

PREPARATION GUIDE

FOR

ORAL TESTS

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GENERAL INFORMATION ON ORAL TESTS

Oral tests are conducted to formally evaluate if an applicant has the knowledge, skills and abilities that are important for success in a job. (An oral test is not the same as an employment interview.) In an oral test, a panel of subject matter or job experts ask applicants a set of pre-determined oral test questions and listen to and evaluate their responses to these questions. Panel members take detailed notes of each applicant's responses, usually using rating sheets that contain the answers to the questions. A structured procedure is used to score applicants' answers to the oral test questions. In an oral test, all applicants are asked exactly the same questions in exactly the same order. The specific questions asked in an oral test are often similar to essay questions asked in a written test. A monitor is present to ensure that the test is administered and scored in a standardized way to all applicants. Communication in an oral test is highly structured and mostly one-way; applicants are not given an opportunity to present information not specifically requested or to ask questions about the agency or department.

Oral tests are designed to assess the knowledge, skills and abilities that are important for success in a job. Oral test questions are not intended to assess information that can be learned quickly on the job or by reading a book or brochure. Test questions are not developed from specific reading materials, and we do not provide applicants with specific information about what to study in order to prepare for oral tests. There are several things applicants can do, however, to put themselves at ease when taking an oral test:

- (1) Read the job announcement carefully. Job announcements normally include a description of the purpose of the job class and a list of the knowledge, skills and abilities that are required in the job class. Use this to determine the subject areas that are likely to be represented in the oral test.
- (2) Read the job specification for the job class. (This is available on the DAS web site). Job specifications include a list of the duties performed by employees in a job class. This may also be useful in suggesting areas that are likely to be represented in the oral test.
- (3) You may want to visit your local library for test preparation materials related to individual jobs or professions. Please keep in mind that these materials are not designed to prepare you for any one state employment examination. DAS does not endorse any specific study materials, test preparation publishing organizations or test preparation courses.
- (4) Practice answering questions verbally and/or giving a presentation in front of others. Applicants often find it helpful to simulate the environment that they will face at the oral test.

It is important to note that an oral test is **not** the same as an employment interview. Employment interviews are conducted, with the purpose of making a final selection of an applicant to fill a specific position. Although interviews are structured, they are often more informal than oral tests. Employment interviews are typically conducted so that the employer can meet with applicants to ask questions about their prior work history, to provide applicants with information about the organization and work unit, and to assess the level of fit between the applicants and the specific position being filled. Employment interviews are also conducted so that applicants can determine if the position and the agency are of interest to them.

Please note that this booklet does not include any example questions or suggestions on what to study. This preparation guide is intended to provide you with some general guidance in preparing for and taking oral tests. It is not meant to provide absolute procedures that will apply to all situations and to all applicants. It is suggested that you read the information in this guide carefully and incorporate this with any test taking strategies that you have found to be successful in the past.

ORAL TEST QUESTIONS

There are two distinct types of oral questions that may be used in an oral test: the Content Oral Question and the Oral Presentation Exercise. Some oral tests include just one type of question and some oral tests include both types of questions.

Content Oral Question

A content oral question is similar to a content essay question. In the most common form of a content oral question, you are given a brief description of a situation or problem that a new employee might be expected to encounter in his/her new job, and asked to describe the steps you would take to properly handle the situation or problem. This type of question requires that you apply your knowledge, skills and/or abilities to handle a particular situation or problem. Another common type of content oral question is one where you are asked to demonstrate your knowledge by answering a direct question such as: (1) Explain the two major types of oral test questions and give an example of each. (2) Describe the similarities and difference of an oral test and an employment interview. (3) Explain the advantages and disadvantages of using an oral test.

For some content oral test questions you may be given simulated work documents to review prior to the start of the oral testing session. And during the oral test you may be asked to identify problems with the documents, explain the documents, or use the information in the documents to answer questions.

Three other forms of the content oral question are sometimes used. (1) You may be asked to describe the experience and training you have that is related to the functions or activities performed in the job in question. (2) You may be asked to role-play a job activity with another person (such as interviewing a client or disciplining a subordinate) to demonstrate your skill in this activity. (3) You may be asked to watch a video scenario and critique how a situation was handled or answer questions about what you observed, what you heard, or how you would handle the situation.

An applicant's response to a content oral question is evaluated by the oral panel members in terms of the amount of correct information provided, using a defined content rating scale. For this type of oral question, applicants' responses are graded on the content of the response (the amount of correct and complete information provided in the response). Depending on the question, there may be cases where the order of the information included in the response is considered in the scoring of the question. The inclusion of incorrect information in the response is also considered in assigning a score.

A good response to a content oral question includes complete and logical answers to each of the parts of the question.

In most oral tests with content oral questions, applicants are also evaluated on their oral communication skills. This is accomplished using one or more defined oral communication rating scales.

Tips on Answering Content Oral Questions

1. Listen carefully to each question and make sure you understand exactly what is being asked. Oral panel members cannot interpret questions for you, but if you do not hear all of a question, or are not sure if you understand a question, ask for the question to be repeated.
2. Pay particular attention to key words, directional words, and multiple parts of questions.
3. Pause briefly after a question is asked. Take a few seconds to compose your thoughts--quickly review in your mind the parts of the question or the main areas of information that you need to cover, and organize how you will go through this before you begin to answer the question.
4. If you don't know the answer to the question, try not to panic. Just give the best answer that you can for the question. Try not to ramble if you do not know or are unsure of the answer to a question.
5. Answer the question in a logical and organized manner so your answer will be clear to the oral panel and so that you do not forget to mention something. If the question includes more than one part, be sure to cover all of the parts in your answer. Remember, you can ask to have the question repeated if are not certain you have answered the question completely.
6. If you are given only a limited amount of time to complete your answer to the question, monitor how much time you have left as you answer the question and make sure that you cover all of the important points if you are in danger of running out of time.
7. If you are given a certain amount of time to answer a given question, you do not need to use the full amount of time so long as you have given a complete answer. Rambling or repeating your answer to fill the allotted time is not an effective approach.

Oral Presentation Exercise

The other type of question that may be used in oral tests is an oral presentation exercise. In the most common form of an oral presentation exercise, you are asked to arrive prepared to give a presentation on a topic or subject before the oral panel.

In another common form of an oral presentation exercise you are given a brief written description of some situation or issue, which may also include some simulated correspondence or other material, to review and are instructed to make a brief presentation or summary of the facts concerning the situation or issue, before the oral panel. Applicants are typically given a period of time (e.g., 30 minutes) to review the information/material before making their presentation. In some cases, applicants may be given the information/material and the oral presentation question well before (often a week or more in advance of) the oral test.

Other forms of the oral presentation exercise may also be used. You may be asked to prepare and deliver (role play) a brief training presentation on how to perform a task (how a task should be done). You may be asked to demonstrate and explain the proper operation of a piece of equipment, to show your skill in this activity.

If you are asked to come to the oral test with a prepared presentation, you will be given detailed instructions with your scheduling letter. The instructions will tell you the question or topic you are to address, the time you will have to make your presentation and what materials, if any, you are permitted to bring to the oral test.

Oral presentation exercises may be graded on both the oral communication skills demonstrated in the presentation and on the content of the presentation. Oral communication skills are evaluated by a panel of subject matter experts who individually rate an applicant's presentation on one or more oral communication skill dimensions, such as: (a) Style, which includes clarity of expression, self-confidence and persuasiveness; and (b) Organization, which includes use of logical organization, appropriate elaboration (completeness) and cohesiveness. Applicants are graded on each oral communication skill dimension, using defined rating scales. In many cases an applicant's response to an oral presentation exercise is also evaluated on the content of the information presented. This is accomplished using a defined content rating scale.

A good response for an oral presentation exercise would: (a) be clear, confident and engaging (persuasive); (b) be logical and well organized and (c) cover the appropriate details (information) in an understandable fashion.

Tips on Answering Oral Presentation Exercises

1. Make your presentation in a logical and organized manner so that your answer will be clear to the oral panel and so that you do not forget to mention something. If the question includes more than one part, be sure to cover all of the parts in your answer.
2. Present the information to the oral panel as if they were the audience for the presentation. Do your best to communicate the information clearly and be observant of the panel and whether they appear to be following your presentation. Project a professional image. Please note that the panel has been instructed not to give applicants positive or negative verbal or non-verbal feedback during or after an oral test.
3. If you are given only a limited amount of time to complete your answer to the question, monitor how much time you have left as you answer the question and make sure that you cover all of the important points if you are in danger of running out of time.
4. Do not ramble or repeat yourself. As long as you cover the topic appropriately, you do not need to use all of the allotted time.
5. Consider organizing your presentation around the following main areas: (a) an opening statement, (b) the body (content) of your presentation, and (c) a closing statement.
6. If the presentation question is given to you ahead of time, prepare your presentation and practice delivering it so that you are comfortable delivering the presentation and so that it can be delivered in the time allotted.
7. Pay attention to the instructions concerning the use of notes when making your presentation. If you will be allowed to refer to them, you may find it helpful to make notes to refer to when making your presentation. How detailed your notes are is your decision; however, please note that simply reading from your notes is not an effective presentation approach.

ON THE DAY OF THE TEST

1. Arrive at the testing location early enough so that you can (try to) get relaxed before the start of the test. But don't arrive so early that you have time to become anxious.
2. Typical dress for an oral test is normal business attire. Very casual dress, such as wearing t-shirts, jeans, shorts or flip-flops (sandals), is generally not appropriate for an oral test.
3. Do not bring family or friends to the examination site. Space is arranged only for applicants and the monitoring staff.
4. You are not permitted to bring any of the following materials with you into the testing room: books, manuals, pads, envelopes, folders, briefcases, backpacks, carrying bags, calculators or watches with memory capability, electronic paging devices, recording or filming devices, radios, computers, PDA's, cellular phones, or other mechanical or electronic devices. Leave these materials at home or in your car. Notes or note cards are only allowed if specifically mentioned in your examination scheduling letter.
5. Be sure to read and follow the instructions given in your scheduling letter about what you need to bring to the test site. Your scheduling letter will tell you what other materials, if any, you should bring with you (e.g., pencils, pens, calculators). Do not bring any materials other than those you are instructed to bring.
6. Be sure to bring your scheduling letter and a current photo ID that includes your signature with you.

IN CONCLUSION: SOME COMMON SENSE SUGGESTIONS

It is important to use common sense when facing a written or oral test.

- Get plenty of sleep the night before your oral test and eat breakfast/lunch.
- If you are not sure where the test site is, take a drive to the site before the test date.
- Leave yourself plenty of time to get to the test site just in case there is traffic or you have car problems.

Keep in mind that the Department of Administrative Services wants you to succeed when taking state examinations. We do not utilize “trick” questions, tolerate biased grading or develop examinations that favor a particular racial, ethnic, gender or age group.

The intent of our examinations is to identify the best qualified applicants for state positions based on the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to perform the duties of the job.

Best of luck!