

Probation Officer Information Guide

What to Expect on the Exam

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**Jefferson County Commission
Human Resources Department
Employee Selection Division**



Table of Contents

I. INTRODUCTION 3

II. TEST DESCRIPTION 3

III. CONTENT MEASURED BY THE TEST 5

IV. PREPARING FOR THE TEST 6

V. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR TAKING THIS TEST 8

VI. TEST CONTACT INFORMATION 9

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this information guide is to help explain what to expect on the upcoming structured interview (or “test”) for the Jefferson County Probation Officer position. It will also give you information on how to prepare for the test. This booklet contains information about the interview process, including:

- Introduction
- Interview Description and an Example Question
- Content Measured by the Structured Interview
- Preparing for the Interview
- Additional Information for Taking the Interview
- Contact Information

You were determined to be minimally qualified for this job by the Personnel Board of Jefferson County, and your name was placed on a list and shared with us here in the Human Resources Department of Jefferson County Commission. This step in the process was considered the primary selection process.

Now you will be participating in the secondary selection process which is a recorded structured interview. You must take the structured interview in order to be considered for this position. Please remember that the material in this booklet is designed to help prepare you for the test. You will not need the material in this booklet at the time you actually take the test. Therefore, you will not be allowed to carry this booklet into the interview session.

II. TEST DESCRIPTION

The upcoming test for Probation Officer consists of a structured interview and computer-based work sample.

Structured Interview

The structured interview scenarios will be about issues, situations, responsibilities, activities, incidents, etc., which a new Probation Officer may have to address. You will have time beforehand to prepare your response to some or all parts of the interview. After the preparation period is over, you will be taken to a testing room to begin your interview session. The scenarios and focusing questions will be narrated. You will respond orally to most scenarios and focusing questions. Your oral responses will be recorded. In addition, you may be asked to respond to scenarios in writing. For these types of scenarios, only your handwritten response will be considered. You will have a specified number of minutes to respond to each question. If you complete your response before the allotted time has elapsed you must wait until the time expires and a new scenario is presented.

On the day of the test, you will be provided with a test preparation guide that contains some or all of the actual scenarios and focusing questions you will respond to during the interview. You will have a specified number of minutes to read through the scenario and focusing questions and prepare your responses. The preparation period includes any time you spend reading the interview instructions.

While you are reviewing the scenarios and associated focusing questions, you may make notes for your use during the interview. **For scenarios where you respond orally, raters will only be evaluating you on what you say during the actual interview session.** They will not evaluate what you have written down in your notes. Only your recorded oral responses will be scored. There may be some scenarios where only your written responses will be evaluated by raters. You will be explicitly instructed if an item involves a written response.

When it is time for your interview to start, you will be escorted to a testing room. You will be the only candidate in the testing room. When the interview starts, you will see information on screen and hear the same information read by a narrator.

The narrator will present each scenario, or question, verbally. After each scenario, the narrator will present a set of focusing questions. The focusing questions will also be presented in writing either on a sheet of paper or on a video monitor. To complete the test, you must orally respond to most scenarios and their associated focusing questions. You may use your notes when providing your response; however, your notes will not be evaluated. Only your oral response will be assessed. There may also be scenarios where you will be scored on your written response. For these scenarios, you will be explicitly informed that your response must be written.

After each scenario and its associated focusing questions have been presented, you will hear the instruction, "your response period begins now." The time remaining to answer the question will be shown on a video monitor or on a timer. You will then have a specified number of minutes to respond to each scenario and associated focusing questions. At the end of each pre-specified time period, you will hear the command "STOP! Your time is up." Evaluators will ignore any information you provide after the command to stop has been issued. You will not be able to use time from a subsequent scenario to complete a response to an earlier scenario.

Your responses will be recorded. It is important that any audio or video equipment remain in place; therefore, do not touch any of the equipment at any time. You could be disqualified from the interview process for tampering with any of the equipment. If there is a problem with the equipment, please raise your hand and keep it raised until a test monitor enters your room. You are responsible for making sure you speak loudly and clearly enough to be understood by the evaluators reviewing your recording. A normal conversational tone as used in a meeting setting is sufficient.

Remember, there will be approximately 6 scenarios and associated focusing questions plus a computer skills test. Each scenario and focusing question will be read aloud prior to your response time beginning. In your response, be sure to answer all of the focusing questions presented. Keep in mind the following things when responding:

- More detail is better than less detail. That is, more details which show one's knowledge, skills and abilities relevant to the question may improve a candidate's evaluation
- The evaluators will not "read in" to what you say
- Your responses will be evaluated against a defined set of performance standards
- You should answer all focusing questions related to each scenario
- Be sure to talk about what you would do and why

Sample Question

The following question is presented as an example of the form or type of scenarios with which you will be presented. Please note that the content, or subject matter, of the actual interview scenarios will vary and may or may not be similar to that of the questions presented below. The scenarios to which you will respond during the interview will be related to the job for which you are applying.

Example

The department that you work in recently purchased some new equipment. Today, you are able to use the new equipment for the first time. You have been told that the new equipment is similar to what you have had previously. While you are using the new equipment, it stops working and shows an error message that you have never seen before.

Focusing Question(s)

- What are the next steps that you would take to determine the meaning of the error message and continue with your work?

Computer-based Work Sample

To complete the computer-based work sample component, you will be provided a computer. The work sample/simulation will consist of 20 questions and you will have approximately 40 minutes to complete all of the simulation questions.

III. CONTENT MEASURED BY THE TEST

An analysis of the Probation Officer job was conducted prior to developing the structured interview. Employees who work in this position, and their supervisors, participated in this process. When the job analysis study was completed, the results showed that a new employee in the Probation Officer position may perform several of the duties listed below, including:

- Supervises and monitors juveniles in the system by maintaining contact, gathering information relevant to case, performing home/site visits, communicating with family, school, and programs associated with the juvenile in order to monitor their case and ensure that probation requirements and mandates are being met.
- Performs day-to-day administrative tasks such as documentation, maintaining information files and processing paperwork to ensure that the department is functioning in the most efficient manner possible.
- Develops cooperative and constructive working relationships by serving as liaison for department to correspond with other departments, divisions, resources, and community through meetings; one-on-one or group, and forums to ensure information is communicated between supervisors, co-workers, subordinates, departments, and clients by telephone, in written form, e-mail, or in person.
- Develops specific goals and plans to prioritize, organize, and accomplish work in a timely, effective manner.
- Handles complaints, disputes, and resolves grievances and makes appropriate decisions and/or finds solutions through analyzing information, evaluating the situation and/or negotiating to find best solution and solve problems.

The study of the job also showed that a number of knowledge, skills, and abilities were very important and needed from the moment a person becomes a (that is, before receiving any training for the Probation Officer job). These knowledge, skills, and abilities include:

- Knowledge of English language grammar, punctuation, syntax, word usage, and sentence structure.
- The ability to listen to and understand information and ideas presented through spoken words and sentences.
- The ability to orally communicate information and ideas so others will understand.
- The ability to read and understand information and ideas presented in writing.
- The ability to communicate information and ideas in writing to a variety of audiences in a clear, concise, and organized manner, free from spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors.
- Skill in selecting the most appropriate course of action in situations where information is unclear or unavailable and making high quality and effective decisions.
- The ability to assess the importance of, and consequences associated with, tasks in order to set priorities in light of competing demands.

- Skill in maintaining a positive working relationship through comfortable and appropriate interpersonal interaction.
- The ability to manage and resolve conflicts with coworkers and/or customers.
- The ability to pay close attention to detail in order to ensure the completeness and accuracy of work.
- The ability to plan work activities in order to meet deadlines and/or goals.
- The ability to work productively and effectively under conditions of high stress, such as tight deadlines, heavy workloads, or emergency situations.
- The ability to work without close supervision or significant amounts of direction/guidance.
- The ability to manage your time in order to accomplish objectives within given timeframes.
- The ability to work in an environment that requires strict adherence to instructions, standards, and/or procedures.
- The ability to manage and allocate one's time in order to handle multiple tasks and/or meet pressing deadlines.
- The ability to identify behaviors that indicate a person is having difficulty adjusting socially or is emotionally unstable.
- Skill in conducting one's self in a calm and professional manner in stressful situations.
- Skill in managing one's own time and the time of others
- The ability to review written material and identify errors with regard to spelling, grammar, punctuation, and formatting.

The structured interview will give you an opportunity to demonstrate many of the knowledge areas, skills, and abilities you have just read.

As discussed, the upcoming test for Probation Officer is a structured interview involving reading and listening to questions, taking notes to prepare, and providing oral responses and, in some cases, written responses. If you require special testing accommodation to participate in this test, you should notify Jefferson County Human Resources immediately using the contact information at the end of this guide.

In the remainder of this "What to Expect" Booklet, you will read about ways to prepare to take the test, what to bring to the test, and whom to contact if you have a question.

IV. PREPARING FOR THE TEST

A. General information on "What to do before the test":

Here are some suggestions for what to do before the test. This includes getting to the testing place on time and with the proper things that you will need to take the test.

- 1) Be well rested. Get a good night's sleep for several nights in a row before the interview.
- 2) Allow plenty of time to get to the test. If you are rushed and late, you will be upset when you get there. Plan to arrive at least 15-20 minutes before earlier than the scheduled time for check-in. Due to the nature of the test and the number of candidates that must be processed, NO exceptions will be made to accommodate individuals arriving more than 15 minutes after their scheduled check-in time.
- 3) Come in to the test dressed comfortably. You will be there for up to two hours.
- 4) Do NOT bring any electronic communication devices (e.g., cell phones, laptops, tablets, smart watches, etc.) with you to the interview. If you bring a cell phone or any other electronic communication device, you will be asked to return it to your car. Jefferson County will not confiscate them or "hold" them for you during the interview. You must comply with this rule in order to be admitted and you will still be subject to the check-in deadline. Using any communication device

after you have checked into the test site will be considered a violation of test security and you will be disqualified. ALL electronic communication devices are prohibited from the testing facility (e.g., cell phones, tablets, smart watches, cameras, etc.).

- a) If any device is seen, heard, or used during the interview process it will be considered a violation of test security and you will be disqualified and dismissed from the interview process.
 - b) You are allowed to bring reading materials, such as magazines or books not related to the position or interview.
- 5) Do not bring any of your study or reference materials to the test. This includes any notes, manuals, source documents, reference materials, or study materials that you have used or created to prepare for the test.
 - 6) Do not bring this booklet to the test location. You will not be permitted to bring it in. All the materials you need for the test will be given to you at the test.
 - 7) You should read this booklet to get comfortable with the test process.
 - 8) You should read this booklet to understand which job duties, knowledge, and abilities are important for the Probation Officer job.
 - 9) You should bring the confirmation email that you have received from Jefferson County to the testing location. The confirmation email lists the name of the test (i.e., Probation Officer), the place you should go to in order to take the test, and the time, day, and date of the test.
 - 10) You must bring valid PHOTO IDENTIFICATION (i.e., Valid Driver's License, Valid Non-driver ID, Valid Photo Voter ID Card, Valid State Issued ID [Alabama or any other state], Valid Federal issued ID, Valid US passport, Valid Employee ID from Federal Government, State, County, Municipality, Board or other entity of the state, Valid student or employee ID issued by a state or private institution of higher learning [including postgraduate technical or professional schools], Valid Military ID, or Valid Tribal ID). You will not be allowed to enter the test location nor take the test without your photo identification.

B. General information on "What to do during the test":

- 1) Some people are nervous when they take tests. Up to a point, there is nothing wrong with that. Whenever you are going to do something important, it is good to feel a bit nervous. It is nature's way of getting you warmed up and ready, like an actress or actor about to go out on stage for a performance.
- 2) However, it is not good to be so nervous that all you can think about is how nervous you are. You need to keep your mind on the test questions, and not on your feelings. To improve your ability to do that, you will find useful ideas in this booklet on how to prepare for the test and what to expect. **The more prepared you are, the more comfortable and less nervous you will feel during the test.**
- 3) Several things that you can do that will make you feel more comfortable taking the structured interview including: following the guidelines presented in this booklet on what to expect on the test and how to prepare for the test; becoming familiar with what the structured interview process will be like (including reading the sample question); and, understanding the test instructions.
- 4) You must not leave the room in which you are taking the interview unless you are told that you may do so. Once the test begins, you must remain in your room. There will be Test Monitors nearby at all times. They will be available to assist you if you have any problems.
- 5) You will be given the opportunity to use the restroom, stand, and stretch throughout the time you are at the testing location. You should use these opportunities as necessary. Once the test begins, you will not be able to stop the process to use the rest room.
- 6) You are not to open any test material or instructions or begin working on the test until you are instructed to do so.

- 7) During the preparation and testing period, you are not to use any materials other than what has been provided during the testing session.
- 8) Candidates making any disturbances or caught cheating will be disqualified from the test.
- 9) Test Monitors will not interpret test questions for you. However, they can assist you with any problems, such as mechanical difficulties or equipment breakdowns.
- 10) There will be an audio recorder in the room in which you take the test. The audio recorder will be used to record your spoken responses to the test.
- 11) You should speak in a normal speaking voice when you are required to give spoken responses to questions. It is not necessary to shout, but do not talk in a whisper either. Simply speak in a normal voice.
- 12) For those questions that ask you to provide a written response, you should print legibly (i.e., not in cursive) so the raters can read your response.
- 13) On the day of the test, you will be provided with a test preparation guide to help you prepare to respond to the structured interview questions.

V. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR TAKING THIS TEST

The following information will help you prepare to take the structured interview.

A. What To Bring To the Test

Please remember to bring to the test the confirmation email that you received from Jefferson County.

You must bring a PHOTO IDENTIFICATION to the test location. This might be a valid driver's license, a military identification card, a passport, etc. You only need to have one form of photo identification. You will **not be allowed** to enter the test location or take the test without your photo identification.

You should plan on bringing your own beverages and food to snack on during the day. You will be onsite for up to two hours. Once on the test site, you will NOT be permitted to leave to get food or drinks. You should also bring something to read such as a book or magazine. The reading material should be for pleasure only. You **may not** bring outside test-related materials into the test. All written materials needed for taking the test will be provided. You do not need to bring writing utensils with you to the test—they will be provided to you.

B. What Not To Bring To the Test

Do **NOT** bring this Booklet to the test location. You will not be permitted to bring it in the testing room.

Do **NOT** bring any of your study materials to the test. This includes notes, manuals, and other study materials.

Do **NOT** bring any electronic communication devices (e.g., cell phones, laptops, tablets, smart watches, cameras, etc.) with you to the interview.

C. Effective Note Taking

The structured interview asks about issues, situations, responsibilities, activities, incidents, etc. which a newly hired Probation Officer may have to address. On the day of the test, you will be given a chance to look over the questions that you will be asked on the test before you start the interview. You will have a chance to think about your answers for the test, and you should take notes to help guide your responses. Good notes contain the essential or important details. The notes do not need to be written in complete sentences. You are the only one who needs to be able to read and understand your notes. Your notes will not be graded. Your notes will be collected at the end of the interview.

Why Take Notes?

There are several good reasons to take notes during the preparation phase of the test process.

- In order to take notes, you are forced to carefully consider the information being given.
- Taking notes can help you remember. Notes you take in your own words are easier to understand and remember.
- Writing down notes may actually make the information clearer to you.
- The notes will help you respond to the interview scenarios and focusing questions.
- Having notes can help you feel less anxious or nervous while taking the test.

VI. TEST CONTACT INFORMATION

General Questions about the Test

If you have questions about the test administration, you may contact the Employee Selection Division at (205) 214-5518 or careers@jccal.org. Jefferson County employees are not allowed to divulge, and do not have access to, specific information about the content of the test.

Reasonable Accommodation

If you would like to request special testing accommodation or have any questions concerning the test site or testing conditions, please contact Tonya Dawson at 205-716-2687 or dawsont@jccal.org.

Please note, due to recent events concerning the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), CDC guidelines will be followed for all secondary selection procedures administered by the Employee Selection Division of the Human Resources Department. Additional precautionary measures that may be taken include:

- 1. Disinfecting common areas of the testing facility - pre-interview and post-interview.**
- 2. Restricting the number of candidates and/or exams we administer to limit the total number of people in the testing facility.**
- 3. Limiting the number of on-site Human Resource staff members.**