

## Instructions for Oral Examiners

Thank you for your willingness to serve as an oral exam panel member. This booklet provides information about your role as a panel member and the oral examination process.

### Your Role as a Panel Member

You have three main tasks as a panel member:

1. To create an atmosphere in which the candidates can demonstrate their readiness to do the job;
2. To administer the exam uniformly to all candidates; and
3. To evaluate the candidates' responses to the exam questions.

### Who May Serve as a Panel Member?

The members of oral examining panels should be chosen primarily for their ability to judge the qualifications of candidates objectively. A panel typically has three members and must have at least two. One or more members by past experience and training must be familiar with the nature of the job for which candidates are being tested.

### Waiver of Candidates or Panel Members

Panel members must disclose each instance in which they have already formed an opinion of a candidate. Review the list of candidates who are scheduled for testing. If your knowledge of a candidate would influence your judgment of the candidate's responses, you must excuse yourself from rating that candidate.

Candidates are also asked whether they wish to waive any panel member. They are sometimes reluctant to do so because they think it would prejudice the rest of the panel. Therefore, we assure candidates that oral panels are used to having people waive.

### Making the Exam Fit the Job

Every job has a number of tasks that must be performed. The employee needs certain competencies (knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors) to be able to perform these tasks well. An employee who would be excellent in one job may be marginal in another. Self-confidence and the ability to express oneself are important in some jobs but not in others. The purpose of the exam is to assess a job applicant's knowledge, skills, and abilities in terms of those needed for the job.

## How does one Measure Competencies?

Before developing an examination, an assessment consultant works with subject matter experts to analyze the job. What are the essential functions and tasks to be performed and the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics needed to perform them? What assessment tool or tools would best measure those competencies? An oral exam may comprise the entire testing process or it may be used along with a written test, evaluation of experience and training (E&T), performance test, or another assessment tool. The oral exam is designed to measure only those job-related factors it can measure best. It is important that panel members focus on the job factors the oral exam is intended to measure rather than on other factors.

## Factors you may not Consider

Panelists are prohibited by law from considering certain factors associated with candidates. These factors include:

- Race and color
- National origin
- Political or religious affiliations or opinions
- Marital status
- Children, child care, pregnancy, or plans to have children
- Age
- Sex
- Sexual orientation
- Sensory, mental, or physical disabilities
- Success or failure in previous examinations
- Union membership
- Membership in clubs, lodges, societies, etc.

## Setting the Tone of the Examination

For many candidates the exam is a stressful situation in which they have a lot at stake. As a panel member, you can help make them feel comfortable so that they will be able to demonstrate their readiness to do the job.

Your facial expressions and body movements should show that you are actively listening, but be sure you do not nod your head or otherwise indicate approval or disapproval. Eye contact is especially important. It is disconcerting if a panel member seems to be ignoring the candidate when he or she is talking. Nervous mannerisms such as twisting your hair, doodling, or raising your eyebrows are also distracting.

## Introducing the Exam

Before the testing begins, the panel will need to choose a chairperson, who should begin by greeting the candidate warmly and introducing the panel members. The chair should stress to the candidate that this is an examination and the candidate will be rated. The following is an example of introductory statements you might use:

This is a test and not a job interview. We will ask you a number of questions and score your answers. We will be taking thorough notes and will not interact with you as we might in a job interview. You may take time to think about each question before you respond and make notes if you wish, especially for questions you have not seen in advance. You may also wish to tell the panel the way you interpret a question before giving your answer.

The chair should then remind the candidates of the exam time limit and advise them to pace themselves so that they stay within that limit.

## Pre-Exposed Problems and Job Simulations

Some oral exams include or consist entirely of pre-exposed problems. Pre-exposed problems are presented to the candidate before he or she meets with the panel. The candidate is allowed a prescribed amount of time to study each problem and prepare a response, making notes as desired. The panel must collect all notes used by the candidate at the end of the examination. Some oral exams consist of job simulations or role-play exercises. The panel members may be asked to observe and rate the candidates. A panel member might also be a participant and play a role to which the candidate reacts.

## Assigning Scores

The procedure for assigning scores includes a comparison of the candidate's answer with the criteria listed and the utilization of the raters' judgment. Oral exams generally utilize rating guides that show what kind of response is worth a given number of points. The rating guide provides objective criteria for assigning scores. Use your professional judgment to evaluate the quality of the response in relation to the rating key. Always compare the candidate's answer with what is printed in the rating key. Some candidates may give answers that are different than the ones listed. If they are equally valid points, you may credit them. Usually the rating guide directs you to do so by stating, "or the equivalent." You must use your judgment to determine if that answer is equivalent to one of the key points listed in the guide. If you feel that a candidate should receive credit for the response, write it down and explain why.

Do not compare candidates against each other.

Experience has shown that first impressions have a powerful influence on judgments. There is a strong tendency to judge later responses in the context of earlier ones. Responses that do not fit the examiner's expectations tend to be disregarded. To combat this tendency, the rating guide lists key

points to look for in each question. Try to assign a score as each response is given. Then put that rating aside and score the response to the next question on its own merits.

There is a compelling tendency to be influenced by factors that are not supposed to be measured by the particular exam. What do you do when a candidate provides some very insightful information that does not fit the question? Do not give credit for it. All candidates must be evaluated in a uniform manner.

## Panel Briefing

You will be briefed before the testing begins. The briefing session may take place a day or two before the testing begins or may be held just prior to the exam. During the briefing you will receive a detailed description of the rating scale that you will be using. You will also review the rating guide with criteria to help you evaluate the candidates' responses. You may also have a practice session with a mock candidate. It is important that you become very familiar with the rating guide before the testing begins. Please keep in mind that a candidate may bring up a point that is not listed in the rating guide. You must use your judgment to determine if that answer is equivalent to one of the key points provided by the guide. If you feel that a candidate should receive credit for the response, write it down and explain why.

## Your Comments about the Candidate's Performance

As you are listening to a candidate's responses, you may check off or underline the points he or she makes as listed on the rating guide. In addition, write down any additional points or poor responses in the space provided. You will also need to explain why you assigned the score that you did. Be especially detailed for a low score. Reasons should relate directly to the candidate's responses to the questions. Reasons should be written in a clear, legible manner so that a reviewer can determine why the candidate received the particular score.

### Unacceptable comments for giving low scores:

1. Did not answer the question well.
2. Doesn't have enough experience.
3. Doesn't understand the duties and responsibilities.
4. Would not be able to do the job
5. Poor interpersonal skills
6. Indicates lack of interest; not dynamic enough.

Your reasons for giving a low score need to be tied to the job factors the exam is designed to measure. Make sure that your comments are specific and that they relate to the exam's scoring criteria. Assign scores and write comments soon after the candidate gives a response. After each

candidate has tested, you will have some time to review your scoring and to write your rationale for assigning the score that you did.

Acceptable comments for giving low scores: The statements below are examples of the types of specific comments that would be appropriate.

1. Answer to the question implied he would do all the work himself. No delegation or prioritization.
2. Did not know whom to contact to get essential information.
3. Indicated she would set priorities, which should be done by the supervisor, and would set up the machine, which should be done by the technician.
4. Could not explain the engineering principles or the operating procedures for solving the problem posed.
5. Showed insensitivity and lack of tact in dealing with the woman's complaint.
6. Omitted steps covering follow-up and documentation.

## Confidentiality

You will be asked to maintain the confidentiality and security of all test materials. Do not discuss the questions or answers with candidates before or after the exam or anyone not connected with the exam administration.

## Selection of Employees

It is important to rank candidates according to job-related qualifications. Experience has shown that performance of the best worker in a unit often exceeds the performance of the poorest worker by a ratio of three to one. Valid exams go a long way toward helping supervisors select the best candidates. No exam is perfect, but averaged out over a large number of exams you would find that candidates ranked number one do a significantly better job than do candidates ranked number five. Candidates ranked number one can be expected to be about 25 percent more productive than the average candidate when examiners assign meaningful scores to well-developed examinations.

A candidate who lacks ability should be given a low score to avoid the frustration of being placed in a job in which the candidate will not perform well. This may also avoid frustration on the part of the supervisor and the clients the agency serves.