

Study Guide

Video-Based Entry Level Law Enforcement Test

What is the Test?

Each item of the test portrays a realistic scenario in vivid detail. Candidates are asked to use common sense and make a quick judgment about how to handle the situation. You are asked to pick the best choice among the options given. All answers can be readily derived without prior police experience or training. Questions in the test were created by multiple panels of experienced police professionals. The video now has 54 different scenarios and takes 1 1/2 hours. The advice in this practice test is nothing more than what is usually described as common sense. As a police officer, common sense is your most important asset. You will have to make many important decisions on a daily basis. No two situations you face will be the same. You will have to decide what you want to achieve. You will have to weigh the pros and cons of various things that you could do. This practice test is designed to make you comfortable with how the test is set up and to tell you some of the things you should think about when deciding what action would be best.

You don't need experience to answer the questions in this test. Common sense is always your best guide.

What if You Have Law Enforcement Experience?

Some candidates may have prior experience in law enforcement or you may have taken college level courses in criminal justice or law enforcement. Experience should help you on this test. But be careful! Sometimes candidates with experience will read too much into a situation and start thinking "what if", or perhaps think about similar situations in which they participated. Also an experienced candidate may be trying to apply departmental policies and procedures with which they are familiar to this test. However, since this is only a test of common sense and not policy, this kind of thinking can lead to poor decisions. Remember most questions are asking about the first thing you should do or how to initially approach a problem, we are not asking about longer term handling or follow-up on the incident. Remember also, since this is a test designed for those without prior experience there are not going to be any "tricky" questions that only an experienced candidate would know.

This study guide and the practice questions should be just as valuable to you. Please read it carefully.

Learn From the Test

As a police officer you must be able to learn as a result of experience. If you pay attention during this test, you will see things in some questions that will help you in later questions. Some questions involve continuing stories. For every question in the test, it is assumed that you have learned and remembered what you have seen before.

For instance, notice that you have radio contact all the time even when you are away from the vehicle.

Understand What's Going On

Don't jump to conclusions. Things aren't always as they may seem at first. For instance, just because someone is present at a home when you enter doesn't mean that person lives there or is a relative or a friend.

If you have contradictory information, find out the facts before you take action. Maybe what you see doesn't make sense. Maybe you have been sent on a call but it doesn't seem like what you were told it would be when you get there. Figure it out before acting. Victims aren't always victims. People don't always tell you the truth. Be open to new information. Don't get tunnel vision. Be alert for things that are suspicious: actions that are out of character for the situation, things that are unusual, possible crimes, etc.

- Make sure you understand the situation.
- Don't assume guilt or innocence without enough information.
- Listen to what people have to say.
- Get explanations for things that don't make sense.
- Decide what outcome is most important.

Don't act randomly or thoughtlessly. Think about what you want to happen or what you are attempting to do. Your words and actions should be intentional and directed toward achieving your goal.

Before embarking on a course of action, decide where you want to end up. Once you have decided on a goal, how to get there will be clear.

Common goals include:

- Preventing injury or loss of life
- Diffusing dangerous situations

- Improving relations of people within the community
- Helping people in need
- Protecting people's rights
- Following court directives such as making warrant arrests
- Gathering and protecting evidence
- Lowering the possibility of future related problems
- Influencing young people to positive lives
- Respecting and protecting family relationships

Multiple, Changing and Competing Goals

In most situations, you will have more than one goal. For instance, you have to arrest someone on a warrant, but you also want to maintain good public relations. The person you need to arrest is at work in a store and is very cooperative but extremely embarrassed. You try to keep the situation as low key as possible. This achieves both the arrest and good public relations.

Sometimes goals change as situations change. For instance, you go to arrest someone on a warrant for not paying a fine. The person is hostile and you can see weapons in the house. Your main goal becomes safety. The arrest becomes secondary and can be accomplished later with backup. Public relations considerations become a lower priority.

Not all police situations have good outcomes. As a police officer, you want your actions to lead to the best outcome that is possible, given the circumstances. You don't want to make things worse in any way that is not necessary.

Deciding What Action to Take

Given the current circumstances, decide what you are going to try to accomplish. The next decision is how to achieve that goal. When deciding how to handle a situation, there are many things to take into consideration:

- Priority of competing demands
- Safety
- Need for backup or other assistance
- Public relations
- Seriousness of situation
- Importance of quick action
- Practical use of time
- Limits of your authority

Priority - What to do First?

Many times there will be several situations that could use your attention. You can only do one thing at a time. Take care of your primary problem first. Protecting lives is always the first priority. Address the most immediate danger. Investigations can happen later and can take as long as necessary. Take care of safety problems first.

You may be taking care of one thing when a higher priority situation presents itself. For instance, suppose you are writing a ticket for speeding. You witness an individual with a gun threatening a motorist in what appears to be a carjacking attempt. The carjacking attempt is a much more serious situation requiring immediate attention. In order to take care of the carjacking, you would probably choose not to finish writing the speeding ticket. You would also want the speeder to leave the area for his or her own safety.

Deciding when to leave should always be carefully considered. Once you have responded to a situation you have a responsibility to take care of things before you leave. Don't leave situations where there is still a problem, unless something of higher priority arises. If you can see something that you could do to help before you leave, do it.

When handling situations and prioritizing what you will do, always consider all the circumstances.

Take Control of Safety

Always think safety first, both your safety and that of others. Will your action or inaction jeopardize someone's safety? Is there a threat to safety that must be addressed before dealing with other problems?

Think about what you might not be able to see. Be aware of the potential of a weapon, for instance. Don't confine people without searching them first. Think about the possibility of what upset people might do if weapons are available. Think about what may be happening in areas you can't see. Don't let suspects out of your sight if there is potential for a problem that could result. Contain situations so that you can control them. Always address safety concerns first.

Work with others in the department to insure safety. Inform your radio contact of your whereabouts and what you are doing if there is a chance your situation may become dangerous. Don't try to handle dangerous situations alone without backup. If you see a crime in progress, you need backup. If you are only suspicious, investigate first, then call for backup if you need it.

Consider the safety of your fellow officers. Is someone else counting on you? If you encounter another situation on the way to providing backup, what is the priority of the call where you're being sent compared to what you are faced with now? What might happen if you don't show up as backup? The risk is less if you are not the only one being sent as backup. Weigh the risks, considering safety first, when making priority decisions.

Public Relations are Important

The Police Department does not operate in isolation. Police professionals and the public they serve must work together in mutual support to create and maintain a safe community where people can live without fear. Every police action adds to or detracts from the relationship the department has with the community. As a police officer, you should go out of your way to promote good public relations. Consider every action you take in terms of how it will affect the way people feel about the department and about police in general. Be polite and considerate when you can. Respect and appreciate the diversity you encounter. Take time to talk with people, establishing relationships and tightening bonds with the community. Be fair and unbiased in the way you enforce the law. Promote a positive image of your occupation and your department.

Try to be helpful for people. If you can prevent a problem from happening for someone, you should do that. Be considerate. Even when you are in an enforcement situation, try to consider people's feelings and their situation if you can.

Try to help people improve their relations with each other so you don't have to keep going back about the same things. Do what you can to help with all kinds of situations in which you become involved.

The media are often attracted to police situations. Think of the media as your primary public relations contact. Go out of your way to show good public relations when situations allow.

Seriousness of Situation and Timing of Enforcement

In some situations you will have choices about how lenient you can be and how quickly you must enforce. Consider the following:

- What are the circumstances and safety considerations?
- How serious is the crime?
- Is the individual dangerous?
- Is the person likely to flee?
- May the person be facing a stiff sentence?
- Does he or she have ties to the community?
- Is speed more important than public relations?
- What can be done later versus what needs to be done now?
- How much time will it take to give special consideration?

Don't overreact to small situations. The lesser the offense the more latitude you have. You can choose to do things later if that could accomplish other goals such as being considerate to people's feelings. Violent crimes or crimes where the person may be facing a stiff sentence call for quicker enforcement and less leeway in terms of personal consideration. If risks are minimal in terms of safety or losing the suspect and it won't take an undue amount of your time, make the choice to be considerate.

Be Practical with Your Time and the Time of Your Co-Workers

Consider that you have only limited time and many things to attend to. Don't cut things short when they are not finished. Take the time to be kind and considerate when you can. However, don't take longer than is reasonably necessary to accomplish what needs to be done. Be respectful of your co-workers' time as well. Be reasonable in your use of department resources.

For instance, don't call in when there is no pressing need. It just takes up the time of people who could be answering other calls.

Accept Your Responsibility and Realize Your Limits

Accept your role and responsibility. As a police officer you will have to make difficult decisions. It is your job to enforce the law. Try your best to resolve problems, rather than avoid them. Never take gratuities or improperly use your position. You must be ethical, responding to criminal behaviors regardless of how you may personally feel about the suspect or who that suspect is. Don't take sides. People may try to use you. Be fair and impartial.

Realize the limits of your authority. Not everything is your business. If there is no crime, you have no authority. Don't let your personal opinions about how you think others should behave affect your decisions. If a situation seems to be private, it probably is. Imagine you see a situation of which you do not approve. For instance, you see someone about to buy something that you think is overpriced. It is not your position as a police officer to intervene. If there is no criminal behavior and no one has asked you for assistance, it is not usually a good idea to become involved in non-police matters. However, taking time to be considerate or helpful is good. For instance, if you see someone who is having car trouble, offering to be of assistance is good.

Accept your responsibility but don't overstep your authority.

Communication

A police officer is a professional communicator, using both verbal and nonverbal communication to accomplish his or her goals in each situation. A police officer must use communication skills and understanding of human behavior in order to do a good job. A police officer doesn't simply respond to other people. A police officer must think in terms of how his or her communication affects others. A police officer has a desired outcome to achieve and should use every reasonable tool available. Communication is one of the primary tools the officer has to accomplish his or her desired goals.

- Use communication to:
- establish good rapport
- avoid resistance and get people to cooperate with you
- get people to tell you the truth

- keep situations calm and safe
- show respect and promote good public relations

The best approach to establish rapport and gain cooperation is to be friendly at first, unless the circumstances dictate a more aggressive stance. Don't abuse your authority by ordering people around unless there is a reason to do so. Understand that people are frequently upset when they have called the police or if they find themselves in situations that involve the police. People may need to vent a little. Don't take the job personally. The more you focus on people's manner rather than on what they have to say, the less effective and professional you are.

Respect and Consideration

Show respect. Every person's call is important to them no matter how trivial it may seem to you. Treat people with the same consideration you would like to see accorded to your own friends or relatives. Try to accomplish what is needed and still show consideration for peoples' feelings. Consider that sometimes people are not even aware they have done something wrong.

Think of the impact of your actions on others. Many police interventions are shocking and embarrassing. Children in particular may be affected by what they see you do. Let people know what the process is. Do what you can to allow people to retain their self respect as long as safety is not jeopardized. Take steps to lessen fears and make the situation go as well as possible.

Respect families and family relations. Respect parental relations. Parents have a right to know everything concerning their children until the children are 18 years old. In enforcement situations, try to get parents to cooperate with you. Teens have the same rights as others. Don't be more aggressive with teens. Deal with people as individuals. Gain compliance through courtesy when you can. Through your behaviors you are building ideas in young people about the police. These attitudes usually stay with people the rest of their lives. It is very important to act in a manner that causes children to view the police in a positive way.

Be reasonable and fair with people. Think about how you can gain the cooperation you need in the most effective way. Gain control at the lowest level you can. A good way to gain control is to consider people's feelings so they don't become more upset and work against you. Separating people often calms them down. Use the least amount of force you can to safely achieve the desired result. Just your presence, especially in a uniform, is a show of force. Begin at a low level and avoid unnecessary escalation.

Consider who you are talking to and what you want from them. Are they suspects or witnesses? Are they victims? Is this simply a person from whom

you need information? Consider what information you want when deciding how to interact with someone. Interact in the manner that is most likely to achieve your goal. Don't vent your own emotions, such as irritation, when they are counterproductive to achieving your goals. Be professional and don't concern yourself with whether you like or dislike people.

Be considerate of other people who are not present and whom you have not met. Remember there is always more than one side of any story, even if you have only heard one. Don't discount people you haven't contacted yet.

Working as Part of a Team

Remember that you are entering a structured organization with a specific chain of command. Find your way before asserting yourself. You will be here a long time. Work closely and honestly with your supervisors. No one wants to work with someone who is not straightforward. Let your supervisors know by your behavior that you can be trusted. Show respect for your superiors and follow the chain of command.

Don't be afraid of your trainer. Respect your trainer. Take criticism in a non-defensive way. There is a lot to learn. Use your initiative to get the information you need. Don't try to take the easy way. Trainers will give you advice when they think you need it, but they want to see how you can handle the job on your own.

Try to have good relations with co-workers and supervisors. If you can help other officers, do it. Show respect for others who may have more knowledge about a situation than you do. Be respectful of what co-workers are doing at crime scenes and elsewhere. If you have prior knowledge or feel that you could handle a situation better than someone else, then you should offer to take care of it.

Various Styles of Behavior that are Particularly Negative

Too heavy handed or authoritarian.

Some people who take this test seem to think that police officers should be very harsh and authoritarian. Perhaps this comes from watching television. Perhaps this comes from having seen instances of poor police performance in real life. Perhaps this comes from some misguided idea of trying to impress the department by being tough. Whatever the source, it is not at all what the department would like to see in its officers or in its candidates.

Not willing to do what is necessary.

On the other hand, some people consistently answer in a way that shows they are not comfortable enforcing the law and doing what is necessary to accomplish the job. Avoiding all conflict is also an ineffective style for police officers. There are many instances in which an officer must be decisive and firm.

What Style is Good for Police Officers?

Style of any kind is a very poor approach when dealing with human situations. If you have a style it means you tend to handle most situations the same way. That kind of thinking is too narrow for the complicated human situations police officers frequently encounter. Flexibility is the key. Judge each situation for what it is and respond according to those circumstances. You will *definitely* get many questions wrong if you have a simplistic idea of what we are looking for and try to follow that all the way through. The test is intentionally designed to see if you can handle situations requiring different approaches. This study guide has shown you that there are many things to consider when you are deciding what to do in a specific situation. If you apply this kind of in-depth thinking to each question in the test, weighing the pros and cons of each answer, you should do very well.

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