



## DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

### **Study Guide** Senior Probation Officer

- This booklet contains SAMPLE QUESTIONS ONLY. Studying this booklet will not necessarily improve your exam score.

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## **PURPOSE AND CONTENT OF THIS STUDY GUIDE**

This guide was developed to help you prepare to take the written examination for Senior Probation Officer. It contains general test-taking advice and also provides specific information related to the exam content. This information includes the subject areas covered by the exam, the kinds of questions to expect, strategies for approaching the questions, and sample questions. Though this information cannot guarantee a higher examination score, it can give you direction for your examination preparation that will assist you in doing your best.

## **PREPARING TO TAKE THE EXAMINATION**

### **Before the Day of the Exam**

- Review this guide to get familiar with the content of the exam. Knowing about the topics and kinds of questions that will be in the exam will ensure that you will not be surprised by the content of the exam or the manner in which it is presented. This can improve your ability to demonstrate your job potential.
- Make sure that you know where the exam will be administered and all of the relevant details, such as where to park, where to report for the exam, and what identification is required.

### **On the Day of the Exam**

- Make sure that you are well rested and have eaten. These things will help your concentration during the exam.
- Plan your day to allow plenty of time to get yourself prepared and get to the exam site. Allow enough time to cope with weather, traffic, parking, etc. Hurrying creates anxiety, so do not put yourself in the position of having to hurry.
- Listen carefully to all instructions from the examination administrator. Make sure that you understand the instructions and carry them out correctly. Ask questions at the proper time before the exam begins if you are unsure of any aspect of what you should do during the exam.

## GENERAL EXAM TAKING TIPS

- Use your time carefully. The time limit should provide you with more than enough time if you move through the exam steadily and do not spend too much time on any one question.
- Read the questions and answer choices carefully. Read all of the answer choices before you select an answer.
- If you come to a question that is especially difficult, skip that question and come back to it later if you have time.
- Answer every question. Scores are based on the number of correct answers. You will receive no credit if you leave an answer space blank. It is to your advantage to use your best judgment to make a choice among the answer choices provided.

## THE SENIOR PROBATION OFFICER WRITTEN EXAMINATION

The written examination for Senior Probation Officer is based upon a job study that identified the most important knowledge, skills, and abilities required to perform the job successfully. These areas include:

- your knowledge of effective approaches for interacting with others.
- your knowledge of correct grammar, punctuation, and word usage for preparing written documents.
- your knowledge of concepts and techniques associated with effective supervision of others.
- your skill in problem solving including interpreting, processing, and evaluating information.
- your knowledge of concepts and terms relevant to the work performed by the Probation Department.

All of the exam questions are presented in a multiple-choice format. Each question is identified by a question number that is followed by a question statement. Unless indicated otherwise, there are between two and four answer choices following the question statement. You should read all of the answer choices and then choose the best answer. **Each question has only one correct answer.**

## SECTION 1: COMMUNICATION SKILLS

This examination section contains thirty (30) questions designed to assess both your knowledge of effective interpersonal communication techniques and written communication skills. For the interpersonal communications questions, you will be presented with a situation and asked to select the most effective response, given the circumstances. For this type of question, it is important to focus on the objective of the communication and the specific circumstances involved. It is also important to place yourself in the role of a Senior Probation Officer and consider what is the most appropriate response from that perspective given the circumstances presented.

For the written communication skills questions, you will select words or phrases to complete sentences in the most accurate and effective manner possible. A recommended approach for doing your best on this type of question is to review basic grammar and punctuation rules prior to taking the exam. Then, when taking the examination, sound each sentence out mentally to be certain that you are actually reading every word as it is presented. Sometimes, our eyes may see something that is incorrect, but our brain interprets it as what it expects to see, rather than what is actually there.

Examples of the types of questions in this examination section are shown below. Each question is followed by a brief explanation of the correct answer.

1. You are conducting a client interview and want to prompt the client to speak openly with you about events and related concerns. You will be most likely to accomplish this if you ask questions that:
  - A. require explanation.
  - B. are easily answered.
  - C. are general in nature.
  - D. are narrowly focused.

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #1 is response choice "A". The focus of the question is on prompting someone to provide information. Asking questions that require more information or detail in order to respond is the action that is most likely to get someone who might be hesitant to speak to open up. Conversely, the other response choices may enable the client to answer briefly and without elaboration which will not encourage additional dialogue.

2. You are speaking with someone for whom English is a second language and who appears to be having some difficulty with comprehension. The message that you are attempting to communicate is most likely to be understood if you do which of the following?
- A. Briefly pause between sentences.
  - B. Speak at your normal volume and pace.
  - C. Stand closer than normal to the person.
  - D. Maintain direct eye contact and avoid gestures.

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #2 is response choice "A". Those who are not native English speakers sometimes must mentally translate English words to those of their native language in order to fully comprehend the information. As a result, they may need a bit more time to process what has been said. A brief pause between sentences will allow for such time without disrupting the flow of the interaction. Answer choice "B" basically describes doing nothing, which will not improve understanding. Answer choice "C", standing closer than normal, will not assist in communication and may violate cultural norms of personal space. And answer choice "D" could reduce understanding, since gestures can be effective non-verbal aids to understanding.

3. If you are involved in a confrontational communication situation with another person, much of that person's power will be derived from his/her ability to do which of the following?
- A. Express feelings.
  - B. Speak assertively.
  - C. Compel you to react.
  - D. Provide a rational argument.

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #3 is response choice "C". The focus of the question is how power can shift during a confrontational interaction. The balance of power is most likely to shift when you react because reactions are generally based in emotion. At the point that you are experiencing emotions such as frustration or anger, you are less able to engage productively in the interaction, thus giving the other person more power. The other response choices may help the other person make his/her point or persuade you, but will not shift power because they reflect the speaker's actions only.

**Instructions:** The description below has been prepared by an employee and submitted to you for review. Review the description and then respond to the questions that follow by indicating which words or phrases best fit in the numbered spaces.

I scheduled a meeting with Mr. 1 his completion of the substance abuse treatment program. He indicated that he has 2 housing at his step 3 home, is doing 4 in his efforts to secure employment, and is participating in an outpatient counseling group that 5 weekly. All of his post-treatment behaviors 6 shown a willingness to work towards recovery.

4. Which of the following is most appropriate to place in the space numbered "1"?
- A. Jones following
  - B. Jones, following
  - C. Jones; following
  - D. Jones. following

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #4 is response choice "A". The words "Jones" and "following" do not need to be separated by any punctuation.

5. Which of the following is most appropriate to place in the space numbered "2"?
- A. got
  - B. gotten
  - C. forged
  - D. obtained

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #5 is response choice "D". Based on the context in which the word is used in the sentence and the specific meaning of each of the response choices, the word "obtained" is the best choice for communicating clear and accurate meaning.

6. Which of the following is most appropriate to place in the space numbered "3"?
- A. mothers
  - B. mother's
  - C. mothers'
  - D. motherly

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #6 is response choice "B". The word in the sentence is a singular possessive adjective used to describe the subject "house". Since the context of the sentence implies that the step mother is an individual, the use is singular, therefore, making "mother's" the correct possessive form of the word. The word "mothers" is plural, but not possessive, meaning more than one mother. The word "mothers'" is a plural possessive, meaning something that belongs to more than one mother. The word "motherly" is an adjective that reflects characteristics of motherhood which makes it inappropriate given the intended meaning in the sentence.

7. Which of the following is most appropriate to place in the space numbered "4"?
- A. well
  - B. right
  - C. good
  - D. decent

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #7 is response choice "A". The word to be placed in the space modifies the verb "doing". The word "well" is the correct and most clear word to modify the verb. The words "right" and "good" are adjectives that are appropriate to use when modifying a noun. The word "decent" requires that "ly" be added for the word to function correctly as an adverb, so the word would have to be "decently" in order to be correct.

8. Which of the following is most appropriate to place in the space numbered "5"?
- A. met
  - B. meats
  - C. metes
  - D. meets

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #8 is response choice "D". Though two of the other response choice words sound the same, they have different meanings. The word "meets" is most appropriate given the context of the sentence since it references a gathering. The word "meats" refers to animal flesh or food and "metes" refers to giving out something or to survey boundaries, both of which are inappropriate given the intended meaning conveyed by the rest of the sentence. The word "met" is incorrect because it is past tense and the use of the verb "is" in the sentence indicates that the meetings are ongoing.

9. Which of the following is most appropriate to place in the space numbered "6"?
- A. has
  - B. did
  - C. have
  - D. clearly

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #9 is response choice "C". The correct verb form to accompany the subject "behaviors" is "have". It always helps to isolate the subject and verb together in your mind to determine which is correct. By doing this, it becomes more clear that the response "has" does not flow correctly from "behaviors". Similarly, by looking at the verb with the next word "shown" you can see that the words "did" and "clearly" are also not accurate.

## SECTION 2: SUPERVISORY CONCEPTS

This part of the exam contains twenty (20) questions that assess your knowledge of basic concepts related to the supervision of others. Supervisory responsibilities often include planning and scheduling work tasks, overseeing and reviewing work, ensuring that policies and procedures are followed, providing feedback and direction, resolving problems, and guiding others towards the accomplishment of goals. This requires knowledge of supervisory methods and principles related to leadership, delegation of work, motivation, training and coaching, evaluating and modifying performance, team building, and the basic requirements for ensuring that the work environment is safe and operating in accordance with legal requirements.

Information on supervisory responsibilities, methods, and principles can be found in textbooks and online resources that address the topic of employee supervision. When answering questions in this area, it is helpful to ensure that you answer from the supervisory perspective of how an effective supervisor would respond, given their responsibilities.

Examples of the types of questions in this examination section are shown below. Each question is followed by a brief explanation of the correct answer.

10. The employee performance evaluation interview is intended to address employees' strengths and weaknesses based upon:
- A. professional guidelines.
  - B. objective evaluative criteria.
  - C. recent supervisory recollections.
  - D. the work performance of those performing similar work .

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #10 is response choice "B". A key supervisory responsibility is evaluating the performance of employees. Therefore, it is important to know how to perform this function effectively. It is commonly accepted, and documented in literature about supervision, that objective evaluation criteria should be used when evaluating employees as part of the performance evaluation process. Professional guidelines may assist in defining criteria, but may not relate specifically to the job being evaluated. Recent supervisory recollections are not appropriate because the evaluation should cover the entire review period. The performance of others is also not the best answer because it does not allow for different performance levels and goals based upon each employee's unique stage of development.

11. Effective supervision of today's workforce requires that a supervisor most frequently assume which of the following roles?
- A. Friend.
  - B. Enforcer.
  - C. Facilitator.
  - D. Collaborator.

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #11 is response choice "C". It is generally accepted that the primary focus of supervision is to oversee and guide others in the accomplishment of work goals. Behaviors associated with facilitation are most likely to further such efforts because they involve activities that support employees, for example, providing education, resources, and guidance. While certain situations may require a supervisor to assume other roles, such situations are usually temporary or isolated. In contrast, the role of facilitator is appropriate most of the time.

12. Which of the following is most likely to produce better decision making within a work group?
- A. Social bonds.
  - B. Minimal structure.
  - C. Challenging problems.
  - D. Diverse perspectives.

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #12 is response choice "D". The question asks for identification of the element that will improve the decision making of a group. The standard decision making process involves defining the problem, gathering information, developing alternatives, and making a selection. Diverse perspectives provide the opportunity to obtain more information and ideas at the information gathering and alternative development stages, making response choice "D" the best answer. The other response choices may impact a work group in various ways, but will not definitively improve the decision making process or results.

13. At what age do job applicants and employees begin to be protected from age discrimination in employment by Federal legislation?
- A. 40.
  - B. 45.
  - C. 50.
  - D. 55.

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #13 is response choice "A". The Federal Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) prohibits employment discrimination on the basis of age and specifies that individuals are protected by the Act at age 40. It is important to understand the purpose and main requirements of key employment legislation. In addition to the ADEA, you should also understand the basic protections provided by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

14. A supervisor will have the greatest assurance that employees' decisions will support the objectives of the work group by making sure that employees have been given:
- A. repeated training on the organization's mission.
  - B. detailed instructions on how to handle all situations.
  - C. clear goals and the opportunity to develop a full understanding of them.
  - D. information on how group performance will be included in individual performance evaluation.

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #14 is response choice "C". The role of a supervisor is to develop employees so that they can effectively carry out the work of the organization. To accomplish this, it is most important that employees have clear goals that they fully understand. This knowledge will provide a basis for decision making that is connected to the specific objectives of the work group. The other response choices would be less effective in achieving this outcome.

### SECTION 3: PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS

This part of the exam contains twenty (20) questions that assess your knowledge of effective approaches for interpreting, organizing, and analyzing information. This includes knowledge of problem-solving methods and techniques, skill in reading and understanding written materials such as policies and procedures, and skill in interpreting numerical information and performing basic arithmetic computations.

An effective approach for preparing for these types of questions is to review literature on basic models of planning and problem-solving. By doing this, you will find that there are some basic steps or methods that are common to many approaches, such as defining the problem, gathering information, evaluating alternatives, etc.

A good strategy to use for questions that involve reading passages is to read through the entire passage, then read each of the questions, and finally refer back to the passage as you answer each question. When reading each question, determine what information the question is specifically looking for by giving careful consideration to each of the words used to convey meaning. Does the question ask about a cause or effect? Does it ask you to identify the correct method or sequence for performing tasks? It is important that you select your answer based solely upon the information provided. The exam questions are designed to assess your ability to correctly interpret what is provided, not to assess your knowledge of the subject area addressed by the reading passage. Finally, you should practice some of the skills required to obtain and evaluate information such as interpreting and manipulating numerical information.

Examples of the types of questions in this exam section are shown below. Each question is followed by a brief explanation of the correct answer.

15. When a supervisor must implement a significant change in the work environment, the change process will go most smoothly when which of the following is explained to employees first?
- A. Why the change is being made.
  - B. How the change will affect specific assignments.
  - C. When the various steps of the change will take effect.
  - D. How management will evaluate the success of the change.

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #15 is response choice "A". In many instances, solving a problem requires change to take place. Therefore, understanding how to facilitate change is an important part of implementing solutions to problems. Literature on leadership and problem-solving indicates that first explaining why a change is being made gives supervisors the opportunity to develop a vision, promote understanding, and shape employee expectations. This, in turn, facilitates the implementation of other steps in the change process and tends to enable the process to take place with less difficulty.

16. When assessing a situation, making generalizations and relying on stereotypes will be most likely to:
- A. provide a broad perspective.
  - B. distort one's interpretation of reality.
  - C. provide insight into how others are likely to act.
  - D. assist in organizing and categorizing information.

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #16 is response choice "B". An important aspect of problem solving is assessing situations and developing a complete and accurate understanding of key issues concerns. Generalizations and stereotypes tend to limit one's view and, as a result, provide a skewed or incomplete view of the true situation. Given this, it is important to be aware of such tendencies and avoid them when evaluating problems.

17. You are responsible for reviewing probationer assessment reports submitted by your employees. Typically, each review takes about forty (40) minutes to complete and you usually receive approximately 6 reports each week. Given this, how much time must you allow during a typical four-week month for reviewing the reports?
- A. 13 hours
  - B. 14 hours
  - C. 15 hours
  - D. 16 hours

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #17 is response choice "D". An important element of problem-solving is understanding how to quantify time and other resources in order to plan and evaluate options. For this question, you must first calculate the number of minutes spent each week. This is accomplished by multiplying the number of reports received by the number of minutes required to review each one ( $6 \times 40 = 240$ ). Then, you must determine

the total number of minutes needed for the month by multiplying the weekly total by the number of weeks in the month ( $240 \times 4 = 960$ ). Finally, you must divide the total number of minutes by the number of minutes contained in an hour to determine the number of hours required each week ( $960/60 = 16$  hours).

18. Your department has made a decision to provide Probation Officers with electronic tablets to allow them to take photos and enter documentation during field visits. You have eight Probation Officers in your unit and the electronic tablets cost \$753 each. You are nearing the end of the budget cycle, so much of your equipment budget has already been spent. If there is \$2,300 available at this time and it is all used to acquire tablets, how many tablets will still need to be purchased after new funds have been made available?
- A. 3 tablets will need to be purchased in the next budget cycle.
  - B. 4 tablets will need to be purchased in the next budget cycle.
  - C. 5 tablets will need to be purchased in the next budget cycle.
  - D. 6 tablets will need to be purchased in the next budget cycle.

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #18 is response choice "C". Problem-solving often involves quantitative elements such as determining costs or available resources. For this question, you must first determine how many tablets can be purchased with the funds that are currently available. The correct calculation to do this is to divide the amount available by the cost for one tablet ( $\$2,300/\$753 = 3$  tablets). Then, you should subtract the number of tablets that can be purchased now from the total number needed ( $8 - 3 = 5$ ).

Use the information in the table below to answer the question that follows. The Probation Department has three divisions and each division oversees approximately the same number of cases. The value in each cell is the percent of the total number of probation revocations in the department that are attributed to the Division shown for the reason specified.

**Probation Revocations for Year A**

<b>Reason for Probation Revocation</b>	<b>Division 1</b>	<b>Division 2</b>	<b>Division 3</b>
Substance Violation	9%	16%	13%
Weapon Violation	11%	9%	12%
Missed Appointments	10%	11%	9%
Sum of percentages within each Division	30%	36%	34%

19. If the department wanted to develop a new support program to address the cause of the greatest number of probation revocations for the department as a whole, it should focus on which of the following?
- A. Treating substance abuse.
  - B. Improving appointment attendance.
  - C. Conformance with weapon restrictions.

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #19 is response choice "A". This question requires interpretation of the numerical information presented in the table. The first step is to make sure that you understand the information contained in the table and what each of the numbers represents.

The subject of the table is the reasons for which probation is revoked. The table shows the percent of the total for three causes for each of the three Divisions. Since the Divisions have equal numbers of cases, these percents represent relative magnitude identical to that of actual counts. Therefore, to understand which cause accounts for the most warnings, you add the values for each cause (row). Doing this shows that the percent attributed to weapons violations is 32% ( $11+9+12=32$ ), the percent attributed to missed appointments is 30% ( $10+11+9=30$ ), and the percent attributed to substance abuse violations is 38% ( $9+16+13=38$ ). This makes response choice "A" the correct answer to the question.

Use the information below to answer the question that follows.

### **Prisoner Transport Requirements**

Prisoners must be transported in patrol vehicles on a minimum one-to-one ratio to Officers with no more than two prisoners transported in a single patrol vehicle. For safety reasons, prisoners should be under observation at all times to reduce opportunities for escape or attack. If a prisoner is to be transported in a patrol vehicle by only one Officer and the vehicle does not have a security screen, the prisoner must be secured in the front passenger seat. If a second Officer is assisting with transport of a single prisoner, the prisoner should be secured in the rear passenger-side seat with the second Officer seated beside the prisoner and behind the driver. When two prisoners are being transported, there should be one prisoner-Officer combination in the front seat and one prisoner-Officer combination in the rear seat.

20. A single Officer is preparing to transport a single prisoner in a patrol vehicle. According to the information provided, which of the following must the Officer do first?
- A. Secure the prisoner in the rear seat.
  - B. Secure the prisoner in the front seat.
  - C. Get another officer to be an observer.
  - D. Determine if the vehicle is equipped with a security screen.

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #20 is response choice "D". The third sentence of the reading passage indicates that the placement of the prisoner is dependent upon whether or not there is a security screen. Therefore, response choice "C" is the first action that the Officer should take.

## SECTION 4: TECHNICAL CONCEPTS: PROBATION

This part of the exam contains twenty (20) questions that assess your knowledge of technical concepts related to work performed by Probation Officers. This includes concepts and terminology related to topics such as probation processes, human behavior, mental disorders, narcotics, and court procedures. A good strategy to prepare for questions in this area is to review these concepts in literature such as department procedures, professional guidelines, manuals on mental disorders, and federal narcotic schedules.

Examples of the types of questions in this exam section are shown below. Each question is followed by a brief explanation of the correct answer.

21. The legal document that is a formal request to a court to order a certain action on a specific matter is called a:
- A. plea.
  - B. petition.
  - C. motion.
  - D. complaint.

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #21 is response choice "B". The term "petition" is used to describe formal requests to the court for action. This term, along with others related to court processes and procedures related to the work performed by Probation Officers, can be found in legal dictionaries included in text books or online resources.

22. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, which of the following is an example of a Schedule II controlled substance?
- A. Heroin.
  - B. Ecstasy.
  - C. Oxycodone.
  - D. Anabolic steroids.

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #22 is response choice "C". According to the U.S. Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration's Diversion Control Division, Oxycodone, also known as the trade name OxyContin, is a Schedule II controlled substance. The first two response choices are identified as Schedule I substances and the response choice "D" is identified as a Schedule III substance.

23. If a probationer is having constant, repetitive thoughts that are accompanied by an unreasonable desire to carry out certain behaviors, it is most likely that he/she is experiencing which of the following?
- A. Schizophrenia.
  - B. Post-traumatic stress disorder.
  - C. Obsessive-compulsive disorder.
  - D. Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder.

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #23 is response choice "C". Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is characterized by constant, repetitive thoughts, otherwise referred to as obsessions. These thoughts happen with unnecessary and unreasonable desires to take certain actions known as compulsions.

24. Which of the following is most correct regarding eye contact during face-to-face communication?
- A. It inspires trust.
  - B. It makes others feel threatened.
  - C. It has little effect on communication.
  - D. It tends to be interpreted as dominance.

**Answer:** The correct answer to sample question #24 is response choice "A". It is important to be able to interpret the behavior of others and to use your own behavior to effectively influence situation. Literature on communication indicates that making appropriate eye contact during communication helps to make connections and inspire trust.

### **ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE**

If you feel that you would benefit from more practice, your local library or relevant internet web sites may have reference materials that can be helpful. This is true for all of the subject areas covered by the Senior Probation Officer written examination.