

# Sergeant Written Examination Study Guide

THE PUBLIC SAFETY SELECTION SPECIALISTS™



## Cook County Sheriff Department of Corrections

Industrial/Organizational Solutions, Inc.  
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## **Introduction to the Written Promotional Examination**

I/O Solutions has been retained to develop the sergeant promotional examination for the Cook County Sheriff Department of Corrections. I/O Solutions is a public safety consulting firm located in the suburban Chicago area. The firm works exclusively with public safety clients across the United States (police, fire, sheriff's departments, correctional facilities, etc.) to develop, validate and implement promotional and entry-level selection processes. Our clients include the Massachusetts State Police Department, New York State Police Department, Minneapolis Police Department, San Diego Police Department, Houston Police Department, Austin Police Department, Atlanta Police Department, Dallas Police Department, Washington D.C Metro Police, Gwinnett County Corrections Department and the Jacksonville County Police Department.

I/O Solutions has several goals in developing a written promotional examination for the county. First and foremost, the selection procedures must be valid, fair and legally defensible. A valid examination is relevant to the department and position in question, measures the critical skills and abilities necessary for promotion, and aids the department in selecting highly qualified individuals for promotion. Also, the process should conform to appropriate legal guidelines regarding the selection and testing of candidates. In addition, the process should treat all candidates with dignity and respect, and rules should be fairly and equitably applied.

This *Orientation and Preparation Guide* has been prepared to introduce you to the written promotional examination for the Department of Corrections of the Cook County Sheriff's Department. This guide will familiarize you with the written examination process. Following are the sections that this guide will cover:

- Information on the format and structure of the exam
- Advice on the importance of reading specified study materials
- Advice on how to study for the written examination
- The development of a study plan
- General preparation guidelines
- Rules for the test
- Test-taking principles
- Use of the answer sheet
- Helpful hints about the test

## **Format of the Job-Knowledge Examination**

A job-knowledge exam consists of questions/items that are based on prespecified resource materials and cover material that is deemed important to successful performance on the job. Job-knowledge items are typically constructed in a multiple-choice format. In the case of this exam, this means that there is one correct answer option and three incorrect answer options. Your goal is to select the correct response from among the four possible options. The following is an example of a job-knowledge item:

1. Eyewitness identification and description are regarded to be the most \_\_\_\_\_ form of evidence due to the fact that human perception and memory are \_\_\_\_\_ functions.
  - a. reliable; selective
  - b. accurate; constructive
  - c. valid; focused
  - d. unreliable; selective

**Answer:**

Eyewitness descriptions are not considered to be very reliable forms of evidence in criminal proceedings. If you know that eyewitness descriptions are unreliable, you have a good chance of answering this question correctly. In order to fill in the first blank, you must find a word that indicates that eyewitness descriptions are unreliable, inaccurate or “flawed.” You can immediately eliminate answer options “a,” “b” and “c” because these imply the opposite concerning the reliability of eyewitness descriptions. You are left with answer option “d,” which indicates that eyewitness descriptions are “unreliable” and that this is caused by “selective” memory functions. This answer makes the most sense and is therefore the correct answer

## **Importance of Reading the Study Material**

It is critical for candidates to read all of the study material thoroughly. One goal in the test development process is to identify the relevant job knowledge someone needs upon promotion. Therefore, this study material was chosen in conjunction with subject matter experts within your department to target important job-knowledge areas associated with successful performance. Subsequently, I/O Solutions develops all examination questions directly from the identified source material. Thus, becoming familiar with the source material can significantly improve your exam score.

Many candidates simply fail to read the examination material and conduct little or no preparation for the examination. I/O Solutions has conducted extensive research on the relationship between candidate study habits and test performance. The single greatest factor impacting candidate performance is examination preparation. In particular simply reading the sources has a substantial impact on test performance. In our research, candidates who simply read the examination sources pass the examination

at a rate of 80%. In contrast, those candidates who fail to read the source material pass at a rate of 30%. Simply reading the examination material can put you in a position to be promoted depending on your promotional process!

## **Studying for the Exam**

As mentioned above, it will be necessary to study for the exam to improve your chances of performing well. There are many proven methods of study that can enhance your performance when applied appropriately. It should be noted that different methods work better for certain individuals. The following provides a few brief suggestions on methods of preparation for the exam.

1. *Read the material:* As stated above, it is absolutely critical for candidates to read the study material. There is no substitute for this method of preparation.
2. *Highlight important information:* When reading the source materials, you may want to highlight information that you think is particularly important with a highlighter/marker. Later, as the exam date approaches, you can review the highlighted material.
3. *Take notes/make flashcards:* Many individuals find it helpful to take notes on the important material during the course of their reading. With this method, you can put the author's ideas into your own words, which will be easier for you to recall at a later date. Another similar study method involves making "flashcards" on 3" x 5" note cards. The goal of either method is to condense the amount of reading material to the most important and relevant aspects of the source. Also, your goal should be to make this material understandable in your own words. For example, read a section of the criminal code (e.g.) and take some time to decipher the meaning of the code. Then, in your own words, explain the nature and meaning of the code in your notes or flashcards. With either method, you should be prepared to spend some time studying the notes or flashcards in the weeks prior to the exam.
4. *Study with a partner/group:* Many individuals find it helpful to study with a partner or group of individuals who are also preparing for the exam. This way you can discuss the material with them, determine what the most important material is and analyze difficult concepts. In addition, study groups can divide duties and prepare brief summaries on the reading material to share with other group members. You might try preparing brief summaries or having various group members verbally describe a particular issue or section of the reading material in an informal presentation. Explaining and describing material to others is a great way to learn the material yourself!
5. *Answer practice questions:* If a practice test is available on a particular subject, you should take the time to complete it. If there is not one available, there are several other methods of preparation to help you in answering exam questions. First, if the source material has "questions for review" at the end of each chapter, you should try to answer these questions immediately after reading the material. In addition, once you have completed a section of material, you can review the material and try to determine what questions might be asked of you

on an examination. You should be able to answer these questions once you have read the material.

6. *Study the material:* This may seem rather evident, but there are two steps to studying. First, you must read the material. Then, you must review the material at a later time. This may involve reviewing notes, highlighted portions of the material, flashcards, group study sessions or completely re-reading the source. Regardless, there should be at least one review of the material to gain understanding and help with recall when the actual test occurs. It may go without saying, but if you spend time taking notes, making flashcards or highlighting during your initial reading/study phase, you should then spend time reviewing this material before the exam. For example, if you choose to highlight important material from the text, you should spend some time the week before the exam reviewing the highlighted passages. This may involve reading the highlighted sections several times.
7. *Memorize:* There is certain material that must be memorized for an exam. While, for example, we can advocate reading and taking notes in your own words, it is important to understand that some material must be memorized directly from the source. I/O Solutions writes exam questions directly from the source material and often uses the wording as it appears in the source material. Thus, recalling the specific information from the passage can be critical in determining your success on the exam.
8. *SQ3R Study Method:* The acronym SQ3R stands for the five sequential techniques that have been used as a strategy to enhance the understanding and retention of reading material. This strategy includes the following steps:
  - **S**urvey. Start by gathering the information necessary to focus your understanding of the chapter. Read the chapter title, read the chapter introduction, section summaries, and conclusion, scan through the contents of the chapter (e.g., section headings, diagrams, and pictures). Aim to gain an overall understanding of the structure of the chapter and how the main concepts are related.
  - **Q**uestion. Go through each section of the chapter and turn the headings into questions that you think will be answered in that section. Write your questions down on a piece of paper. In the next step when you begin reading the sections, you will write down your answers that go along with each question. The purpose of this step is to help you in become actively engaged in the reading by having you seek the answers to the questions that you have formed.
  - **R**ead. Reach through each section, keeping the questions you have formed in mind. Read the section, seeking information to answer the questions that you have written down. Pay attention to determine if there are any other questions that need to be included.
  - **R**ecall. When you have completed reading through a section, stop and try to answer the questions you have composed without looking back at the reading material. If you can not come up with the answers, go back to the section as many times as you need to until you can answer your questions from memory.

- **Review.** After you have completed reading through all of the sections using the aforementioned steps, you should continue going over the questions you have created and trying to answer them from memory. If you cannot answer them, you can look back to the material to refresh your memory and then continue to review. Review the material often in the weeks and days leading up to the exam.

## **Developing a Study Plan**

The designated study period is approximately 60 days for this examination. It is in the best interests of the candidate to use the entire study period to prepare for the examination. Typically, the candidate will use the initial study period to read the material and highlight, take notes or make flashcards. Thus, for a 60-day study period, the candidate may spend the first 45-50 days reading all of the source material. The week or two might be spent reviewing notes or other study material and re-reading important sections of the source material.

Typically, candidates can read 15-30 pages of textbook material or department policy in an hour. In contrast, candidates can usually read approximately 10-20 pages of criminal code or other highly technical material in an hour. Highlighting usually doesn't add any significant time to the reading period although taking notes and/or developing flashcards can add a significant amount of time. Taking detailed notes will probably slow an individual to approximately 10-20 pages per hour (textbook material). While this process may slow your progress through the material, good notes can be invaluable to the study process.

Given the guidelines above, you should estimate the overall time it will take to read all of the source materials for the exam. For example, you may determine that you have approximately 1,000 pages of text/department policy to read and 200 pages of highly technical material. You estimate that you can read 20 pages of text per hour and approximately 15 pages of the technical material per hour. Thus, you estimate that you will need to spend approximately 63 hours to read the source material. In addition, you have decided you will highlight relevant material and take notes on critical information. Thus, you estimate that the time to progress through all of the source material will increase by approximately 50 percent. Therefore, you determine it will take approximately 90 hours to read, highlight and take notes on all of the source material. If you spend the first 45 days on reading the source material, you will have to spend approximately 15 hours a week on your studies. You might decide to spend one hour each night (or day, depending on your shift) after work on reading. Then you may spend a few hours on your off days to finish up your weekly readings. Finally, you should spend some time studying the material before the exam. It is a good idea to use the last week or two before the exam to review the material thoroughly, study and memorize critical facts. For such a study plan you might spend 10-15 hours per week for the final two week "study period" —this time might be spend re-reading key sections of source material, reading highlighted materials or notes, etc.

## General Preparation Guidelines

Diligently studying for this exam will be the best method for ensuring your success; however, there are other considerations that can affect your performance on the day of the exam. Your attitude on the day of the exam, the test-taking strategies you utilize and your ability to avoid common test-taking errors will all affect the outcome of the exam. These issues are discussed in detail below.

- **Preparation for the exam.** You will increase your chances of obtaining your best score if you spend a lot of time preparing for the exam. This includes carefully reading and studying the materials listed on the *Examination Notice/Promotional Examination Source Material* document as well as this *Orientation and Preparation Guide*. It is also important that you avoid becoming overly anxious about the exam and implement good test-taking strategies.
- **Your physical well-being.** Get a good night's sleep before the exam. Try to ensure that you are in the best possible condition both physically and mentally on the day of the exam.
- **Arrive early.** Make all necessary arrangements to ensure that you arrive early at the test site. It would be wise to anticipate traffic delays in traveling to the test site and to allocate extra travel time to ensure an early arrival even with delays. Give yourself ample time to settle in at the test site.
- **Confidence.** The more confident you are in your abilities, the more likely you are to do well on the exam. Try to stay focused so that you don't end up reading sentences and answer choices over and over again. You want to take control of the exam by feeling confident in your skills. Try to relax but concentrate on the exam you are about to take.
- **Attitude.** This exam is an opportunity for you to demonstrate that you have a grasp of the job knowledge necessary to perform successfully, and a positive attitude can have an impact on increasing your test score. There are a few ways to fine-tune your attitude about taking this exam: Look at this exam as a challenge but try not to get "stressed out" by thinking about it too much. By using this *Orientation and Preparation Guide* and practicing your strategies, you can be more prepared for the exam.

## Basic Rules Governing the Testing Process

1. Promptness is mandatory for admittance to the test on the date and time scheduled. Please ensure that you arrive at the site well before the examination to avoid being late. No candidate will be admitted after the start time.
2. Photo identification will be needed for admittance to the test.

3. You may bring the following supplies to the test: #2 pencils, erasers and a watch. A small pencil sharpener is also allowed. No other supplies will be permitted at the test site. Pencils will be supplied during the administration of the exam.
4. Beepers/portable phones and any other electronic or communication devices must be turned in prior to testing. We strongly suggest that you leave electronic devices in your vehicle for the duration of testing. If you choose to use an unauthorized communication device, in violation of testing guidelines, your test may be collected and considered invalid.
5. You will not be allowed to take any other materials with you into the examination room—this includes paperwork of any kind, backpacks, portfolios, etc.
6. Once you are seated in the classroom, you will have access to restroom facilities only if escorted by a proctor. Once testing begins, any time taken for this purpose will be counted as test time.
7. You will undergo the same standardized process as all other candidates with respect to the testing process (e.g., notification, instructions, etc.).
8. Due to the security measures that will be in place, only authorized candidates will be admitted to the test site.
9. All questions or concerns that arise during the testing process should be directed to the appropriate designated test administration staff person(s).

### **General Strategies for Taking the Promotional Examination**

- **Listen carefully.** The exam administrator will provide you with complete instructions for taking the exam. Be sure that you pay close attention to all test instructions. It is extremely important that you completely understand the directions before the exam begins.
- **Ask questions.** If there are instructions that you do not understand or if something is not clear, please feel free to ask the exam administrator any questions that you may have before the exam begins.
- **Note start and end times.** Just before the test administrator begins the test, make a note of the time the test will actually begin and the time that the test will end.
- **Keep track of time.** It is important that you keep track of your time so that you are able to pace yourself throughout the exam. You do not want to run out of time

and have unanswered questions. It is important that you allot a few minutes of time to guess on unanswered questions at the end of the exam.

- **Remain calm.** It is important that you remain calm throughout this exam so that you are able to work most effectively. You can't allow yourself to become nervous or confused by a few difficult or challenging questions. There are going to be times when you are not going to know the answer and neither will other individuals taking the exam.
- **Read each question carefully.** Be sure that you understand what the question requires of you.
- **Try to answer the question before you look at the answer options.** If you know the answer, compare it to the available choices and pick the choice closest in meaning to the answer you have in mind.
- **Answer easy questions first.** It is important that you answer the easy questions first on this exam. By doing so, you will afford yourself more time to spend on the difficult questions if necessary. Seek out questions you can answer. If there are particular kinds of questions with which you feel most comfortable, answer those questions first. For example, if you are particularly good at reading comprehension, then find those items first and complete them.
- **Don't waste time on questions you can't answer.** If you believe that you are not able to answer a question, then skip it. It is better to skip a difficult question than to spend a lot of time on it and not be able to complete other exam questions.
- **Mark your exam booklet.** Mark in your exam booklet those questions that you have skipped so that you are able to come back to them later in the exam. Marking questions that you have skipped in your test booklet will help to ensure that you have answered all of the questions by the time the examination period has ended.
- **Use a process of elimination.** If a situation presents itself in which you are unable to answer a question, use a process of elimination to narrow your options. First, eliminate any answers that are clearly wrong. Then determine how you feel about the remaining choices. If you believe that some answers are more correct than others, indicate that on your exam booklet. Later in the exam, you may have an opportunity to come back to these questions and answer them without having to read the entire question again.
- **Guessing.** It is important that you try to get as many points as possible on the examination. Points are given for correct answers only. Because there is no penalty (i.e., points deducted) for guessing on this exam, you should try to answer every question. By leaving yourself enough time at the end of the test to fill in unanswered questions using your "best guess," you will increase the possibility of getting a few of them correct.

- **Extra time.** If you finish the exam before the time period is over, review your answers and make any changes that are necessary. Also make sure that you have marked your answers on the answer sheet correctly.

### **Using the Test Answer Sheet**

This section describes the procedures used to fill in the answer sheet during the actual exam. All of the questions on the examination will be multiple choice. *You will mark your answers on a separate answer sheet that you will be given at the examination, and detailed instructions on how to use it will be outlined for you at that time.*

### **Things to consider when marking the answer sheet:**

- Make heavy black marks that fill the rectangles completely.
- Erase any answers you wish to change completely.
- Do not make any other marks on the answer sheet.
- You must use a #2 pencil (this will be provided to you). Pencil is required to complete the answer sheet because a computer will be reading these marks.
- Place all of your answers on the answer sheet. Only answers on the answer sheet will be scored. You may use your exam booklet as scratch paper but be certain to record your answers on the answer sheet.
- Use your *exam booklet* for scratch paper.
- Be sure that the number of the question you are working on corresponds with the number that you fill in on the answer sheet. For example, if you are working on question 37, make sure that you fill in your answer on line 37 of the answer sheet. Periodically check yourself to make sure that your answers are in the correct spaces.
- There are four alternatives (a, b, c and d) listed on the answer sheet for each question. Please be sure that you mark your answer in the appropriate column. You may want to go back and check your answers periodically to be sure that you have placed your answer in the correct column.

The reason that we ask you to take such care in marking your answer sheet is because errors can affect the scoring of your written examination.

### **Helpful Hints about the Exam**

This section describes a few helpful hints to remember when preparing for the exam and in regard to answering questions on the examination.

- Exam questions are written directly from the source materials. Questions are often written “word-for-word” from the source to avoid confusion. Thus, the correct answer is also drawn directly from the sourcebook (not from subject-matter-expert input). In many cases, the distracters, or incorrect answers, are also drawn directly from the source. Thus, the information may “look familiar” but still be incorrect.
- Since questions are drawn directly from the source material, it is important to note that the correct answers (and hopefully your answers) will be taken directly from this source material. If there is a conflict between “how things are done in the department” and what the source indicates, the source is the deciding factor! In many cases, such items are removed during the review process. In some cases, these items remain in the examination to reinforce “how things should be done.”
- Furthermore, in the rare event that two sources conflict with one another, your answer (and the correct) should come from the source indicated for that particular item. For each individual item, the source material is indicated. Thus, you will be informed where the item was written from.
- Generally, we avoid questions on sentencing and penalties and related areas (i.e., “trivial items”) that are not relevant to the work of sworn officers. At a minimum, you should focus your preparation efforts elsewhere. That said, some items may be more difficult and test your knowledge of the details of a particular policy.