

10 Tips for Mastering the Police Oral Board

Oral boards are the key to getting hired. As a police academy manager and former police chief, I have seen countless applicants bomb their oral hiring board when they were otherwise good candidates. Like many other things in life, proper preparation can make the difference. This article will suggest ten tips to increase your chances for success.

1) **Do your research.** Study up on your target agency. In this age of the Internet, there is no excuse for walking into an agency without an intimate knowledge of its statistics and key personnel. Some items to glean off of the department and larger governmental entity (city, county, or state – not to mention airport, college, harbor, school district or other setting) websites are: population policed, agency chief executive (usually the elected sheriff or chief), divisions, number of law enforcers, square miles of the jurisdiction, policing philosophy, and mission statement.

2) **Be early.** As the old saying goes: "early is on time and on time is late." I had the time that the person arrived for their oral board noted and relayed to me. My thought, along with many other chiefs, was that if the person can't make it on time (better yet early) for their interview when they should be on their best behavior, they certainly won't have good time management skills down the road when they are hired and off of their probationary status.

3) **Check your appearance.** Be sure that you are perceived as a professional. It should go without saying that all nose rings, tongue piercings, and earrings should be removed prior to coming into the area of the interview building. A dark suit with conservative tie and shirt is appropriate with men with similarly suitable business attire for women. Clothes should be cleaned and pressed. Oral board attendees should have their hygiene handled correctly. Special attention should be paid to nails and shoes.

4) **Use proper titles.** Make sure that you use the right titles when speaking at the oral board. Don't call a law enforcer an "officer" in a sheriff's office and vice versa (in that case, it should be "deputy sheriff"). Know the rank insignia for your target agency and the corresponding titles that go with them.

5) **Know your elements.** Some oral panels, particularly those that interview people who have already graduated from a basic law enforcement academy, quiz the applicant on elements of common crimes. Know your state's criminal statutes and how they apply to situations. For example, you may be asked to define burglary or be presented with a situation, which comprise the legal components of burglary.

6) **Make eye contact.** Whether each member of the panel asks questions or only a facilitator speaks for the group, be sure to make eye contact with each person in the room. In the law enforcement world, the eye contact conveys confidence and respect.

7) **Sound confident.** Minimize the appearance of nervousness or a lack of confidence by practicing to avoid stuttering. Watch your self in a mirror. Better yet, hold your own mock oral panel and videotape yourself. When you watch the tape later, you will catch both good and bad things that you did realize you were doing. Remember, we are our own harshest critics.

8) **Avoid creating distractions.** Distractions can come in the form of verbal cues (such as "um", "ok", and "see what I mean") or they can be physical (such as tapping a ring on the metal part of the chair). When distractions crop up, they make you appear nervous and detract from the message that you are trying to impart.

9) **Plant your feet.** Interview panel organizers frequently place the applicant in a swivel chair that also has the ability to recline. When you sit down, be sure to plant your feet and resist the inclination to swivel or rock in the chair. Most panel members perceive movement in the chair as indicators of nervousness.

10) **Shake hands.** When an appropriate moment comes up, usually before exiting the interview room, stand up and walk over to each member of the panel. Address each by their rank or title and thank them individually for their time while shaking their hand.

These ten tips address some of the more blatant ones problems I have observed while running oral panels. As an applicant, you are granted around twenty minutes to give the panel members a glimpse of who you as a person and they type of law enforcer you would be if employed by the hiring agency.

Your first impression (commonly thought of as the first 15 seconds) as viewed by the panel members is crucial to the success of your oral board experience. Incorporate these ten tips as you thoroughly prepare for a pivotal, albeit brief, piece of the professional law enforcement officer application process.

Preparing Yourself for your Police Oral Board

- Know where you're going, plan to arrive at least 30 minutes early, fill the gas tank, and have parking money.
- Be familiar with key aspects of your education, job history, why you want a career in law enforcement and why this agency.
- Research the Department – Do your homework! Talk with some law enforcement officers; attend a Workshop if offered.
- Be able to clearly and convincingly state your interest in law enforcement.
- Look sharp. Dress professionally. Select a conservative suit or clothing and shined shoes help.
- Minimize jewelry. No strong cologne/perfume or very light, if any, and good grooming and hygiene.
- Get a good night's sleep. You will need it.
- Rehearse your answers and statements out loud (it really helps)
- Practice answers out loud while walking or driving in your car.
- Record answers on audio/video tape, or use a friend to role-play. PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE...
- Be aware of any nervous mannerisms you may have while speaking in front of panel members. They can be very distracting.
- How do you feel about carrying a gun and possibly having to take someone's life in the line of duty?
- Know what Police Officers do, be prepared to answer scenario based questions.
- Be sure to LISTEN to the questions and answer all parts. What would you DO and WHY, be very thorough and articulate.
- Maintain eye contact with the board members.
- Maintain an appropriate volume of speech and Inflect your voice when appropriate.
- Be willing to ask that questions be repeated or clarified if you don't understand them. Only do this sparingly if needed.
- Relate to interviewers in confident, courteous, and respectful fashion.