CALIFORNIA COMMISSION ON
PEACE OFFICER STANDARDS AND TRAINING

Interviewing Peace Officer Candidates:

POST2003SEB-0357

Hiring Interview Guidelines

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The Mission

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Interviewing Peace Officer Candidates:
Hiring Interview Guidelines

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California Commission on Peace Officer Standards
and Training (POST)

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Preface

Commission Regulation 1952 stipulates that every peace officer candidate be personally interviewed prior to employment by the department head or a representative(s) to determine his/her suitability to perform the duties of a peace officer. The six factors to be assessed in the interview include experience, problem solving ability, communication skills, interest/ motivation, interpersonal skills, and community involvement/awareness.

The POST *Interviewing Peace Officer Candidates: Hiring Interview Guidelines* manual is intended to assist department heads and other oral interview panel members in all phases of the interview: question development, administration and candidate evaluation. Although a guidance document, agencies are strongly urged to heed the precepts of structured interviewing described herein. In doing so, they will ensure that their interview procedures are efficient, effective and lawful.

In conjunction with these guidelines, POST has developed a bank of interview questions relating to the six interview factors. These questions are available, through the POST website, to law enforcement agencies and personnel departments. Details for accessing the bank are included in these guidelines.

Questions about these guidelines or the interview question bank may be directed to the Standards and Evaluation Services Bureau at SEB@post.ca.gov.

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Background

The hiring interview is the most long-standing, most common, and undeniably the most popular employee selection method. Rightly so, as the interview has many unique advantages. For example:

- It is an efficient way to measure a wide variety of abilities and attributes.
- It provides the opportunity for a two-way, face-to-face interaction with candidates.
- It can measure oral communication and other skills that cannot be measured with paper and pencil.
- It allows interviewers to determine if the candidate understands the question and to seek clarification on unclear or poorly worded responses.
- Positive interactions with hiring panel members can solidify and enhance the candidate's interest in the agency and the position.

Due in good part to its long history and popularity, the interview is also one of the most well-researched employee selection devices, starting back in 1915.[1] For a long time, the results were not encouraging. Conventional interviews — basically informal conversations between interviewer and applicant — were found to be haphazard, idiosyncratic, spur-of-the-moment events. They were also found to be largely unreliable and invalid predictors of job performance. This poor showing was attributable to a combination of inappropriate questions and extraneous factors affecting the interviewer's evaluation of an applicant.[2] In particular, research indicated that:

- Information was not covered consistently across interviews.
- Interviewers differed on the importance they attached to the same information.
- Interviewers were susceptible to a variety of rating errors and biases.
- These rating biases were formed early in the interview (one study clocked it at four minutes[3]) and strongly influenced the decisions reached.
- Interviewers were found to develop a stereotype of a good candidate and to use this stereotype to judge interviewees.

- Interviewers were more influenced by unfavorable information than by favorable information.

- Interviewers often spent more time during the interview talking rather than listening.

This dismal showing prompted other work, conducted over the past 30 years, aimed at correcting for these deficiencies. It worked: current assessments of the selection interview are quite positive. In fact, correctly designed and implemented, the interview's effectiveness as a predictor of job performance is comparable to any other long-proven valid selection device, such as cognitive ability tests and assessment centers.[4 †]

The key to improving the reliability, validity and overall effectiveness of the hiring interview has been the evolution of the **structured interview** process. Structured interviews use multiple mechanisms, such as questions based on job analysis, detailed rating scales, and trained interviewers, to make the interview more job-related and systematic.[5] It requires careful preparation at all stages of the interview process: development, administration, and scoring. These efforts have been shown to result in more valid, defensible, unbiased hiring decisions.

† Cognitive ability tests and assessment centers have yielded corrected validity coefficients of .53 and .35, respectively. Structured interviews have an average corrected validity of .57.

Purpose

The purpose of this manual is to assist those tasked with developing and conducting peace officer hiring interviews in accordance with Commission Regulation 1952. It contains concrete guidance and guidelines on structured interviewing based on the latest research and practice. It is hoped that this knowledge will enable oral board members to maximize the effectiveness of their interviews as a tool for hiring valued officers.

A few points to keep in mind when reading this manual:

- These are guidelines, not standards. This is intentional, as there is no one-size-fits-all right way to conduct an interview (although there are plenty of ways to do it wrong). This manual provides general, good-practice guidance, and includes discussions of the pros and cons of the many practical tips and admonitions contained therein. It will often provide more than one way to accomplish a particular guideline. Our goal here is to educate our readers, and by doing so enable them to tailor this information in order to develop and implement interviews best suited to their own agency's operation.

- The primary focus of this manual is on hiring candidates for *entry level* peace officer positions. Obviously, the types and content of interview questions that can be asked of experienced officers can vary from those appropriate for new hires. However, the interview factors discussed in this manual, as well as the guidelines themselves, are equally relevant to all candidates, regardless of job experience.

- This manual is intended to provide a complete picture of the structured interview process as it applies to peace officer hiring. However, the information provided here only samples the breadth of guidance published in this area. For those who want to delve deeper, a short list of recommended additional reading is located in Appendix A.

One final introductory note: creating an interview guide for experienced law enforcement officers may seem akin to "bringing coals to Newcastle." Indeed, interviewing — victims, suspects, community members, etc. — is a universal, integral part of the job of a peace officer. However, it must be remembered that a hiring interview is not an interrogation, and therefore the techniques useful for getting at the truth or detecting deception in interrogations could lead to inaccurate, biased evaluations and decisions. Distinctions between interviews conducted for hiring and those conducted in the normal course of law enforcement will be made, as relevant, throughout the manual.

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The Case for Structured Interviews

Everyone likes to believe that they are good judges of human character and potential. Many believe that by simply talking with someone for a short period of time and asking some general questions about interests and experiences, they can make accurate predictions of an applicant's likely work performance. This is simply not true. Decades of research have proven that these types of unstructured interviews do not work. The key to successful selection is structure. Structuring the interview to systematically gather information relevant to defined job factors, and then applying well-defined evaluation standards, are the keys to accurate assessment of future success.

A "structured interview" is a term that encompasses a variety of mechanisms to assist the interviewer in determining what questions to ask, how to ask them in a systematic, standardized fashion, and how to evaluate candidate responses fairly and accurately. Interviews cannot be simply labeled as "structured" or "unstructured." Rather, structure runs along a continuum — ranging from the completely unplanned interview, where questions are asked spontaneously and responses are not evaluated in any systematic manner — to highly standardized procedures based on exacting specifications.

Structured interviewing involves careful planning, linking questions to job information, ensuring consistency across interviews, and evaluating candidate responses against predefined, job-relevant criteria. Table 1 (*see next page*) outlines the key characteristics of structured interviews, in comparison to unstructured interviews.

At best, a lack of structure reduces the value of the interview as an assessment tool. At worst, a lack of structure can lead to perceptions — and quite possibly the reality — of disparate and unfair treatment.[6] The major benefits of structured interviewing can be categorized as follows:

1. **Validity:** In the 80-year history of published research on employment interviewing, few conclusions have been more widely supported than the idea that structuring the interview improves its validity — that is, its effectiveness as a predictor of future job performance and success.[7] The average validity coefficient[‡] of the structured interview is 0.57, versus 0.38 for the unstructured interview — and undoubtedly lower for carelessly

[‡] Validity is expressed as a correlation coefficient with a range between 1.0 and –1.0. A value of 1.0 means that there is a perfect positive relationship between the score received on the selection tool and performance on the job. A value of 0 means that there is no relationship — in practical terms, that the selection tool has no ability to predict job performance. A negative value indicates an inverse relationship: the better performance on the selection tool, the worse the expected on-the-job performance. The amount of variability in an employee's performance that can be predicted by a selection tool is estimated by squaring the validity coefficient, i.e., a selection measure with a validity coefficient of 0.57 predicts 32% (0.57^2) of how well people would do on the job.

conducted unstructured interviews.[8] In practical terms, this means that the structured interview is twice as effective as an unstructured interview.

Table 1
Characteristics of Structured and Unstructured Interviews

STRUCTURED	UNSTRUCTURED
Development	
Careful planning of purpose of interview and its role in selection process Identification of interview topics and questions based on analysis of the job Questions are designed to elicit high-yield, job-related responses	Very little if any pre-planning is conducted The factors evaluated by the interviewer are implicit and vary across candidates Questioning is spontaneous and not necessarily job related
Administration	
Each candidate asked questions from same topic areas Prompting/follow-up questions are controlled Extraneous information is withheld Detailed notes may be taken	Questions vary from interview to interview for same job Little if any control over type or amount of information collected across interviewees Extraneous information can influence direction of interview Notetaking can be sketchy or haphazard or not at all
Scoring and Evaluation	
Predeveloped, behavioral basis for evaluating interview responses	No system, guide or basis for evaluating interview responses
Interviewer Training	
Training and practice provided in conducting interviews	No formal interviewer training or instruction

2. **Job related content:** Preplanning and attention to job-relatedness ensures that knowledge, skills and abilities earmarked for assessment are evaluated completely and consistently. In contrast, questions asked in an unstructured interview process are commonly based on interviewers' implicit, idio-syncratic theories of job requirements,[9] as well as their own pet topics and preferences. Without adequate structure, therefore, interview content risks being both deficient and biased, each of which severely impacts validity. In contrast, the preplanning required in structured interviewing ensures that major topics are covered, and irrelevancies avoided. Unstructured interviewers also end up doing more talking,[10] resulting in further content deficiency.

Research has also shown that without preplanned, job-related questions, interviewers often disagree among themselves as to which topics should be covered in the interview. These differences seem to relate more to the individual preferences of the interviewer than to job requirements. In fact, even those topics that an interviewer deems as important are often overlooked (and replaced by relatively unimportant topics) in the typical unstructured interview.[11]

3. **Test reliability:** The reliability of a personnel selection method refers to its *consistency* — for example, the consistency of judgments across members of the interview panel, or for judgments by the same interviewer about the same candidate at different points in time. Reliability is necessary for validity: for a selection measure to predict job performance, it must first yield generally consistent judgments about candidates.

   The lack of reliability inherent in unstructured interviews is in good part responsible for the significantly lower validities as compared to structured interviews. Indeed, structuring the interview is all about increasing its reliability by enhancing consistency in the way it is developed, conducted and the results evaluated.

   Inconsistency in the topics covered and questions asked results in different types of information being gathered from each applicant, making comparison of applicants difficult at best. Asking different questions of candidates is like… "asking one fourth grader for the sum of 2+2 and another the sum of 4,659 + 5,976, and deciding the first child knows more arithmetic because s/he got the answer right and the other child didn't."[12]

4. **Impression management:** The lack of preplanned questions in unstructured interviews allows the candidate greater influence over the interview's focus and direction. It also provides interview-savvy candidates with more opportunity to exert control over the interviewer's ratings through the use of "impression management" techniques, such as agreeing with interviewers' opinions, flattery and compliments.[13] Candidates are most likely to use impression management tactics when the interview is unstructured, and these behaviors have the greatest impact on decision-making when interviewers lack information about the job and the purpose of the interview.[14] Furthermore, when interviewers are held accountable for their recommendations, they generally provide more accurate descriptions of applicant characteristics.[15]

5. **Rating biases:** Human beings are limited information processors. We must take cognitive shortcuts to filter and interpret the vast amount of information we receive, especially when we are required to make judgments and decisions. Rating biases are a byproduct of these shortcuts.

   Interviewers will rely on their personal biases to the extent that there are no clear-cut job requirements or clarification as to what constitutes important or desired applicant characteristics. Structuring the interview process, on the other hand, provides a counterweight to these influences by ensuring that the focus is appropriately job-related, and that the rating task is made more manageable through the use of well-defined, behaviorally-oriented rating criteria.[16]

6. **Legal defensibility:** A review of case law attests to the fact that adopting a structured process is the best way to avoid and, if necessary, defend charges of employment discrimination in the interview. In a recent study, all federal court cases listed in *Fair Employment Practice Cases* from 1978-1997 that involved nine types of selection devices[§] were tabulated.[17] Unstructured interviews accounted for a disproportionately high number of the employment discrimination cases - nearly 60% of the 158 employment discrimination cases identified. In contrast, structured interviews were the target of litigation in only 6% (9) cases.

   There are many reasons why structured interviews have a distinct legal advantage. First, when all applicants are treated consistently, discrimination based on preferential treatment ("disparate treatment") cannot occur. Second, if the selection interview is found to have a negative impact on the employment of a protected class ("adverse impact"), demonstrating that the questions were based on job-relevant factors meets the legal requirement of job-relatedness and consistency with business necessity. Third, the preplanning and interviewer training inherent in structured interviewing will ensure that interviewers avoid asking illegal and otherwise inappropriate questions. Finally, the documentation required in structured interviewing will be extremely valuable if it becomes necessary to formally justify an employment decision based on an interview.

7. **Compliance with professional and legal testing guidelines:** Despite an inherent element of subjectivity, the interview is a test, and no less so than a written test, physical test, or any other selection procedure. As such, it must meet the same standards, guidelines, and principles as any other test. The Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, the Principles for the Validation and Use of Personnel Selection Procedures, and the Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures all delineate the principles and practices required for a test to be considered a valid, effective selection measure. Common to them all are the requirements that serve to define structured interviewing: job-relatedness, consistency in test implementation and scoring procedures, and fair, unbiased treatment of all candidates, regardless of group membership.

8. **Impression on candidates:** Interviewers who take the time to prepare and ask job-related questions, who focus the interview on candidate qualifications, and who treat all interviewees consistently and fairly send a powerful message to the candidate that they are serious about evaluating individuals carefully and selecting the best person for the job. This positive message can prove to be an effective recruitment device, since candidates appreciate employment practices that are thorough, job-related and even-handed.

[§] The nine selection devices included: unstructured interviews, structured interviews, biographical information blanks, cognitive ability tests, personality tests, honesty tests, physical ability tests, work sample tests, and assessment centers.

How Much Structure Is Enough?

When it comes to structure, is more always better? To answer this question, Huffcutt and Arthur[18] conducted a meta-analysis of 114 validity studies. They organized these studies into four levels of structure, ranging from a Level 1, a typical unstructured interview (no constraints on questions, only one single overall evaluation required) to highly structured Level 4, asking all applicants the exact same questions with no deviation or probing allowed, and scoring of each individual response according to pre-established benchmarks.

They determined that validity increased as structure increased, but only up to a point: there was no increase in validity between Levels 3 and 4. They concluded that it is important to pre-specify interview topics and questions and evaluate candidate responses using multiple, pre-established criteria. However, they found that asking the exact same questions in all interviews, prohibiting probes and follow-up questions, and use of complicated, quantitative scoring criteria for each candidate's response does not yield greater validity.

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Defining Interview Content

The interview is a very versatile testing medium: it can be used early on as a recruitment and initial screening device, to provide a realistic job preview, or to determine whether the applicant is minimally qualified. The interview may also take place during the middle and later stages of the selection process, where progressively more lengthy, in-depth discussions are conducted, ultimately to determine who among the finalists for the job will be chosen.[19]

Because of its versatility, a given interview is often loaded with questions aimed at assessing a myriad of competencies and characteristics. Trying to assess too much in too little time yields superficial data of limited value.[20] Although it can be used to measure a variety of attributes and characteristics, an interview doesn't necessarily assess all of them equally well. For example, it is a relatively expensive (and often less effective) way to measure job knowledge, cognitive ability, and other things that can be better assessed by paper-and-pencil instruments. To maximize the effectiveness and validity of the interview, the interview's strengths and weaknesses should be taken into account.

There are several major categories of characteristics and attributes that are especially suited for the interview. They include:

- **Training and experience:** The interview provides a unique opportunity for candidates to clarify or elaborate on the responses they provided on their application and/or personal history statement. Work experience, education, and training can be explored, along with related questions intended to aid in the assessment of work habits (e.g., reasons for leaving last job; past attendance record). By asking probing questions, evaluators can distinguish the truly experienced from those who merely claim the experience.

- **Interpersonal skills** include attributes important for successful personal interactions with others. Questions can be asked that directly relate to interpersonal skills; however, by its very nature, the interview provides a unique opportunity for the candidate to demonstrate these attributes.

- **Oral communication** is another skill that the interview, by its very nature, is uniquely capable of assessing. In fact, this skill is manifested in every response by the candidate, making the creation of separate questions about oral communications optional.

- **Work habits** include such things as dependability, initiative, conscientiousness, adaptability and perseverance. It includes the candidate's likelihood of adhering to the basic rules and policies of the job and organization, such as attendance, overtime, off-duty behavior, etc. These characteristics are best evaluated through questioning candidates about past tasks completed, their work habits and work environments. Such discussion often requires

clarification or elaboration of statements made by the candidate. Because of its interactive nature, the interview allows the interviewer to probe and ask follow-up questions until satisfied with the candidate's response.[21]

- **Problem-solving/decision-making:** The interview is well suited to assess problem-solving and decision-making by requiring candidates to think on their feet in addition to discussing their decision-making experiences. However, keep in mind that it's not the best place to evaluate problem-solving or decision-making skills that require time to develop a complete, well-developed response, nor it is appropriate to require innovative solutions to difficult problems. Furthermore, entry-level candidates should not be expected to provide solutions equivalent to those of experienced officers.

  In contrast to the above categories, the following interview content areas — although very popular — have noted limitations that reduce their effectiveness for assessing candidate suitability:

- **Interests, motivation and values** tap applicants' reasons for interest in the job, their preferences for specific work environments (e.g., working alone or in teams, traditional vs. community-oriented policing) and their attitudes about work (e.g., possessing a strong customer service orientation). Willingness to work can be assessed by addressing the applicant's intentions to meet work schedules (e.g., to work required overtime, to work swing or graveyard shifts, weekends/holidays) and to work under potentially adverse or hazardous conditions (working alone, high-risk, emergency conditions).

  It must be noted that questions about these issues, particularly willingness to work, are subject to distortion by the candidate. Most candidates — especially experienced ones — know that an agency seeks people who cooperate with others, can plan ahead, accept orders, and tolerate impositions. It is therefore in the self-interest of candidates to portray themselves as having demonstrated, or being willing to demonstrate, these characteristics.[22] Moreover, people don't always perform in accordance with their goals or with their (professed) attitudes.

- **Self evaluations/opinions:** This category includes questions requiring self-descriptions ("What is your greatest strength or weakness?"), likes and dislikes ("What did you like best/least about your job?" "What was your favorite course?"), and opinions ("How do you feel about community policing?"). These types of questions have a generally poor track record of predicting job performance. Their transparency, coupled with the inability to verify the accuracy of responses, leaves them quite subject to candidate distortion. Even if candidates respond truthfully, these types of questions assume that peoples' performance will be consistent with their self-assessments, likes and dislikes, and attitudes. This assumption is not always correct.

Legal Issues

Case Law

Inconsistency, subjectivity and irrelevance are at the core of cases involving discrimination in interviews. The cases described below serve to illustrate the importance of adopting a structured interview process, in which all applicants are treated consistently, asked preplanned, job-related questions, and are evaluated against pre-established criteria.

Inconsistency and irrelevance: Inconsistencies and irrelevancies in what questions are asked are a major basis for claims (often substantiated) of discriminatory intent. In *Weiner v. County of Oakland,*[23] for example, the court ruled that the questions asked specifically of a female applicant for a correctional officer position were inappropriate, such as whether she could work with aggressive young men, whether her husband approved of her working, and whether her family would be burdened if she needed to change her normal household chores as a result of the job. Similarly, in *Schenectady v. State Department of Human Rights,*[24] a chief of police asked a female applicant irrelevant questions, such as how her family felt about her being a police officer and whether she was afraid. The third (and perhaps most alarming) example was provided during the interview of a female applicant for a position in the all-male Hampton Beach Meter Patrol, who was asked whether she had experience using a sledgehammer, and if she could participate in stake-outs and make unassisted arrests. Not surprisingly, the court could find no relationship between the questions asked and the job of writing citations and collecting money from parking meters.[25]

Unlawful inconsistencies have been shown even in interviews that ask (basically) the same questions. For example, in *Maine Human Rights Commission v. Auburn,*[26] female police officer applicants were scoring high on the written examination, but very low on the oral examination. It was found that while the same questions were asked of all applicants, the questions asked of women were phrased in a prejudicial way (for example, when women were asked how they would break up a fight, the question included words to the effect of "since a woman is not aggressive").

Subjectivity: Courts have long recognized that subjective practices are susceptible to biases. Since highly subjective procedures make it more difficult to track the process and basis for hiring decisions, the courts have consistently held that the use of subjective procedures will be subject to close scrutiny. For example, in *Bennet v. Veterans Administration Medical Center*,[27] the only white male among eight finalists for a position was selected based on his interview performance. The court sided against the employer's subjective interview practices, in particular the absence of set interview procedures or guidelines, the lack of written interview questions, and a failure to retain interview notes. Similarly, in *Reynolds v. Sheet Metal Workers Local 102*,[28] the court blasted the employer's subjective interview procedures such as broad undefined criteria, no guidelines, and no way to review or evaluate the interviewer's

judgments. In *Stamps v. Detroit Edison Co*.,[29] the court censured the employer for not providing interviewers with specific job-related questions to follow or decision rules for evaluating applicants' acceptability.

Job-relevance: Discrimination is much less likely to be found when employers base the content of interview questions on job-related factors. For example, in *Harless v. Duck,*[30] the police department's interview evaluated communication skills, decision-making and problem-solving skills, and reactions to stress situations. The court accepted these questions as valid because they were based on dimensions identified through job analysis. The courts also judged in favor of the employer in *Maine Human Rights Commission v. Department of Corrections,*[31] in which questions were based on personal characteristics identified as important in the agency's job description, including the ability to maintain composure in stressful situations, the ability to exercise judgment in interpersonal situations, the ability to relate to a variety of people, and the ability to listen and act appropriately.

Inappropriate/Illegal Inquiries

The many laws and regulations aimed at prohibiting discrimination in employment based on protected class status — race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin or ancestry, sexual orientation, marital status, medical condition or disability — include restrictions on inquiries targeted directly on these issues. Table 2 provides a categorized list of illegal and acceptable questions. It must be noted that, relative to non-sworn classifications, there are certain statutory allowances for screening peace officer candidates. For example, California Labor Code section 432.7 permits peace officer employers to check the arrest records of applicants. However, verifying citizenship, age, residency status, etc., is an inefficient use of interview time, as these issues should be addressed as part of the initial qualifications screening and/or background investigation.

Disability Discrimination

ADA/FEHA prohibited inquiries: The federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the companion provisions of the California Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA) impose strict prohibitions against inquiries made prior to making a conditional job offer. If a question would require the applicant to reveal any type of physical, mental or emotional impairment, that question would be deemed illegal if asked pre-offer. Examples of legally prohibited and acceptable questions can be found in Table 2.

Although character issues can be assessed prior to a conditional job offer, interviewers should be careful not to ask questions that could be seen as exploring psychological problems. A past history of drug dependence/addiction, and alcoholism (current or past) are also protected conditions. Therefore, it is illegal to make pre-offer inquiries about either.

Reasonable accommodation: Reasonable accommodation is required to assist individuals with disabilities to participate in the hiring process as well as on the job. Applicants should be asked early on what, if any, accommodations they may need to competitively participate in the interview. Examples of possible accommodations

could include providing the interview questions both orally and in writing (although this is a good practice to use with nondisabled applicants as well), or scheduling extra time to respond to questions. The Job Accommodation Network: 1-800-526-7234 / www.jan.wvu.edu maintains, free-of-charge, a national clearinghouse of reasonable accommodation methods and suggestions for employers who encounter unusual accommodation requests from applicants or employees.

The surest way to avoid legal challenges to the interview is to follow a structured interview process. The procedures and guidelines described throughout this manual are all aimed at helping agencies do just that, thereby ensuring that their interviews are consistent, objective and job-related.

Table 2
Legally Prohibited Questions and Better Alternatives

Questions to Avoid	Better Alternatives	Legal Implications
Age		
"How old are you?"	Refer to Personal History Statement	Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA)
"This job requires a lot of stamina. Do you think a person of your age will be able to withstand these rigors?"	–	
Marital / Family Status		
"Are you married?" "Divorced?"	–	Title VII of Civil Rights Act: gender/sexual orientation discrimination
"Do you have any children or plan to have children?" "When?"	"Are there specific times you cannot work?"	
"Are you pregnant?"	"Do you foresee any difficulty in working graveyard shifts?"	California Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA)
"You are obviously pregnant. When is your baby due?"	"Do you have responsibilities other than work that will interfere with specific job requirements such as traveling or working overtime?"	
"What child care arrangements have you made?"	"Would you be able and willing to work overtime as necessary?"	
"Would your spouse object if you traveled or worked overtime?"	–	
Sexual Orientation		
"Are you homosexual?"	–	Title VII of Civil Rights Act – gender/sexual orientation discrimination
Political or Religious Affiliation		
"What is your religion?"	"Will you be able to work on weekends or holidays as the job requires?"	Title VII – Religious Discrimination
"What church do you attend?"	–	
What are your religious holidays?"	–	
"Are you a Republican?"	–	

continued

Table 2
Legally Prohibited Questions and Better Alternatives *continued*

Questions to Avoid	Better Alternatives	Legal Implications
National Origin / Race		
"Where were you born?"	Defer citizenship confirmation to background investigation	Title VII – Race/National Origin Discrimination
"Are you a U.S. citizen?"	If hired, are you authorized to work in the U.S.?"	California FEHA
"What is your native tongue?"	"What language(s) do you read, speak or write fluently?" (if job-related)	
"What is your race?"	–	
Disability		
Medical		
"Do you have any disabilities?"	"Can you perform (any or all of the job functions) with or without accommodation?"	Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
"How's your health?"	–	FEHA
"Do you have any health conditions that we should know about?"	–	
"How many sick days did you take last year?"	"How many days were you absent from your last job?"	
"Have you ever been hurt on the job?"	"How many Mondays or Fridays were you absent last year on leave other than approved vacation time?"	
"Have you ever filed for workers compensation?"	–	
Psychological		
"Do you get ill from stress?" "Does it affect your ability to be productive?"	"Do you work better or worse under pressure?"	ADA
"Do you have problems controlling your anger?"	"How do you handle stress?"	FEHA
"Have you ever sought treatment for your inability to handle stress?"	"What do you do to cope with stress?"	
Substance Abuse		
"How many drinks do you have per day/week?"	"Are you a social drinker?"	ADA
	"Have you ever been arrested for DUI?"	FEHA
"How often did you use illegal drugs in the past?"	"Have you ever used illegal drugs?"	
"Were you ever a drug addict?"	"When is the last time you used illegal drugs?"	
"Have you ever been treated for drug addiction/drug abuse?"	–	
"How often do you take pain killers?"	–	

POST Interview Factors

The importance of job-related interview questions cannot be overemphasized. Basing all questions on factors deemed essential for the job is the single most important improvement that can be made to the interview. Deriving questions from an analysis of the job will ensure that the interview neither includes irrelevant information nor excludes relevant information.[32] It can also protect the agency from charges of bias.

Commission Regulation 1952(c) mandates that the pre-employment peace officer interview include the following six factors:

- Experience
- Problem Solving Ability
- Communication Skills
- Interest/Motivation
- Interpersonal Skills and
- Community Involvement/Awareness

These factors were chosen for their relevance and importance to the core job of peace officer as well as their ability to be assessed in an interview. The methodology followed in the development of these factors is detailed in Appendix B.

These interview factors are quite broad in scope. Therefore, agencies will need to determine the specific aspects of each factor that best address their specific needs and concerns. In addition, agencies are free to include additional interview factors and issues as they see fit.

Factors 1–6 are presented on the following pages.

FACTOR 1: Experience

This factor assesses the candidate's ability and experience in accepting responsibilities and performing assigned tasks as demonstrated through achievements in work, school and other activities. Experience-related interview questions serve to:

- Delve deeper to verify information and determine the actual achievements accomplished by the candidate,
- Account for gaps in work/school history, and
- Allow the candidate to explain any problems on previous jobs

Experience questions also allow candidates to talk about themselves, making them useful opening questions to help ease the candidates into the interview process, and serve an important function by **verifying educational, training and work information** provided on their applications.

These questions need not be law-enforcement related. Rather, they should be designed to look for a general pattern of **effective work habits**. The actual task or activity is not as important as the **diligence, maturity** and **conscientiousness** required to perform it, particularly in spite of any obstacles or setbacks that might have been encountered. Experience questions can also be designed to assess the correspondence of non-law enforcement experience to that of sworn officers, such as **accepting and complying with orders** and **interacting with diverse cultures**.

FACTOR 2: Problem Solving

Solving crimes and community problems has long been a critical peace officer function, however, the advent of community policing has served to further elevate the importance of decision-making and problem solving abilities. The Problem Solving factor assesses the reasoning skills to **develop timely, logical responses** to a wide variety of situations and problems. It also requires the emotional capability to **calmly and quickly problem solve**, even in **pressure-filled, life-threatening, emergency conditions**. The actual focus of the problem addressed is secondary to the abilities and processes used in arriving at a solution.

Interview questions should focus on the candidate's ability to complete the following job-relevant problem-solving steps:

IDENTIFICATION AND COLLECTION OF INFORMATION

- **Locate** and **gather relevant information** from a variety of sources
- **Grasp pertinent information** and ignore irrelevant information
- **Summarize complex information** in a meaningful way, i**dentifying important trends, patterns and relationships** among facts and information
- **Recognize risks** associated with problem

ANALYSIS

- **Organize and analyze** situations based on all available information, **prioritizing** issues, concerns and actions based on importance and expected consequences
- **Develop possible solutions** and courses of action, and evaluate their impact in terms of both desirable and undesirable outcomes
- Arrive at **creative and innovative solutions**

RESPONSE

- **Choose and implement an appropriate solution** from an array of options with no known/clear-cut solution
- Can think on **one's feet**, using **practical judgment**
- Be willing to **respond** proactively, **without fear** of making a wrong decision

ASSESSMENT

- **Evaluate** the effectiveness of the response
- Make **mid-course corrections** as needed
- **Learn from past mistakes** and not be dismayed
- Make exceptions and **exercise appropriate discretion**

FACTOR 3: Communication Skills

This factor deals exclusively with *oral* communication skills: **speaking**, **listening** and **non-verbal communication**. Since oral communication skills are assessed throughout the entire interview session, the creation of a separate set of questions to assess this factor is optional; however, the candidate should demonstrate the following elements of effective oral communication:

SPEAKING

- Speaks in a **clear** and **understandable** tone of voice
- Speech **volume**, **rate**, **vocabulary**, **grammar** and **pronunciation** facilitates (and does not distract from) the message being conveyed
- **Understandable** to almost anyone with whom he/she is likely to come into contact on the job
- **Converses easily** with **all kinds of people**
- **Directly responds** to questions and issues **without undue confusion**, **disorganization** or **rambling**
- Discusses topics **completely yet concisely** by providing **appropriate responses without** a lot of **unnecessary/irrelevant details**

LISTENING

- **Listens** well
- **Actively listens with interest** to others, making sure that he/she understands what others are saying
- **Understands** both the **explicit and implied message** communicated by others and responds accordingly
- Finds a **good balance between talking and listening**

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

- **Expresses thoughts and emotions appropriately** through facial gesture and body language
- **Words and behaviors** (gestures, body posture, eye contact, etc.) consistently **communicate same message**
- Communicates with **self-confidence**, **persuasiveness** and **tact**

FACTOR 4: Interest / Motivation

This factor addresses the candidate's interest in and preparedness for the peace officer job. It includes assessment of the candidate's general level of **interest**, **initiative** and **goal orientation**. It also includes assessment of the extent to which previous work and educational experiences have provided a sufficient preview of the demands, dangers and frustrations as well as the rewards and satisfactions of the peace officer position as demonstrated by:

JOB / CANDIDATE FIT: Match between the candidate's interests, strengths and weaknesses and the requirements and demands of the job.

- Shared **values** with those of law enforcement and the job of peace officer in particular
- Demonstrated and reported **interests and abilities** match those of the job: e.g., interacting with public, playing multiple roles of mediator, public servant, law enforcer, etc.
- **Experiences** (on and outside of job) and activities found satisfying indicate a good fit with the tasks, demands and conditions of police work

REALISM OF EXPECTATIONS

- **Reasons** for interest in police work are **realistic**, **constructive**, **well thought out**
- **Expectations** of job — positive and negative — are **well-founded**
- **Education** and **experience** have provided him/her with an **adequate** preview of the peace officer job, including duties, responsibilities, demands, limitations, dangers and frustrations

PREPARATORY ACTIVITIES

- Has **sought out** and **engaged in activities** to learn about and **prepare** for the peace officer position
- Has made **efforts** within the educational, employment, military or other contexts **to develop interests** relevant to police work

CAREER PLANNING

- Active, reasonable, well thought out **career planning**
- Evidence of **progress toward goals** and acceptance of **personal responsibility** for **goal attainment**

DRIVE AND ENTHUSIASM

- Demonstrates initiative, ambition, self-motivation
- Demonstrates drive and determination required to withstand the challenges, rigors of police work
- Demonstrates perseverance in the face of problems and adversity

FACTOR 5: Interpersonal Skills

Like problem solving, the long-standing importance of interpersonal skills has been elevated even higher under the community-oriented policing model. Officers must **form partnerships** with individuals and groups within the community. They must spend time **meeting and working with people** on a face-to-face basis as a **facilitator, intermediary, and problem solver**.

There are many facets to the Interpersonal Skills factor. [**] They include:

SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE/APPROPRIATENESS

- Behaving correctly in a variety of social situations
- Tactful and effective interactions with a wide variety of different individuals and groups
- Sensitive communication of constructive criticism and other negative information

SOCIAL INSIGHT

- Ability to discern people's motivations, feelings and intentions underlying behavior by correctly interpreting behavioral cues
- Aware of the impact of one's words and behavior on others
- Accurate prediction of others' behavior

EMPATHY

- Sensitive and compassionate towards others
- Approachable
- Accepting of others

SOCIAL INFLUENCE

- Easily persuades and influences people
- Seizes the initiative when appropriate and emerges as a leader
- Assertive and decisive

[**] These facets are drawn heavily from the Social Competence taxonomy described in Schneider, R.J., Roberts, R.D. & Heggestad, E.D. (2002) "Exploring the structure and construct validity of a self-report social competence inventory," in L.M. Hough (Chair) Compound Traits: The Next Frontier of I/O Personality Research. Symposium conducted at the 17th Annual Conference of the Society of Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Inc., Toronto, Canada.

SOCIAL SELF-REGULATION

- Controls one's behavior; seldom displays anger, irritation or other negative emotions
- Does not seek retribution when provoked
- Avoids physical or verbal aggression unless necessary
- Accepts constructive criticism

SOCIABILITY

- Genuinely enjoys the company of and interactions with others
- Appreciates differences between people
- Honest and genuine

TEAM ORIENTATION

- Enjoys and works well as part of a team

SOCIAL SELF-CONFIDENCE

- Comfortable in approaching individuals and initiating conversations
- Believes in one's own ability to succeed in any social situation
- At ease around other people

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SKILLS

- Able to confront and reduce interpersonal conflict
- No difficulty dealing with people who are angry or upset

NEGOTIATING SKILLS

- Negotiates effectively and ethically with others
- Not overly susceptible to negotiating and selling tactics

FACTOR 6: Community Involvement/Awareness

The abilities and characteristics required for policing in the community are measured across all six interview factors. The Community Involvement/Awareness factor, however, focuses specifically on candidates' **experiences** and **interest in community issues**, as well as their interest in and ability to **fill multiple roles** and serve a diverse community as demonstrated by:

KNOWLEDGE, INTEREST, AND EXPERIENCE IN COMMUNITY ISSUES: Expresses and demonstrates an interest in and awareness of community issues and concerns.

- **Participation** in community and public service activities
- **Aware and appreciative** of the importance of community public relations aspects of police work
- Basic **awareness of some of the social, economic and psychological factors** associated with crime and delinquency; interest in participating in activities to address them

RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY: Demonstrates capability, experience and interest in interacting with people from diverse cultural, ethnic and social demographic backgrounds.

- **Freedom from social or ethnic prejudices**; can be fair and objective with all people
- **Sensitive to and accepting of differences** in behavior based on cultural and other demographic background including age, gender, physical/mental disability, sexual orientation, political affiliation, religious beliefs, and social status

ROLE ADAPTABILITY: Capable and comfortable in quickly switching among the many roles of peace officer, including law enforcer, public servant, facilitator, collaborator, leader, follower, etc.

- Is capable of **determining the correct role** to take for any given situation/incident
- Can **adapt own behavioral and communication style** to fit the situation

Developing Interview Questions

An interview question can be seen as consisting of two major components: (1) the **content** or substance of the question; and (2) the **format** — the manner in which the question is asked. Careful attention to both of these components is necessary in creating effective, valid interview items.

Interview Question Content

The six POST interview factors were chosen for their widespread applicability across entry-level peace officer positions. However, because of their broad scope, agencies need to determine the specific aspects of each factor that are most important for their operation and therefore most appropriate for assessment during the interview. In addition, agencies may want to identify additional factors they may wish to evaluate in the interview.

Agency job analyses, job descriptions, position opening announcements, FTO evaluation criteria, and performance evaluation measures can all provide useful, department-specific information that may aid in the development of interview topics and questions. However, this type of information typically lists tasks and competencies, etc. More useful in the creating of interview content are examples of what officers *actually did* — particularly well or particularly poorly — in specific situations.

Critical Incidents: Identifying agency-specific examples of good and poor job performance provides a rich source of information to use in creating effective interview questions that differentiate between the better candidates from the less qualified. These types of examples are referred to as "critical incidents."[33] Generating incidents for use in creating effective interview questions need not involve a long, arduous process. In essence, all that is required is to provide job experts with the interview factors and ask them to recall and record actions that officers have taken which illustrate unusually effective or ineffective performance in those areas. Ideally, these examples should:

- Be specific — describing only one behavior
- Focus on observable behavior
- Briefly describe the context in which the behavior occurred
- Indicate the consequences that resulted from the behavior

The main goal is that each incident contain sufficient information and detail to convey the same image of performance to any subject matter expert. For example, an incident that reads, "*An officer overreacted when subduing a suspect after a high speed chase,"* is a judgmental rather than a descriptive statement. A better, more behavioral incident could read, *"After a high speed chase, an officer grabbed the*

suspect, flung him out of the car, and proceeded to beat him to the point of serious injury."

Examples of failure to act also need to be stated in specific, behavioral terms; for example: "*An officer failed to provide protection for his partner during a barroom search for a robbery suspect,*" does not indicate what the officer did, as does: "*While searching bars for a robbery suspect, the officer stood in front of the bar while his partner would go inside and look for the suspect."*

Turning these incidents into interview questions can be a relatively straightforward process. For example, based on the above incident — "*After a high speed chase, an officer grabbed the suspect, flung him out of the car, and proceeded to beat him to the point of serious injury"* — the ability of candidates to control their temper in dangerous, life-and-death situations could be explored through an interview question such as: "*Describe the circumstances of the last time you lost your temper and/or got into a physical altercation. What, if anything, would you do differently if you encountered the same situation?"*

Table 3 (*see next page*) provides examples of critical incidents and associated interview questions for five of the POST interview factors. As can be seen in these examples, the process of deriving interview questions from incidents is rather direct, requiring little retranslation or inference.

Although critical incidents can be a rich source of information for interview questions, they do have their drawbacks and limitations. Most notably, since they are actual examples of job performance, caution must be used to avoid crafting questions that presume or require job knowledge. Requiring answers that contain information or procedures that will be learned during training are not appropriate for entry-level hiring interviews. For example, an incident could read: "*An officer executed a lawful arrest of a subject in his residence. He then searched the entire apartment and came across a gun that matched the description of a weapon used in the commission of a recent crime. However, because he failed to follow appropriate search and seizure procedures, the gun was not admitted into evidence and the charges were never filed by the D.A."*

Although this incident may address an important performance deficit, it would not be appropriate, in an entry-level interview, to ask for knowledge of detailed procedures associated with conducting search and seizures that will be covered in the academy, such as: "*You execute a lawful arrest of a subject in his residence. You conduct an inventory search and find a weapon. What, if any legal concerns are presented by this discovery?"*

However, it may be appropriate to develop a question that asks candidates about their experiences in following procedures per se; for example: *"Tell me about a time when you didn't adhere to the proper rules, regulations or policies. What reasons did you have for handling the situation the way you did? How would you handle this kind of situation if it came up again?"*

Table 3
Example of Critical Incidents and Corresponding Interview Questions

CRITICAL INCIDENT	INTERVIEW QUESTION
Problem Solving	
After there had been a rash of auto thefts near a theatre parking lot, the officer began spending more time patrolling the area in which they had occurred.	*Over a several month period, you realize that a number of auto thefts have occurred in a theatre parking lot. What type of actions might you consider to address the problem?*
Communication Skills	
A trainee was partnered with an experienced FTO who, as a result of poor personal hygiene (including neglecting to change his uniform over two weeks), had an offensive odor. The trainee tactfully told the FTO that he had had the same problem, and suggested a soap and deodorant that had helped him. The FTO took the hint without showing offense.	*Tell me about a time when you had to deliver some unpleasant or sensitive information to someone. How did you handle the situation?*
Interest / Motivation	
An officer recently assigned to a new position received no instruction on what the job involved, so he read the job description and was able to handle all duties.	*What would you do if you were given an assignment but no instruction on how to perform the duties involved?*
Interpersonal Skills	
When confronted by an irate citizen who demanded to see a particular police captain who left specific instructions not to be disturbed, the officer threatened to kick his butt and throw him in jail.	*Describe a time when you were confronted with an angry customer, supervisor or coworker. How did you react? What resulted?*
Community Involvement / Awareness	
After several children in one neighborhood had been molested, the officer attended PTA meetings and briefed parents on how to prevent molestations. He also went to the schools and told the children, without scaring them, how to help in apprehending the molester.	*If the neighborhood to which you were assigned was experiencing a series of child molestations, what are some of the things you might do to help protect the community and apprehend the criminal?*

Many times, careful phrasing of the questions created from critical incidents can make them acceptable for assessing candidates without law enforcement experience. For example, rather than asking, *"Tell me about working with a community group to address a neighborhood problem,"* a more appropriate question would be, *"Tell me about a time you worked with a small group on any project that required frequent interaction over a period of time."*

Another pitfall of using critical incidents — particularly incidents reflecting exceptionally good performance — as a basis for interview content is the inclination

to treat the behavior described in the incident as the only correct response. Most situational questions lend themselves to multiple correct (and incorrect) answers. Rather than judging the "correctness" of the answer per se, responses should be treated as information that contributes and supports the assessment of the candidate on the pertinent interview factor.

Interview Content Guidelines: There is not enough time in the interview to ask "low-yield" questions, that is, questions that have little value determining the candidate's competence or for distinguishing between candidates. The following criteria should be considered when crafting interview items:

- ✓ ***Job-relevance –*** Is the question directly related to the interview factors, or is it merely nice to know?

- ✓ ***Appropriate for entry-level –*** Is it appropriate to expect entry-level candidates to provide acceptable responses? Will this knowledge/ability be covered in training?

- ✓ ***Difficulty –*** Is the desired response so obvious that most candidates are likely to answer correctly? If so, it may not provide a useful assessment of even minimal competence and therefore will not differentiate even minimally qualified candidates from those even less qualified. On the other hand, overly challenging questions may assume a level of knowledge or understanding that is inappropriate for entry-level positions. As a result, few if any candidates are likely to provide the desired response, diminishing the power of the interview to distinguish among candidates based on their qualifications.

- ✓ ***Transparent answers –*** The preferable answers to certain questions, especially those calling for self-descriptions and personal opinions, are vulnerable to candidate distortion and therefore may do little to distinguish between candidates.

- ✓ ***Effective use of interview time –*** To take maximum advantage of this labor-intensive testing medium, questions should focus on the skills and attributes for which the interview is uniquely suited, that is, factors that are best assessed by an interactional, face-to-face context, areas that may need clarification/elaboration, or questions where there is not one fixed, correct answer. Questions that could be asked as effectively in a paper-and-pencil format may be better addressed in this less-costly fashion.

- ✓ ***Planned/unplanned redundancy –*** If candidates have already been (or will be) evaluated on the same factor elsewhere in the selection process, interview questions may add little value, unless the interviewer wants to confirm or expand on existing information. However, critical issues and prerequisites (for example, integrity) may warrant repeated assessment across multiple measures.

- ✓ ***Sufficient coverage of each factor –*** To ensure accurate, reliable measurement, each interview factor should be assessed by multiple items. Limit the number of factors assessed and focus on in-depth evaluation of those factors, rather than touching on many attributes superficially. Note, however, that the same question, with appropriate follow-up probes, can provide information for more than one interview factor.

POST Interview Question Bank

As part of the larger oral interview development project, POST collected interview questions from all California law enforcement agencies. Seventy-two agencies submitted a total of 611 questions. These items were reviewed and edited by the Advisory Committee, who eliminated redundancies, removed irrelevant questions, and categorized the remaining items into the six POST interview factors.

Although the question bank is by no means exhaustive, it provides a useful source of questions for evaluating each factor. The questions may be incorporated as provided, or used as a reference when developing unique, agency-specific questions.

The interview questions are available through the POST website: www.POST.ca.gov by accessing the Interview Question Bank. (At the POST homepage, under the Hiring tab, select **Exams/Assessment**; then click on "Oral Interview Question Bank (password access only)."

NOTE: Agencies are encouraged to review this manual prior to using the Interview Question Bank. Access to the bank is limited to law enforcement agencies and personnel departments. Upon initial entry, an agency will be assigned a unique password. *This password must be used each time the bank is accessed.*

Interview Question Format

Closed-Ended Questions. Questions can vary by the type of response required of the candidate, ranging from simple, "yes" or "no" to an in-depth answer. In general, answers to **closed-ended** questions — for example, "*Do you enjoy your job*?" or "*Would you be willing to work night shifts*?" — are usually so short that they don't provide interviewers with significant, useful information. The result is that interviewers end up doing more talking in the interview than the candidate. A "yes or no" question, for example, may require 15 to 20 words to ask, but only elicit a 1–3 word response.[34] Therefore, questions that are open-ended are generally preferable.

Although they should be used sparingly, closed-ended questions do have their place in the interview. They can be useful for verifying facts, eliciting specific details, addressing questions arising from responses in the candidates' application blank, or for checking minimum qualifications. Examples of such questions include: "*What type of software programs were covered in your computer class*?" or "*What did you do during the six months between your last two jobs*?"

Open-ended questions require candidates to provide specifics and details, and encourage them to express ideas and give more information. These questions are useful in finding how well the candidates organize their thoughts and sometimes they can reveal attitudes and feelings critical to effective job performance.[35] They are generally more effective than closed-ended questions at developing insight into a candidate's experience and abilities. For example, rather than the closed-ended question "*Are you a good writer*?" which can be answered with a simple "yes" or "no," an open-ended question such as "*Describe the types of documents you have*

written, reviewed or edited," requires the candidate to provide specifics, providing much more insight into his/her writing skills.[36]
Although these types of questions allow candidates more freedom to select the type of information to include in their answers, good open-ended questions should be focused on specific factors rather than be generic in nature. For example, rather than asking a general question such as "*Tell me about your experience in handling problems,*" you could ask, "*Give me an example of a problem you've had to deal with and the particular problem-solving techniques you used to deal with it*."

Two types of open-ended questioning found effective for hiring interviews are ***situational questions*** and ***behavioral questions.*** Both require candidates to discuss their own behavior with respect to job-related situations and circumstances.

Situational questions pose hypothetical, job-related situations and ask the candidate "What would you do…?" Situational questions can be used to assess a wide range of competencies, as illustrated by the following two examples:

> ***Example 1 –*** Your spouse and two teenage children are sick in bed with colds. There are no relatives or friends available to look in on them. Your shift starts in three hours. What would you do in this situation?[37]
>
> Possible responses could range from: "I'd stay home – my family comes first" (which may be rated as low), to "I'd phone my supervisor and explain my situation" (an average response), to "Since they only have colds, I'd come to work" (a response indicating a high degree of conscientiousness and work commitment).
>
> ***Example 2 –*** A citizen comes into the police department to pick up a police report that she had been told on the phone would be ready several days ago. However, you cannot find the report and the individual to whom she spoke is not on duty. The citizen is very angry. How would you handle the situation?[38]
>
> Responses to this question can provide an indication of the candidate's interpersonal skills, with possible answers ranging from "Tell her the report is not ready yet and ask her to check back later" (low), to "Apologize, tell her that you will check into the problem, and call her back later (average), to "Apologize to her and ask her to wait while you make calls to get the report while she waits" (high).

Incidents should be generated by subject matter experts (e.g., supervisors, incumbents) by asking them to recount examples of actual behavior that they have actually observed or have heard offered by officers that reflect exceptionally good or poor performance on one or more interview factors. There should be sufficient agreement among experts as to the degree of effectiveness reflected in each response before they are used as guides for rating the responses of interviewees.

Being derived from actual examples of job performance, the job-relevance of situational questions is indisputable. However, these types of questions can be difficult to write for several reasons. First, many performance incidents may assume or require job knowledge, and therefore cannot be easily translated into an entry-level

interview item. Second, the desired response might be obvious; in such instances, what a candidate says he'd do doesn't necessarily reflect what he would do. For example, the answer to the following question would be fairly apparent to the astute interviewee: "You pull over a motorist for speeding. He hands you $100 along with his driver's license, saying 'This should take care of it.' What would you do?"

Behaviorally-based questions ask the candidates to describe things they actually did or said in a previous situation and the outcome of their actions. Rather than the "What *would* you do?" in hypothetical situations, behavioral questions ask, "What *did* you do?" These types of questions[††] are based on the well-established principle that the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior.

As with situational questions, job experts serve as an excellent source of important, job-related behaviors to evaluate. And like situational questions, this type of questioning is not limited to use with candidates with law enforcement experience. When crafted correctly, even candidates with no job experience will be able to provide telling instances of their interpersonal skills, problem-solving ability, or virtually any of the attributes and characteristics best measured in the hiring interview. For example, for lateral candidates, you might ask, *"Tell us about a time when you had to defuse a highly charged domestic dispute."* However, interpersonal skills or other attributes underlying this incident could be assessed for candidates with no law enforcement experience by asking, *"Tell me about a time when you stepped in to defuse an argument or other type of heated situation between very angry people."*

Behavioral questions can be designed to assess virtually any knowledge, skill or attribute — including the POST interview factors — as illustrated in the examples below:

Interpersonal Skill:

Tell me about a time when you had to criticize someone and how you handled it.

Describe a time when you successfully dealt with an unreasonable person (or when you unsuccessfully dealt with an unreasonable person).[39]

Communication Skill:

Describe the last time you persuaded someone to accept your way of thinking.

Problem-Solving:

Give an example of a time when you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision. How did it turn out? What did you learn from it?[40]

[††] The most well-known form of behavioral questioning — Behavioral Description Interviewing — is much more fully described in a book by its originators: Janz, T., Hellervik, L. & Gilmore, D.C. *Behavior Description Interviewing*, 1986, Allyn and Bacon, Inc., Boston.

Describe a major problem that you dealt with in your last job. Tell me how you analyzed the situation and how you defined the key factors and developed your solutions.[41]

Interest / Motivation:

Give me an example of an important goal you set and tell me about your progress in reaching that goal.

Community Awareness / Orientation:

Describe a time when you've had to adapt to working with people from different cultural backgrounds on a task, project or to solve a problem.

In addition to the initial question, behavior description interview items contain follow-up probes that allow the interviewer to seek out exactly how the candidate behaved and what the consequences of the behavior were. For example, possible probes for *"Tell me about a time when you stepped in to defuse an argument or other type of heated situation between very angry people"* could include:

- What was the source of the argument?
- How did you become involved?
- What steps did you take to calm things down?
- How did they respond to your intervention?
- What was the outcome of your efforts?"[42]

Probes for an item measuring Interest/Motivation: "Tell me about the last time you undertook a project that demanded a lot of initiative" could include:

- What type of project was it?
- How did you become involved in the project?
- Why was initiative called for?
- What steps did you go through in accomplishing the project?
- What obstacles did you encounter, and how did you overcome them?
- What was the outcome?

Situational vs. behavioral questions recap: pros and cons – Both situational and behavioral questions are effective interview questioning formats that, when crafted and administered correctly, can yield important, job-relevant information about candidates. However, each one has its respective advantages and limitations that should be considered when choosing a format for interview questions. Table 4 lists some of the major differences between the two question types.

Situational questions require candidates to describe what they would say or do in hypothetical situations. Their responses may reflect what they presume to be the most desirable response, as opposed to what they would actually say or do under the same circumstances. Behavioral questions, on the other hand, require candidates to recount

an actual instance in which they demonstrated the attribute in question. This type of questioning is a better reflection of the behavior that candidates would actually engage in under similar circumstances.

Table 4
Comparison of Situational and Behavioral Questions

SITUATIONAL QUESTIONS	BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS
Hypothetical behavior	Actual past behavior
"What would you do?"	*"What did you do?"*
More prone to social desirability ("looking good") bias	Less prone to social desirability ("looking good") bias
Requires more time to ask	Requires relatively less time to ask

Since it is more difficult to fabricate an inaccurate or untruthful answer to a behavioral question, especially in light of follow-up probing, behavioral questions can yield more reliable information. In addition, responses to situational questions generally require more time than answers to behavioral questions. Given these results, behavioral questioning is generally the more favored interview format; however, both types of questioning are offered here to encourage interviewers to experiment with these (and other formats) that best fit their needs.

Guidelines for Phrasing Questions

Regardless of format, all questions must be worded clearly and concisely. Vague, ambiguous or poorly worded questions will have a direct impact on the quality of candidates' answers. The candidate must understand what is being asked without having to second-guess or read between the lines. The following guidelines should be followed:

- Phrasing should be as simple and direct as possible. Do not use unnecessarily difficult words or terminology.
- To ensure that the question is easily understood when spoken (vs. written), rehearse the question by saying it aloud.
- Avoid jargon or other confusing or unfamiliar terminology.
- Avoid double negatives (for example: "*Do you agree that you cannot not be loyal to your partner no matter what he/she does on duty? Why or why not?*).
- Be concise: Avoid unnecessary wordiness, but make sure to include all the information necessary — especially for situational questions. If questions need to be lengthy to include all necessary information, consider providing a written copy of the questions for candidates to refer to during the interview.

Leading questions: Interviewers can have a significant influence over the responses of candidates based on the specific wording chosen to communicate the question.

Leading questions indicate to the candidate the response that the interviewer wants. Leading questions include those in which the correct answer is fairly obvious ("*How important is it for a peace officer to have integrity?*") or implied by the way the question is phrased or delivered ("*Would you be willing to use deadly force, if necessary?*").

Even slight changes in wording can influence the candidate's answer. In one experiment,[43] individuals were interviewed after viewing a film of an automobile accident. The interviews were identical, except that some individuals were asked, "About how fast were the cars going when they *hit* each other?" Others were asked, "About how fast were the cars going when they *smashed into* each other?" Additional words used to describe the same action of the two cars coming together included *collided, bumped,* and *contacted*. All of the individuals who were asked the question with the word *smashed* estimated the speed of the cars higher than those questioned with the words *collided, bumped,* and *hit.*

Interviewers can lead or suggest to candidates the answers they want not only through the words they chose, but also through their "paralanguage" — the manner in which they speak to candidates and the way they say what they say.[44] Placing more emphasis on one word as opposed to another can have a dramatic effect on how it is received. Consider the very different messages conveyed in the following six sentences, identical except for the emphasis placed on the bolded words:

*"**I** never said you stole the jewelry."*

*"I **never** said you stole the jewelry."*

*"I never **said** you stole the jewelry."*

*"I never said **you** stole the jewelry."*

*"I never said you **stole** the jewelry."*

*"I never said you stole **the jewelry**."*[45]

Follow-up / Probing

One of the hallmarks of a well-designed structured interview is that the interview content is the same for all candidates i.e., the same factors are covered in each interview. This can be accomplished by asking the same questions of all candidates, or asking primarily the same questions but allowing some discretion, such as picking from a list of questions, or having a common core of questions plus discretionary questions, etc.[46] Follow-up questions can jeopardize this consistency if interviewers ask dramatically different things or otherwise use it as an opportunity to explore areas that are irrelevant to the job factors being measured. However, without probing, interviewers may fail to elicit key information that could be critical to a complete, accurate assessment of the candidate. Keeping in mind that the goal of the interview questions is to provide sufficient information to permit reliable and valid evaluation of the candidates on all designated factors, it is often advisable to augment the initial questions with carefully worded follow-ups and probes.

Follow-up questions can serve three important functions: **clarification**, **elaboration**, and **verification**.

Clarification: Follow-up questioning may be necessary if the candidate's response was vague or confusing, or indicates that he didn't understand the question. Interviewers should ask clarifying questions if they find themselves needing to make inferences or assumptions to fill in the gaps in the information provided. However, follow-up questioning should not be seen as an opportunity to explore new areas. Furthermore, interviewers must carefully guard against conveying messages in their follow-up questioning. Candidates will be quick to look for signs of approval or disapproval, or indications of the "right" answer in any interviewer response. It is therefore important to ask follow-up questions in a neutral and nonjudgmental fashion.

Sometimes clarifying questions may be as simple as repeating the initial question. Otherwise, clarifying follow-up questions typically begin with phrases such as: "*Could you explain again…," "Help me understand,"* or *"What do you mean …"* It may also be appropriate to paraphrase what the candidate said: *"If I heard you correctly here is what you said…"*

Elaboration: A candidate may provide a brief answer that needs to be expanded. In these situations, follow-up questions can be used to obtain more details. Sometimes a simple pause — saying nothing — will elicit a further response. Otherwise, probes such as *"Tell me more about..," "Walk me through…"* or *"Could you expand on…"* or *"Please provide an example"* can prompt the candidate to provide additional, necessary information. Even if the candidate's response was complete, at times it may be useful to request another example or other additional information to ensure a complete picture of the skill or characteristic being assessed.

The STAR (Situation-Task-Action-Result) method can be useful when seeking more information about a candidate's description of an event or experience. The STAR method includes four lines of inquiry:

> ***Situation*** **–** the candidate described: *"Describe in more detail the situation you were involved in." "What kind of stress were you under and from where?"*
>
> ***Tasks*** – the candidate performed: *"Describe the task you had to accomplish." "What were your responsibilities in this situation?"*
>
> ***Actions*** – taken: *"When you say you calmed the victim down, exactly how did you do that?" "Why was this the right thing to do in this situation?"*
>
> ***Results*** – plausibly associated with the actions taken by the candidate: *"What were the results of your decision/actions?"*

Verification: In an effort to present themselves in the best possible light, candidates (especially the more self-confident and articulate ones) will provide impressive but not necessarily complete and accurate responses. In fact, interview-savvy candidates will have developed and rehearsed pat answers to the more common questions (e.g., *"What have you done to prepare yourself to be a police officer?" "What is your greatest accomplishment?"*). Asking follow-up questions to obtain details about how, who, when, and where will help interviewers separate what is being said from how it

is being said, to ensure that they are not unduly influenced by candidate presentation skills alone. Pressing candidates for specifics allows the interviewer to retain control of the interview by ensuring that the answers provided are complete, accurate and in line with information the interviewer sought.

Pre-Interview Information

It is a common practice for interviewers to review applications and other information about the candidate prior to conducting the interview. However, pre-interview information can have a significant biasing effect on both the conduct of the interview and the resulting evaluation of candidates. The initial impression of the candidate gleaned from the pre-interview information can result in a self-fulfilling prophesy, affecting how questions are asked and how answers are perceived.

One experiment in particular illustrated the biasing effect of pre-interview information.[47] The interviewers in this study were given applications that included either favorable or unfavorable information prior to watching videotaped interviews of the applicants. The interviewers recalled significantly more positive information from an interview when it was preceded by review of a favorable application. For example, when the application was positive, an interviewee was seen as "… alert, responsible, well-educated, intelligent, can express himself well, organized, well-rounded, enthusiastic, hard worker, reliable, and generally capable of handling himself well." When provided with an application with negative information, interviewers rated the same applicant (based on watching the same videotape) as "…nervous, quick to object to the interviewer's assumptions, and lacking self-confidence."

Does this mean that all information about candidates should be withheld prior to the interview? Not necessarily. Careful and judicious review of applications can serve several useful purposes. First, it can provide preliminary information on relevant interview factors (especially Experience) that can be further investigated during the interview itself. This not only saves precious interview time, but also avoids asking candidates something they have already supplied, which itself can send the unintentional, incorrect message that the interviewer is not well prepared.

The interview can be an opportune time to explore concerns or issues raised on the application blank because of incomplete or contradictory statements, such as employment gaps, overlapping full-time positions, non-regular career movement patterns, etc. To serve this purpose, prior review of the application is necessary.

A third purpose served by prior review of the application is to use that information as a source of prompts for interview questions, particularly behavioral questions. For example, if the candidate is having difficulty answering a question such as, "*Tell me about a time that you had to work as a team to solve a problem or accomplish a task,"* the interviewer could prompt the candidate by saying, "*I see you were in the army; did you ever engage in group maneuvers when you were a soldier? What kind? What was your role?"*

The following guidelines are offered to control for the biasing effects of pre-interview information on interviewers' evaluations:

- Interviewers should only review information that has direct relevance to the interview factors. Tangential information such as test scores and academy grades are not necessary in the evaluation of the POST interview factors and therefore should be avoided if the interview is focused on assessing these six factors.
- Equivalent information must be available on all candidates. Reviewing information that is only available for some of the candidates creates an unfair bias. Sufficiently equivalent, parallel information should be available on all applicants. Structured application blanks (i.e., personal history statements) provide this level of consistency; letters of reference, past performance evaluations, and related information do not.
- Be aware of the potential for ancillary information to bias the interviewers' evaluations and work to offset its influence, and work to offset its effect by collecting and objectively evaluating ample, behaviorally-based information.

Interviewer Training

Oral board members should be trained on the proper conduct of a structured interview process. Training should include, at a minimum, a review of the guidelines contained in this manual. Interviewer training should include the following topics: [‡‡]

- The role and proper use of pre-interview information
- Review of interview factors and rating criteria
- Establishing rapport with candidates
- Effective questioning
- Impact of verbal and nonverbal behavior
- Evaluating answers and applying rating scales
- Avoiding common evaluation biases and rating errors
- Documentation (e.g., note-taking)
- Making decisions

Numerous training programs on interview construction and administration are offered by both the private and public sectors. The California State Personnel Board (SPB), for example, periodically conducts a one-day interviewer training session,[§§] as does Cooperative Personnel Services (CPS). [***]

[‡‡] "The POST Entry Level Oral Interview Guidelines" video is offered free of charge to law enforcement agencies and basic academies in the California POST program by calling the CPTN Hotline at 800-441-7678. Information about this special video program and other POST videos is available online at www.post.ca.gov/training/cptn.

[§§] For information on SPB courses: www.spb.ca.gov/training/index.htm

[***] For information on CPS courses: www.cps.ca.gov/training.asp

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Interview Administration

Interview Scheduling

The comprehensiveness, reliability and even the validity of the interview is a direct function of its length. Interviews that are extremely short (e.g., 5-10 minutes) fail to provide sufficient time to assess the required POST interview factors (not to mention any others the agency wishes to address). Extremely short interviews can also leave candidates feeling shortchanged and frustrated by their inability to provide a complete picture of their qualifications and capabilities. Rushing through the interview takes its toll on interviewers as well, who may feel pressure to take shortcuts that could jeopardize the validity of the process and resulting evaluations. To be comprehensive, an interview should last *at least* 15-20 minutes.

Prior to the Interview

Before conducting the interview, oral board members should review the candidate's application, especially the education and employment history. Note job duties, level of responsibility, and job advancement (e.g., promotions, increased responsibility, salary increases), as they relate to the interview factors to be assessed. This review need not take more than five minutes.

Interviewers should also familiarize themselves with the factors being addressed in the interview by reviewing the factor descriptions, exam bulletins, job specifications, etc. Interviewers should understand the link between each question and the interview factor(s) it is intended to address.

The task of delivering the questions to the candidates should be designated among oral board members. Interviewers may want to practice reading the questions out loud to ensure that they are easily understood by the candidates.

It is critical for all board members to be fully aware and responsible for the test security of the interview. Adequate provisions must be made and followed to ensure that all interview questions, rating criteria/interview factors, candidates' responses and their personal information remain confidential.

Administering the Interview

Establishing rapport: The oral interview may be the candidate's first opportunity to meet and interact with agency members. As such, interviewers serve as organizational "ambassadors," and their treatment of interviewees sends a powerful message about the climate, concerns and priorities of the department they represent. The candidate's experience in the interview process will affect his/her opinion of and interest in the department as a prospective employer. Being treated respectfully and

professionally by well-prepared interviewers cannot help but create a positive impression and experience.

In addition to its recruiting benefit, establishing and maintaining a rapport with candidates contribute to the validity of the interview itself. Creating an accepting, open environment helps relieve applicants' anxiety, which in turn will allow them to feel comfortable giving honest, candid answers. Therefore, building rapport can enhance the effectiveness of the interview by yielding more complete and accurate candidate information.

Beginning the interview: The chair of the oral board should open the interview session by greeting the candidate with a sincere smile, lots of eye contact, and a firm handshake. After introducing him or herself, the chair should introduce and allow the other panel members to shake hands with the candidate.

Providing background information to candidates can serve as an ice-breaker as well as ensure that they understand the interview process and its purpose.[48] Appropriate background information includes the current status of the selection process, the role of the interview in the selection process, and the interview format. Interviewers should explain how questions will be asked, provide specifics on the interview process, the time allotted for the interview, and other relevant details. Candidates should also be told that interviewers will be taking notes throughout the interview, as necessary, to ensure that they record the candidates' responses correctly. If an audio recording device is used, the candidate should be informed of this as well.

Candidates should be encouraged to respond candidly and completely to questions, to provide specific examples of past behavior, when appropriate, and to ask for clarification if a question is unclear. They should be made aware of the brisk pace of the interview, and forewarned that interviewers may interrupt, as necessary, to keep answers on track.

Sometimes the background information provided includes a description of the job duties, the organization, and the work environment. Although it is important for candidates to be provided with this information, this is not the most effective use of precious interview time. Communication research studies have shown that the information recalled from a conversation between two people can be quite different for each person.[49] It is therefore preferable to provide prospective employees with written information about the job, and the hiring process, rather than communicate it orally during the interview.[†††]

Note Taking

Complete and accurate notes taken during the interview help determine and support good candidate evaluations. Detailed note taking while demonstrating active listening can be quite challenging. However, good notes aid recall and guard against the influence of first (and last) impressions. They can also prove very useful should it be

[†††] The LAPD recruitment brochure, located online at www.lacity.org/PER/recruit1.htm, provides a good example of useful information for prospective applicants.

necessary to reconstruct the interview process or defend employment decisions based on the interview.[50]

All notes taken should be job-relevant and directly related to at least one of the identified interview factors. Should a candidate offer unrelated information (for example, about his/her family or marital situation), this information should not be recorded nor considered when rating the candidate.

The notes taken should reflect, as accurately as possible, the candidate's responses throughout the interview. It is not necessary to record the responses verbatim; however, the notes should reflect **what** the candidate said rather than the interviewer's evaluation of the remark – do not make judgments about the candidate during the interview. For example, rather than writing, "The candidate's response to the question on the interview factor *Community Involvement/Awareness* was very good," it would be better to note, "The candidate stated she would get involved with the community youth group to create rapport with and be a mentor to the group members."

Although the focus should be on what the candidate said rather than how the applicant says it, there are times when it is appropriate to note nonverbal behavior as well. For example, when assessing communication skills, information on the delivery and manner of speaking is as relevant as content. In addition, if the candidate's behavior raises concerns about his or her suitability (for example, taking an inordinately long time to respond to questions or not acting appropriately), this should be noted as well.[51]

Judgmental comments should be avoided. Notes such as "candidate wouldn't fit in here," or "attractive," or "too nervous to handle stress" can end up as incriminating evidence in a discrimination allegation.

Interviewers' Nonverbal Behavior

Body language supplements what a person says verbally with dozens of messages, communicated through such small gestures as eye movements, changes in posture, and facial expressions.[52] In fact, the nonverbal behavior of oral board members can communicate as much information to candidates as the questions themselves.

It is important to realize that the interviewee is observing the interviewer as well and that through his/her own body language, the interviewer can either encourage or discourage the candidate from providing information.[53] The mutual influence exerted on the interview by both interviewer and candidate creates a self-fulfilling prophesy: the interviewer's behavior affects how the candidate will respond and the information he/she will supply, which in turn affects how he/she will be perceived and evaluated by the interviewer.

There are several steps interviewers can take to create an atmosphere in which the candidate will relax and talk more freely:

- Keep your eyes opened and focused on the candidate, especially when asking questions or when a candidate seeks clarification.
- Maintain an open, interested posture: face the candidate, don't cross your arms, lean forward when listening to applicant responses.
- Keep a cheerful expression: smile, never frown, grimace or show confusion, disapproval, boredom or impatience.
- Nodding your head indicates that you find the information useful and encourages the candidate to continue, as does giving short verbal approval, such as "mm-hmm."
- Speak at a reasonable, steady pace, using variation in voice loudness and tone to emphasize important points or requests and to keep communications sounding fresh and genuine.[54]

Candidates' Nonverbal Behavior

Candidates' nonverbal behavior (eye contact, posture, smiling) can have an equally powerful influence on the interviewers' ratings on characteristics ranging from assertiveness, motivation, self-confidence, enthusiasm, sociability to overall suitability for employment.[55] This fact is not lost on interview-savvy candidates, who can manipulate the outcome of the interview through these behaviors, nor on the authors of the multitude of books available in the popular press that teach candidates to do just that. Although the influence of positive nonverbal behaviors on favorable evaluations can be justified for factors such as interpersonal and communication skills, it is important to recognize and separate the message from the manner it was delivered when judging other unrelated factors.

Interviewers are equally susceptible to making erroneous inferences based on less-flattering nonverbal behavior of candidates. Avoidance of eye contact, rapid blinking, and nervous body movements are commonly interpreted — particularly by experienced law enforcement officers — as signs of deception. However, research over the past 20 years has undisputedly demonstrated that nonverbal behaviors, in and of themselves, do not clearly indicate deception.[56] In fact, studies indicate that an individual's overall ability to detect deception from nonverbal behavior is about as accurate as chance.[57] Interviewers should make a conscious effort to avoid drawing conclusions about an interviewee's deceptiveness or other ulterior motives based on his or her nonverbal behavior, particularly under this circumstance that many applicants view as uniquely anxiety-provoking.

Controlling and Pacing the Interview

Obtaining ample, useful information from candidates under tight time constraints can be a real challenge. Particularly in response to open-ended questions, candidates may ramble, get off track, and/or get bogged down in too much detail. Others may respond with anxious silence or bewilderment.

Prudent use of the following pacing and controlling techniques can help candidates direct their focus and the time they spend on their answers:

- **Prepare the candidate:** Explaining the time constraints to applicants at the beginning of the interview and therefore the need to provide focused, terse answers can make it more comfortable to interrupt to redirect their answers later.

- **Allow for silence:** Pausing for a few seconds after asking a question can encourage quiet candidates to provide more information. It also provides needed time for the candidate to craft a careful, well-directed answer. Suggesting to candidates that they take some time and think about the question can also be effective, especially if they initially tell you that they can't think of anything.[58]

- **Restating and rephrasing** questions can help reluctant candidates generate appropriate responses. However, unless carefully worded, restatements can easily provide inadvertent leads as to the correct answer, or even inadvertently change the substance of the question itself.

- **Note taking** can provide effective nonverbal cues to the candidate to continue or stop talking. By taking notes, the candidate will get the message that what he or she is saying is relevant and will keep going. Stopping notetaking will send the opposite message.[59]

- **Tactful interruptions** can let candidates know they are not answering questions appropriately, especially if they tend to ramble, provide lots of irrelevant detail, or repeat themselves. Interviewers can redirect the candidates' responses if more information is needed, or go on to the next question if that topic has been adequately addressed.

  Like restatements, interruptions must be exercised very cautiously and judiciously. Interruptions must be seen for what they are: techniques to (re)gain control of the interview process.[60] As a result, over-dominating the interview through inappropriate or excessive interruptions can fluster candidates and disrupt the flow of the interview.

  Interrupting the candidate to redirect or refocus the candidate's response is sometimes necessary; interrupting the candidate because you assume you know the rest of the answer (a common practice even among experienced interviewers[61]) is not. Contrary to its intended purpose of showing interest and understanding, this type of interruption risks frustrating the speaker as well as biasing the interview process.

- **Keeping quiet:** Excessive talking on the part of interviewers uses up valuable time that should be devoted to listening to candidate answers. The talk ratio should be about 80:20 or higher in the candidate's favor.[62] Keeping quiet and listening carefully is very hard work, requiring a great deal of self-discipline over long periods of time.

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Candidate Evaluation

Rating Errors

Rating errors occur when a rater's evaluation is influenced by something other than the information provided by the candidate during the interview. Knowledge of the following errors and their impact on ratings is an important first step toward mitigating their influence on evaluations:

1. **Halo/Horns:** This error occurs when raters allow one or two either good or bad characteristics of an applicant to influence their evaluation of all other characteristics.

2. **Leniency/Stringency:** This error results when an interviewer consistently rates all candidates very similarly — either higher (leniency) or lower (stringency) — than what would be appropriate.

3. **Central Tendency:** This error occurs when a rater is reluctant to rate any candidate as high or low, and therefore plays it safe by rating all candidates as average.

4. **Contrast Effect:** The contrast effect occurs when an interviewer allows the quality of the prior applicant(s) to influence the ratings of the present applicant.

5. **First Impression Error:** This error occurs when a rater makes an evaluation of an applicant within the first minutes of the interview.

6. **Similar-to-Me:** This error occurs when an applicant is given favorable ratings because he or she is similar to the interviewer in some way (e.g., race, sex, age, attitudes or background). The reverse — Dissimilar-to-Me — also occurs and leads to unfavorable evaluations.

7. **Stereotyping:** Stereotyping occurs when the rater's own personal biases and preconceptions about who will make a good employee influence his or her evaluations. Stereotyping is often based on demographics such as sex, race, ethnicity, or age, but can also involve other variables such as degree of education, politics or interests.

The most effective way to avoid rater errors is to structure the interview to consistently and objectively gather only information relevant to the defined job requirements and apply objective evaluation standards. More specific error-controlling strategies include:

- Create objective rating standards for each factor; review these standards prior to the interview.
- Make no assumptions about the answer to the current question based on answers to prior questions.
- Review completed ratings: a large number of high or low ratings across many or all candidates may (or may not) indicate leniency or stringency error, respectively. A large number of average ratings for individual candidates or across multiple candidates may (although not necessarily) indicate central tendency error.
- After interviewing an exceptionally poor or excellent candidate, be especially alert to the influence of the contrast effect.
- Compare completed candidate ratings to those of the other interviewers. This can reduce personal biases by balancing out different viewpoints.

Scoring Systems

Without an adequate scoring system, interviewers have no real basis for translating candidate responses into consistent and accurate evaluations. Carefully constructed, job-relevant questions are important, but their usefulness is greatly diminished if little or no attention has been paid to what is expected or desired in the way of a response, and how the response will lend support to the evaluation of the candidate on the pertinent interview factor(s). The "I know it when I see it" approach to candidate evaluation is rife with inconsistency, bias and other serious threats to validity. Intelligent selection approaches require clearly defined criteria that drive both the gathering and the evaluation of information.

There is no denying that evaluating interviewees is in good part a subjective process. While it is not possible to predict all candidate responses to open-ended questions, predetermining possible responses — and the level of competence reflected in each — serves not only to provide consistent, defensible evaluation criteria, but also to verify the value of the question in determining candidate eligibility. If acceptable and unacceptable answers cannot be developed or agreed upon by the oral board, the usefulness of the question itself should be reconsidered.

Rating forms vary greatly in content and format. The most highly structured forms contain detailed, independent scoring criteria for each question. An example of a question-level rating scale is provided in Table 5.

While some consider question-level criteria to be the gold standard, other experts have concluded that scoring the factors that are measured by multiple questions is preferable.[63] This makes some sense. Variations in responses to open-ended questions make it difficult to develop criteria to fit all possible responses. Furthermore, interview questions themselves simply serve as a means to an end — that end being the evaluation of candidates on job-relevant ***competencies*** (i.e., factors)**.** In fact, the correspondence between interview questions to individual factors is not 1–to–1. The same initial question can, with appropriate follow-up probes, provide information for

more than one interview factor. In light of the substantial additional effort required tocreate detailed rating scales for each question, factor level rating scales provide the best return of investment.

Table 5
Example Question Level Interview Rating Sheet

FACTOR: Problem Solving

Question: Tell us about a time when you had to make a difficult decision. What was the situation, what did you do about it, and what was the outcome?

Direction: Rate the candidate by circling the appropriate number below. Write your comments in the space provided below and indicate the justification for your rating score.

Highly Qualified (Ratings of 6–7): Candidate recalls a highly challenging situation; clearly states all the elements that constituted the situation; states realistic and optimal solutions that were available to explore, executed the best solution available and resolved the situation successfully. Candidate volunteers insights and lessons learned from the experience.

Qualified (Ratings of 3–5): Candidate recalls a difficult situation; states the elements that constituted the situation; states a few solutions at his/her disposal given the type of the situation; executed an adequate solution given the situation. Candidate does not volunteer lessons learned.

Unqualified (Ratings of 1–2): Candidate recalls an easy situation; unable to state the elements that constituted the situation; states random solutions that are unrelated to the situation stated; outcome was unsatisfactory. Candidate does not volunteer lessons learned.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not Qualified			Qualified		Highly Qualified	

Rater's Comments and Justification:

The number of points on rating scales varies (usually consisting of between four and seven scale points[64]), as do the adjectives used to reflect the various levels of the factor being judged (for example, poor, marginal, acceptable, good, excellent). In addition to these numbers and adjectives, however, each rating scale should also include a clear description of the meaning of the points on the scale.

The rating form should also provide space for comments. These comments should primarily consist of illustrative summaries of candidates' responses to questions that were designed to measure that factor. These comments not only support the rating, but also can provide information that can be used to compare a series of candidates.[65]

POST Interview Rating Criteria

Rating criteria for evaluating candidates on each of the six POST interview factors are available through the POST website: www.POST.ca.gov. Similar to the interview question bank, access to the bank is limited to law enforcement agencies and personnel departments. At the POST homepage, under the Hiring tab, click on "Oral Interview Question Bank (password access only)."

Individual vs. Group Ratings

An interview conducted by an oral board, rather than a single interviewer, has several advantages, especially when it comes time to translate candidate responses into ratings. Additional interviewers can ensure that important aspects of the candidate's responses related to the interview factor in question are not overlooked. Factoring in interviewers' varying perspectives can also result in a more balanced picture of the candidate.[66]

It is acceptable and may in fact be helpful for board members to discuss their evaluations, particularly those ratings for which there are notable disagreements. Individual raters may, as a result of these discussions, decide to alter their initial rating. However, all panel members (particularly the chair) must be careful to ensure that no board member feels pressure to conform. If individuals do opt to change their initial scores, this should be documented, noting the initial rating, the revised rating, and if possible/appropriate, an indication of the reason for the change.

Setting a Pass Point

Setting a pass point is easy when using anchored rating scales: the pass point will equal the lowest point on the scale for which a minimally qualified candidate is expected to score. For example, if the seven-point scale below was used to rate candidates on each interview factor, a rating of "3" would represent the pass point; any score lower than that would be considered less than minimally qualified.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not Qualified			Qualified		Highly Qualified	

Each candidate would receive a separate factor rating from each interview panel member. For the 7-point scale above, an average score of "3" would constitute a minimum passing score for each factor. To compute a candidate's average factor score, simply add up the scores awarded by each panel member and then divide by the number of panelists. For example, if one member of 3-member oral board gave

the candidate a "3" for Factor 1 (e.g., Experience), one member gave the candidate a "2," and the third member gave the candidate a "4," that candidate's Experience score would be:

(3 + 2 + 4) = 9	divided by	**3**	=	**3.00**
↑ Factor score from each evaluator		↑ Number of evaluators		↑ Average score

Since a score of "3" represents "Qualified," this candidate received a passing score on this factor. To pass the interview, candidates must receive a score of "qualified" or better on each interview factor.

Note that this method for computing pass points presumes that better performance on one factor cannot compensate for unsatisfactory performance on another. This is based on the assumption that minimum competence on *each* factor is a necessary prerequisite for successful job performance. If this assumption is not appropriate, given the factors evaluated in the interview, an agency may instead want to adopt a compensatory scoring system, whereby the pass point is based on the candidate's *total* average score. Using a compensatory model, a pass point is calculated by: (1) multiplying the number of factors by the minimum passing score; and then (2) multiplying that product by the number of evaluators. For example, if candidates were evaluated on the six POST interview factors using the above 7-point scale, by an oral board panel consisting of three members, the minimum pass point would be:

Pass Point	**=**	**6**	**x**	**3**	**x**	**3**	**=**	**54 points**
		↑ Number of factors		↑ Minimally qualified score		↑ Number of interviewers		

Rescaling scores: Some agencies require scores to be rescaled so that passing scores range from 70–100. Rescaling puts the scores on a common metric so that they are impervious to the number of raters, factors, or points on the rating scales. Table 6 provides an example of the calculations necessary to rescale scores for a 6-factor interview, conducted by a 3-person oral board, using 7-point ratings scales. Note that overall scores for candidates who did not meet the pass point are not computed; instead, they receive a score of "not pass" and are removed from the applicant pool (see Table 6).

Table 6.
Example of Computing Rescaled Test Scores

If there are:

- 6 factors assessed
- 7-point ratings scales, with a pre-defined pass point of 3 points
- 3 interview panel members

Pass point (minimum score) = 54 points

6 factors x 3 points x 3 panel members = [6 x 3 x 3] = 54 points

Maximum score possible = 126 points

6 factors x 7 points x 3 panel members = [6 x 7 x 3] = 126 points

Scores are to be reported with a 70- to 100-point range.

Candidates scores:

	Scores from:			
Interview Factor	Rater 1	Rater 2	Rater 3	Total by Factor
Experience	3	4	4	11
Problem solving	3	4	3	10
Communication	6	5	4	15
Interest / Motivation	3	3	3	9
Interpersonal	4	4	3	11
Community Oriented	5	4	4	13
TOTAL SCORE	24	24	21	**= 69**

Calculations:

1. Compute the range of rescaled scores [100 - 70 = **30**] and the range of raw scores: [126 (maximum) – 54 (minimum) = **72**].

2. Divide the rescaled score range (30) by the raw score range (72): [30 / 72 = **.42**]. This is the value of each raw score point when rescaled.

3. Subtract the candidate's total score (above) from the pass point score: [69 – 54 = **15**].

4. Multiply this figure by the raw score point value (.42) computed in Step 2: [15 x .42 = **6.3**]. This represents the number of rescaled points the candidate achieved over the minimum acceptable score.

5. Add this score to the rescaled pass point (70): [6.3 + 70 = **76.3**]. This is the candidate's rescaled total score.

Summary and Review

This manual covers a lot of ground and is intended to provide a lot of food for thought. Below is a brief recap of the major points:

1. Ensure that interview content is based on factors identified as relevant and important for the job.

2. Focus the interview content on what the interview is good for: interpersonal and oral communication skills, verifying training and experience, thinking on one's feet, assessing work habits.

3. To ensure adequate coverage of each factor, ask multiple questions, limit number of factors evaluated, and provide enough time to interview each candidate.

4. Ask the same or equivalent questions of all candidates to establish a uniform basis for evaluation. Additional questions, probes, and follow-up questions may be asked to ensure that each factor is adequately addressed.

5. Questions should reflect knowledge/attributes that are important for successful job performance required for entry-level officers, and can help distinguish between effective and ineffective new employees.

6. Don't unnecessarily duplicate information obtained elsewhere in the hiring process.

7. Use primarily open-ended, behaviorally-based questions, basing them, when possible, on behavioral (critical) incidents provided by subject matter experts.

8. Be aware of and avoid legally prohibited inquiries.

9. Offer and provide reasonable accommodation in testing, as appropriate.

10. Carefully craft questions to ensure that they are worded clearly and concisely.

11. Prepare prior to the interview by reviewing job requirements, interview factors, applications, etc.

12. Only review ancillary candidate information if comparable, job-relevant information is available on all candidates.

13. Use prompting, and follow-up carefully to avoid leading the candidate and biasing responses.

14. Provide training and practice to oral board members in the proper conduct of the interview.

15. Put the candidate at ease at the beginning of the interview by establishing rapport and providing information about the interview and the larger hiring process.

16. Take detailed notes and use them when rating candidates.

17. Let the candidate do most of the talking.

18. Avoid biasing the candidate's responses through leading questions, body language and other cues.

19. Don't be overly influenced by flattery, ingratiation, or other impression management techniques that candidates may employ.

20. Allow sufficient time, and use prompting/follow-up techniques when necessary, to get the candidate to provide complete, candid answers.

21. Become familiar with common rating errors (e.g., contrast effect, halo, first impression) and how to offset their influence.

22. Use well-defined, behaviorally-based rating criteria and consistent decision rules to rate each candidate.

One final note: Contrary to popular belief, good interviewing is neither intuitive nor easy. It is a skill, and, like all skills, it requires knowledge and practice to gain mastery. Take advantage of training when available. Review some of the recommended reading listed in Appendix A. These efforts, along with heeding the guidance contained here, will allow agencies to realize the full potential of a well-conceived and executed interview.

Recommended Reading

Anderson, C., et al., Conducting Hiring Interviews. A monograph sponsored by the Western Region Intergovernmental Personnel Assessment Council (WRIPAC), 2002.

Campion, M.A., Palmer, D.K. & Campion, J.E. (1997). A review of structure in the selection interview. *Personnel Psychology, 50,* 655-722. Can be downloaded at: www.ipmaac.org/files/campion.pdf

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Development of POST Interview Factors

The six interview factors were established as the result of a multi-faceted statewide analysis of the requirements of the entry-level peace officer position, and their relationship to interview assessment. In addition to a comprehensive literature review, the following steps were followed to ensure that the resulting interview factors were job-related, important, and appropriate.

1. **Review of POST Peace Officer Job Analyses**

   Essential peace officer functions and job requirements identified by two POST peace officer job analyses were reviewed to derive initial factors relevant for the oral interview. These analyses included: (1) research conducted in support of the POST Background Investigation Manual,[67] and (2) the 1998 Entry-Level Uniformed Patrol Officer Job Analysis.[68]

   Table 7 depicts the relationship between twelve[‡‡‡] background investigation dimensions and the POST interview factors. The relationship between the interview factors and the knowledge and skills identified in the 1998 POST job analysis is depicted in Table 8. Both tables illustrate the degree of overlap and therefore relevance of the POST interview factors to peace officer job requirements deemed important across multiple POST studies.[§§§]

2. **Review of the Occupational Information Network (O*NET)**

   The specific abilities and skills underlying the POST interview factors, and their relevance to core job requirements were also assessed through review of the newly-developed O*NET[69] database. Created by the U.S. Department of Labor, this interactive database includes information on skills, abilities, knowledge, work activities, and interests for over 950 occupations, including *police patrol officer* and *deputy sheriff*.

   Table 9 lists O*NET skills, abilities and work activities rated as highly important/relevant for these job classifications and categorizes these into the POST interview factor they best represent.

[‡‡‡] Operation of a Motor Vehicle, Physical Ability, and Appearance were not included in these tables.

[§§§] "Experience" is not unique to the peace officer position and therefore not included in these tables.

Table 7
Relationship of POST Interview Factors to
Selected Dimensions[****] Identified in the POST *Peace Officer Background Investigation Manual 2004*

BACKGROUND INVESTIGATION DIMENSIONS	INTERVIEW FACTORS				
	Problem Solving	Communication Skills	Interest/ Motivation	Interpersonal Skills	Community Involvement/ Awareness
Communication skills		✓			✓
Problem solving ability	✓				✓
Learning ability	✓				
Judgment under pressure	✓			✓	
Observational skills	✓			✓	✓
Willingness to confront problems	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Interest in people		✓	✓	✓	✓
Interpersonal sensitivity				✓	
Desire for self-improvement			✓		
Dependability			✓		
Integrity	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Credibility as a witness in a court of law		✓		✓	

3. **Attributes and Requirements of Policing in the Community**

Relative to traditional law enforcement policing, community policing models are more organizationally decentralized, proactive, and entail close police-community partnerships.[70] As a result, there have been considerable changes in the role and concomitant skills required of front-line peace officers. The POST interview factors were designed to directly correspond to these changes in job requirements. The relatedness of the ***Community Involvement/ Awareness*** factor is self-evident; however, the other factors also target the skills required by community policing:

- This proactive, decentralized method of policing requires increased motivation and interest to work independently and maintain the self-discipline required to autonomously handle a wide variety of situations and problems;

- Communication skills are vital in working cooperatively with local residents and others, as community policing officers must be willing and able to effectively and non-threateningly communicate with a diverse range of individuals;

[****] The dimensions "Appearance," "Operation of a Motor Vehicle," and "Physical Ability" were not deemed relevant for interview assessment.

Table 8
Relationship of POST Interview Factors to
Selected Knowledge and Skills Identified in the 1998 POST Entry Level Uniformed Patrol Officer Job Analysis

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS	INTERVIEW FACTORS				
	Problem Solving	Communication Skills	Interest/ Motivation	Interpersonal Skills	Community Involvement/ Awareness
Knowledge of **communication and active listening skills**		✓		✓	
Skill in **planning and presenting public speeches**		✓	✓		
Skill in **communicating** with suspects **to offer or solicit information**		✓		✓	
Skill in **communicating and maintaining a working relationship with another agency**	✓	✓		✓	
Skill in **recognizing, appraising and handling potential crime risk**	✓			✓	
Skill in **applying observational techniques to recognize suspicious or criminal activity**	✓			✓	
Skill in **differentiating between emergency and non-emergency circumstances**	✓				
Knowledge of **behaviors indicative of potential hostility**		✓	✓		
Skill in **presenting negative or distressing information**				✓	
Skill in **calming distraught people**		✓		✓	
Skill in **defusing and managing crisis situations**		✓		✓	
Skill in **defusing combative situations, calming or managing distraught or hostile people**	✓			✓	
Skill in **safely and effectively mediating and resolving disputes**	✓	✓		✓	
Knowledge of **techniques for effective interaction with diverse communities**	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Skill in **communicating effectively with diverse communities**		✓	✓	✓	✓
Skill in **dealing with coworkers and community members from different backgrounds and lifestyles**		✓	✓	✓	✓
Skill in **treating all people in an unbiased and unprejudiced manner**			✓	✓	✓
Skill in **maintaining neutrality**			✓	✓	
Skill in **maintaining focus and discipline**	✓		✓		
Skill in **applying problem-solving concepts to a variety of law enforcement situations**	✓		✓		

Table 9
Relationship of POST Interview Factors to
Selected O*Net Skills and Abilities Rated Important/Relevant for Peace Officers

	POST INTERVIEW FACTORS ††††			
	Problem Solving	Communication Skills	Interpersonal Skills	Community Involvement / Awareness
O*NET SKILLS AND ABILITIES	Judgment and decision making	Active listening	Social perceptiveness	Service orientation
	Complex problem solving	Oral expression	Persuasion	Deal with external customers
	Inductive reasoning	Communicating with supervisors, peers or subordinates	Establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships	Contact with others
	Deductive reasoning	Speaking	Deal with unpleasant or angry people	Responsibility for others' health and safety
	Interpreting the meaning of information for others	Oral comprehension	Resolving conflicts and negotiating with others	Performing or working directly with the public
	Making decisions and solving problems	Speech clarity		Originality
	Getting information	Speech recognition		
	Problem sensitivity			
	Analyzing data or information			
	Evaluating information			

- ***Interpersonal skills*** are absolutely critical, as one of the basic tenets of community policing is that a close, working relationship will develop between the beat officers and the people living and working in the community. This involves empathy, respect for others, and listening sensitively to residents' concerns. Interpersonal skills such as tolerance and sensitivity are especially important, as are skills in negotiation and conflict resolution. Integrity and assertiveness are critical and are essential for handling situations such as domestic disputes without invoking the criminal justice system or resorting to threats of authority.[71]

- ***Problem solving*** is at the heart of community policing. Patrol officers are required to be creative and innovative in their approach to neighborhood problems, rather than merely applying previously learned rules. They must analyze key elements of a situation and identify possible courses of action to reach logical conclusions. They must have the cognitive flexibility to adapt to new information, changes in a given situation, and changes in societal values as well.

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†††† The Interview Factors "Experience" and "Interest/Motivation" are not included, as they are relevant across all occupations.

4. **Statewide Analysis of Interview Factors**

POST conducted a survey to assess the current practices in California peace officer hiring interviews. A letter was sent to all agencies in the POST program requesting a listing and description of the interview factors, as well as the interview questions used for entry-level peace officer candidates. A total of 72 local and state law enforcement agencies responded, providing a total of 219 interview factors and 611 questions. These factors were combined based on their descriptions; for example, *judgment, decision-making,* and *reasoning* were combined to form the "Problem Solving" factor. A total of 11 common factors were identified. In rank order of frequency of occurrence, they are:

1. Experience
2. Problem Solving
3. Communication Skill
4. Interest/Motivation
5. Interpersonal Skill
6. Maturity
7. Flexibility
8. Appearance
9. Community Involvement
10. Leadership
11. Integrity/Ethics

An Oral Interview Advisory Committee,[‡‡‡‡] composed of experienced law enforcement officers, employment attorneys, and human resources professionals from large agencies, reviewed these factors as well as the products of the peace officer job analyses described above. They derived the final, manageable set of six factors based on job-relatedness and appropriateness for entry-level interviews.

[‡‡‡‡] The committee members and their affiliations are listed in the Acknowledgements.

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