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Getting a Foot in the Door

Introduction

The goal is the job, the objective is the interview, the catalyst is an impressive résumé, and the means is a comprehensive portfolio. If you don't get called in for an interview, you weren't impressive enough on paper. In this chapter, we will look at effective preparation for the application, the interview, and the job itself. Review this chapter and start doing all the preparation pragmatic to your present circumstances. You can be sure your competitors are!

Portfolios

A fairly recent trend in job applications is the electronic submission. This method has numerous advantages. All of your documents can be scanned and compiled into one file, ready for posting. You can easily add to your portfolio and update the files periodically. You can have it ready for those tight deadlines when you happen across job postings. It can be at an employer's computer in minutes if need be. What types of items are appropriate for your portfolio?

Your portfolio contains all the useful documents you can collect, including your résumé and curriculum vitae (CV). Potential items include recommendation letters, certificates, thank-you letters, school transcripts, sample reports or school research papers, and anything else possible. You will scan everything electronically, but you will also keep everything together as hard copies, ready to take with you to interviews. Keep your portfolio organized, and update it electronically after every semester. You should at least have a recommendation letter from your professor and a list of completed classes to add.

Letters of Recommendation

Applications routinely require letters of recommendation. These can take considerable time to collect. Once you determine the best people to ask, you

need to gently relay the information you want covered, request that the letters be provided quickly, and meet with the letter writers to pick up their recommendations. A practical option is to collect generic letters early on each time you encounter a person who would be favorable for your background check. These can be nonspecific and all-inclusive letters that recommend you for employment, graduate school, internships, and volunteer programs. You can scan the letters into your computer and include them in your portfolio. If your source keeps your recommendation letter saved on his or her computer, you could easily go back and ask for an updated version with the current date and a more specific objective. An adjusted letter would take little effort once the original letter has been created. You may need four or five modified letters before you finally land a job. If your contact is willing to send you letters electronically, you can simply e-mail your request for any changes, and a new letter could be on your computer relatively quickly. Consider obtaining letters right away from friends, family, and acquaintances in respectable positions in the community, such as clergy members, lawyers, police officers, council members, and prominent business owners. These are important because some applications stipulate that your references have known you personally for a particular period of time. Often the duration of acquaintance is merely requested information, with no other specified criteria.

Some professors are willing to write letters for students provided they get to know the students well enough. Approach your professor at the beginning of the semester and find out if he or she would be willing to write you a letter if you prove worthy of it. Bringing attention to yourself early on is key. Some professors can have a student base of 400 to 500 per semester. Participate often in class, sit near the front, talk to the professor periodically, have great attendance and punctuality, get at least an A-, and then ask for a letter near the end of the semester. Consider college as assertiveness practice and job preparation, not just an annoying stumbling block of life.

The types of compliments you want to see included in your letters involve attendance, punctuality, communication skills (both oral and written), critical thinking skills, interaction skills with individuals and groups, integrity, work ethic, organization, stress and anxiety control, work quality, and overall attitude and demeanor. These are some common traits that are explored during background checks. Professors may not be able to witness all of these, but make sure they witness as many as possible.

Certificates

Certificates are impressive and can nudge you ahead of others who haven't collected any. Certificates demonstrate recognition for accomplishments. They generally accompany awards and trainings. People start receiving certificates early on in life for things such as Eagle Scout, honor roll, student of the month, student council service, spelling bees, and so on.

You might take these certificates for granted when you are younger, but they are still pieces of your life story. Each time you find an opportunity to obtain a certificate for an accomplishment, put a priority on it. If there is a free seminar offered at school or anywhere else, ask if certificates or training records will be provided. Scan certificates and add the files to your electronic portfolio.

Were you aware there are some online certificates you can earn for free? A good resource for a quantity of certificates with a variety of choices is the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), at <http://training.fema.gov/IS/NIMS.aspx>. At this website, you will find several trainings for the National Incident Management System (NIMS). NIMS (also known as the Incident Command System) is a standardized approach to the preparation for, response to, and management of catastrophic events. NIMS was developed in 2004 by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. It establishes a standard set of procedures used by emergency responders at all levels of government to conduct large-scale response operations. NIMS enables responders at all levels to work together more efficiently to handle domestic incidents, no matter the cause, size, or complexity, including catastrophic acts of terrorism and disasters. NIMS is also functional for small-scale and routine incidences, such as traffic accidents, fires, and even parades. FEMA desires that everyone learn the NIMS and thus furnishes this comprehensive website as a resource for training. After completing the interactive training, you should be knowledgeable enough to pass the quiz. After passing the quiz, you will be asked for your identification, including your Social Security number. The link for the certificate is then e-mailed to you, usually within 24 hours. Figure 10.1 displays a sample certificate.

It doesn't matter if incident management training is related to the job you are seeking. All certificates add pizzazz to your portfolio and show accomplishments. An employer may not even examine what certificates are awarded for, but 5 to 10 certificates mentioned on your résumé will surely be noticed.

You can also obtain online training from the National Institute of Justice, at <http://www.nij.gov/training/welcome.htm>. After completing an easy registration, you can select online courses in different areas of criminal justice for free. A certificate can be printed out immediately. This site has an assortment of courses ranging from forensics and criminal investigations to corrections and courts.

Another option is to create your own certificates. As specialized training comes along in which you can obtain some level of expertise, ask the providers if you can create your own certificate for them to sign. Some trainers will be happy to accommodate you. You can purchase certificate-making software for a reasonable price online and start creating your own. An example might be a club or volunteer program you participate in at school, in church, or in the community. Not all agencies take the time to hand out some form of acknowledgment. Sometimes you will get a thank-you letter,

Figure 10.1



which is also valuable for your portfolio, but why not ask for a signed certificate as well? You can design it yourself and, although unnecessary, you can ask for logos electronically to really spice up the aesthetics of your masterpiece.

Volunteer Service

Now is a good time to start looking for volunteer opportunities and internships to collect kudos for your résumé. Volunteer for as much as you can, even if it doesn't appear relevant to your career choice. Many employers are impressed with the quantity of life experiences you obtain as much as their relevance. If you want to be an attorney and your certificates are for volunteering with the optimist club and the governor's grant-reviewing committee, you still reveal significant attributes about yourself. Selfless service is an indicator that you are an individual who will likely endure hard work and extra hours without complaining. Presenting evidence that you are an unselfish person might jump you ahead of other applicants who have

too much white space on their résumés. Records of volunteer work can corroborate your words when you declare in an interview that you care about others. Many candidates will say it; you can back it up!

There is an advantage in having a supervisor of an internship or volunteer program who can be contacted for a background check. Experience is a key factor in an employer's decision. You might be the best candidate in person, but without the right attractions on paper, you may get passed over for an interview by those who can demonstrate employment or volunteer experience.

Education Documentation

Although you are rarely asked to submit your transcripts initially with your résumé, it does sometimes happen. Eventually you will have to provide your transcripts to your employer, so why not get those ready to go? If you have an associate's or a bachelor's degree, get four or five sealed and certified transcripts added to your hard-copy portfolio packet. If you have not yet completed your degree, you can obtain transcripts early on that verify what credits you have already earned. If you are just a semester or two away from a minimum educational requirement, you may receive an exception and get an interview. If an employer is looking for a woman with a bachelor's degree who speaks Spanish, she might choose to hire a fluent Spanish-speaking female student close to finishing her degree over another candidate with a completed degree who speaks only basic Spanish.

CV and Résumé

A CV is less than a portfolio but more than a résumé. In terms of length, a résumé is best kept to a one-page, one-sided document listing your skills, relevant experiences, education, and awards. A CV is a longer, more detailed synopsis than a résumé and could be anywhere from two to five pages in length. A CV is more commonly used for academic jobs, but it could be beneficial to have one prepared and ready to use if an opportunity arises allowing you to submit more than what is on your résumé. Your CV provides an overview of your accomplishments throughout your life. There is no standard format, but you should always make sure the most relevant information comes first. Your goal should be to keep it short but inclusive of everything remarkable. One helpful trick is the use of incomplete sentences. Instead of saying "I received 40 hours of grant-writing training," you could shorten it to "40 hours' grant training." You will use bullet points more on a résumé than on a CV. When it is appropriate to add bullet points to your CV, use them modestly.

The résumé will be the document most frequently attached to your job applications. For some jobs, your résumé is the application, but for some criminal justice jobs, you could find yourself filling out 25- to 30-page

applications. For most volunteer opportunities, internships, and employment (other than positions requiring polygraph testing), the résumé and letters of recommendation will be significant in the decision of whether you are called for an interview. Here are some typical components (the order can be changed) of a résumé:

Name:	Should stand out at the top of the résumé
Contact information:	Include address, phone number, and e-mail address
Objective:	What job are you seeking?
Education:	This area can include trainings
Experience:	Any job or volunteer experience is important, but especially that which is relevant
Skills:	This is where you include everything else, such as typing, Spanish speaking, grant writing, and so on
Awards/Activities:	Mention certificates, memberships, volunteer programs such as Boy Scout leadership, church choir, campaign volunteer, dean's list, honors, and so on

In deciding how much information to include on your résumé, look at the aesthetics from the critical viewpoint of the employer. A résumé needs a balance of white space and a blend of bullet points, boldface, italics, and underlining. If your résumé has too much white space, go ahead and include a few of the things you left off for the more important items. If it appears too full, work with the formatting or remove some less relevant minutiae, but keep it at a 12-point font. It is best to single-space your résumé, with spaces between different sections. Make sure to include a heading for each section. Remember the rule “KISS”: keep it simple, stupid.

Should a résumé be colorful? Great question! You want readability, which is why you spread out the white space and include a variety of bullet points, boldface, italics, and underlining. Another supportive feature for a readable document is contrast. Not knowing how your electronic document will look after an employer prints it out, you are always safer with black ink on white background, like most résumés. If you will be submitting your résumé as a hard copy, you may choose to risk adding some boldface, strong colors, such as red or blue, on some expensive paper, but be aware that yours would stand out. That may be good, but maybe not. Figure 10.2 displays a sample résumé.

A key phrase to have on your résumé is “grant writing.” Government agencies and supportive agencies have had to depend on grants for some of their key programs to exist. By hiring grant writers, an agency increases its potential to secure available government money and improve the likelihood of retaining current grants. Grant-writing training is offered all over the

Figure 10.2

Juan Díaz**July 21, 2013**

2620 N. Circle West • Beverly Hills, CA 90210 • (310) 555-9880 * jdiaz1@aol.com

Objective: Fish and Game Ranger

Profile: *Motivated and assertive 22-year-old male with a mild-mannered personality, accustomed to multitasking and being diplomatic and tactful with professionals and nonprofessionals at all levels*

Relevant Skills

- Report writing
- Grants
- Computer savvy
- Emergency procedures
- Project management
- Spanish speaking
- Organization and scheduling
- Communications

Relevant Experience

- Preparation of police reports as a police explorer with Beverly Hills PD (2007–2009)
- Grant writing certified (2013)
- Volunteer with California Fish and Game as a ranger aide (2012 to present)
- Participated on 22 police or ranger ride-alongs (2007–2013)
- Organized two statewide explorer conferences (2008–2009)

Employment History

- Night manager at Wal-Mart, Beverly Hills, CA (2012–2013)
- Criminal justice tutor, Beverly Hills Community College (2011–2013)
- Manager at In-N-Out Burger, Beverly Hills, CA (2006–2007)

Educational History

- Bachelor's degree in criminal justice, UCLA (2013)

Relevant Awards

- Distinguished Service Award, Explorer Division, Beverly Hills PD (2008)
- Five certificates from FEMA for emergency procedure training (2013)
- Dean's list at UCLA for 4 straight years (2009–2013)

country, with costs ranging from \$100 to \$200. Training is available online or in person and can be done in as short as 2 days or spread out in weekly classes for a longer period. At the conclusion of the training, you receive documentation of your certification. This could be the best \$100 you spend for job preparation.

Another eye-catcher to have on a résumé is “Spanish speaking.” Even if your level of expertise is only basic or conversational, the opportunity to list it among your skills can push you ahead of monolingual candidates. Taking

Spanish classes at college is sufficient and can be credited toward your bachelor's degree. The more proficient you become in Spanish, the more value you will have in the job force. Even if you could list on a résumé that you are currently enrolled in a Spanish class and a grant-writing class, it could effectively push you ahead of others who haven't matched your efforts.

Naturally, your educational level will be influential on job applications, even if a degree is not required. The word *degree* is another strategic one to use. If you have just started your degree program, list on your résumé that you are currently enrolled in a particular degree as opposed to just attending college. If you are attending a community college, you might not currently be enrolled in an actual bachelor's degree program, but you can mention "associate's degree" with an added note of your intention to transfer to a bachelor's degree program. If you haven't actually completed any degree, being enrolled in college (with a plan for a degree) will be better than not listing the key words at all.

Guest Speaker: Lance Larsen, Juvenile Detention Officer



I love working in juvenile detention. My earlier impressions of detention have changed. Through working with many outstanding youths, I no longer view them as merely criminals.

In working a variety of areas, including intake, transportation, and screening, I learned that these youths had no fighting chance coming from horrible family lives: absent role models, good examples, or heroes to look up to. As a detention officer, I try to fill those roles.

I hold youths accountable to the rules, while educating them in the hope of changing their destructive patterns. I have encountered youths in detention for theft, domestic violence, drugs, rape, criminal damage, gang activities, and more. I strive to change the lives of these lost, scared, and immature youths. Given a consistent place to sleep, eat, and shower, they eventually appreciate the structure in detention.

One particular youth brought in by the police had some serious charges. I was able to work with him on a daily basis. I learned that he had no father, his mother was a drug addict and a prostitute, and he rarely had food to eat. He started using and selling drugs and quit school. I was able to see this young man change! He excelled in detention and became a leader. This young teenager became a man right before my eyes. He is now working and attending college.

Detention can be a sad place, but the opportunity to sculpt these youths into productive people is rewarding, challenging, and adventurous. If you pursue this career, obtain your college degree. It is a requirement for the job. Also, be prepared physically and mentally with a thick skin, a good work ethic, and strong communication skills. Good luck!

Interview Preparation

What have you done to prepare yourself for this job? Plan on encountering a question such as this in the interview. Better yet, hope for such a question. You will want the opportunity to sell yourself. Too many applicants take the hiring process for granted or don't really want the job badly enough. They don't commit

themselves adequately to the preparation phase and lose the job to someone not so indolent. There are some activities you can participate in that will exhibit your seriousness about the job and will help prepare you for the interview.

Police Ride-Along

Many agencies allow citizens to participate in citizen ride-along programs. A ride-along can be anything from a 4-hour stint to the full 10-hour shift. Some agencies require that you live in their cities in order to ride with their officers. Exceptions to this rule might be for school projects or to investigate an agency for possible employment. Most students have at least four different agencies they qualify to ride with, including campus police, city police, county sheriffs, and their state police agencies. Agencies that don't regularly allow citizens to ride along will usually permit their officers to provide such opportunities for family members or friends.

The protocol for a ride-along ordinarily involves a short request form to be filled out to allow a background check to be done. You will also be asked to select what days and times you are available for the ride-along. The agency will call you back within 2 to 7 days with your scheduled time. You will be asked to be at the police station at a certain time, where the officer will meet you. Some students are able to attend the briefing at the start of the shift, which can be very enlightening. In the briefing, you get to meet the other officers you will be seeing again and again at the various calls for service throughout your ride-along. You start picking up bits and pieces of clearer understanding right from the start as the officers train, share information, and get mentally ready for their tour of duty.

A ride-along is an opportunity for a potential police applicant to see and feel things that could not be experienced any other way than being right there in the action. It is easier to answer scenario-based interview questions when you have been in the unique situations officers encounter. One-on-one time with an officer is a great time to ask questions. Ask her why she touched the trunk of the car as she approached the driver. Ask why she called in a traffic stop before she turned on her overhead lights. Ask why she made a particular driver get out of his car, but not other drivers. Ask for some advice on the oral board questions. Obtain her e-mail address so that you can ask more questions in the future.

Most agencies won't allow more than one ride-along within 6 months. However, it would be beneficial to ride with a variety of agencies and officers, so sign up for more than one department at a time. Try not to key only on the organization you hope to work for.

Dress like a detective! Your opportunity for exposure to the most exciting parts of police work correlates with your appearance. If you look like a student riding along, you will be treated like one and will likely spend a lot of time in the car. If you look professional and could pass for a detective, the officer can reasonably allow you to be closer to more scenes without

distracting the citizens he or she is gleaning information from. Although it would be beneficial to be in jeans and tennis shoes for a foot chase, your potential for a better experience is increased in slacks and a buttoned shirt with professional shoes. Polo shirts are also acceptable, but a buttoned shirt is even more prudent. Women should apply the same strategy. Female detectives generally wear nice slacks, a buttoned top, and classy shoes, with their hair back. Dressing the way you would for an interview would be impressive and could get you more exposure to the routine calls and possibly to some daunting crime scenes.

Court and Attorney Observations

Most students have not been in a courtroom other than for a traffic ticket or a minor criminal offense. When you are asked what you have done to prepare yourself for an internship or a volunteer position at a law firm or government agency, what do you have on your list so far? How would it sound if you were able to say “I have attended various court proceedings, including misdemeanor and felony trials, in both state and federal court. I have also shadowed two different attorneys for a day, in which I accompanied them to court and assisted in their everyday workloads, including court preparation and follow-up”?

Just like police, many attorneys will allow students to meet with them and follow them around for a day. Often a student can participate in some of the work, including case preparation, court note taking, and client follow-up. What you actually learn from the experience is secondary to the value of demonstrating your assertiveness and motivation to enter a law career. If you don't find an opportunity to shadow an attorney, you should at least visit some courtrooms and observe the proceedings. Other than some civil and family cases, all criminal trials are open to the public. You can walk into any courtroom at the city, county, or federal level and observe the hearings that are taking place at that time, as long as seats are available. No appointment is necessary, but you could call and find out if anything interesting is happening, when the proceedings will occur, and in what courtroom they will be held. Most court personnel are familiar with student projects and are happy to assist you with advice. Once you are in the court building, you will walk through the security scanners at the entrance, which are usually much less intrusive than those at airports. If you prefer help, you can contact the information desk for advice on what types of cases are in the works. You could also just walk around the court and read the dockets, which are usually posted outside each courtroom, to see if anything sounds interesting.

A variety of hearings take place at the courthouse. Observing 1 day of a 2-week felony murder trial would certainly be interesting, but even the misdemeanor courts have some eye-opening and rewarding activities to witness. If you are pursuing a law career with an emphasis on the criminal justice system, it would be advantageous to witness what goes on during the

initial appearances. It will give you a genuine understanding of the heavy workload a new attorney will be expected to endure. Spending 2 hours watching initial appearances will leave no doubt in your mind that our court system has all the work it can possibly manage.

Firearms

Firearms are another aspect of police work, like driving, report writing, handcuffing, and fighting, in which you will need to become proficient. You will have the opportunity to learn and/or improve on all these skills in the academy. Often, range masters need to help recruits change their bad habits from years of shooting the wrong way. For this reason, shooting experience isn't always a positive thing, but firearms training (with instruction) can be. You are not likely to be asked in an interview if you are a good shooter, and you should likewise avoid sounding as though you put too much importance on your shooting ability. However, adding this to the list of what you have done to prepare for police work could be beneficial if it comes across properly: just one small part of a larger picture. If the topic doesn't come up in the interview and is thus of no avail to your hiring, prior firearms training will still pay off during the academy, especially for women. In general, women struggle more than men with firearms proficiency in the academy.

Chances are there is a firearms range within an hour of where you live. Our nation is heavily dotted with gun ranges of all types. Look for an indoor range in your area with trainers on site. Most ranges rent guns, eye protection, and ear protection and allow you to buy ammunition if you are at least 21 years of age. If you are under 21, you will need to bring someone with you who is of age. Trainers are usually on duty and normally do not cost you any extra. They will teach you the proper stance, proper gun handling, proper target acquisition, tactical loading, and jam-clearing techniques.

The price can range anywhere from \$40 to \$75 for a 50-round session. You normally don't need an appointment, but all ranges differ in their everyday operations. Again, this type of experience and training is relevant to police work but is rarely usable in an interview. If you are male and choose to refer to your firearms experience in an interview, it should be downplayed as just one of many things you have done to prepare yourself. Women, however, can get away with giving firearms training more emphasis. If a female job applicant were to say that she went on her own to learn firearms skills because she knew that women struggle with firearms proficiency in the academy, it would come across as a positive.

Physical Fitness

For law enforcement and corrections, physical fitness plays an important role in the job. Even if you aren't the biggest and the strongest, you need to

be able to chase, fight, and overpower people for the safety of yourself and others. The hiring process doesn't normally involve any fighting or arrest tactics, but assessing basic physical fitness is almost always a part of the procedure. The physical fitness test differs among agencies but can include things such as an obstacle course; a distance run; some push-ups; some sit-ups; jumping; stretching; a wall climb; and a body drag using a heavy, full-size dummy. Getting physically fit will not only help you ace the physical fitness test but will help you look better in the interview that follows. If you are overweight, make sure you are a member of a gym and have an exercise plan in place when you walk into your interview. You could resolve concerns an employer might have cultivated from the first impression. If you have already dropped some significant weight, let interviewers know so that they won't assume you are sedentary.

Some women seeking law enforcement jobs need to practice climbing a 6-foot block wall. This requires upper body strength as well as some technique. The 6-foot wall is often part of an obstacle course, so climbing the wall quickly is important. There are several sources online, including YouTube videos, that you can learn from before you actually attempt this task. Some women may have problems with push-ups if they are not properly prepared. Even if a woman outruns every applicant and doubles everyone in sit-ups, she will be disqualified if she fails even one part of the test.

A battle for men is the stretch and reach component. You may be asked to perform a stretch test in which you sit with your legs straight in front of you and reach forward as far as you can. This is usually a pass-fail test with a standard number of inches you have to reach from a certain designated point. Athletic women can sometimes touch their noses to their knees, so the stretch test isn't as much of an issue for them. Male applicants often struggle with this.

Most agencies will alter the requirements for different ages, such as a longer time allowance for the 1.5-mile run for those over 30 years old. However, it is rare for an agency to make any exceptions for gender. Not only would it be unfair to men if women had a shorter fence to climb, it would also be insulting to capable women who want to earn the job on their own merits.

Volunteering Versus Internships

Volunteer work is great for the résumé and doesn't have to be job related. Because of unexpected hiccups in the economy and subsequent budget cuts, many agencies have made available more opportunities for volunteer positions. The word *volunteer* implies that you donate some time for the benefit of others with no expectation of payment or reward. Although this is true, you can still reap huge benefits by including the word *volunteer* on your résumé, revealing your aggressiveness in your approach to job preparation.

Popular volunteer or intern positions in law enforcement involve victim services, crime scene work, police aide, detective aids, pawn detail, evidence managing, auto theft and impound lot assistance, and data entry for records. There are also volunteer and intern positions at courts and law firms. Most agencies will post volunteer openings on their websites. Volunteer work is normally not too taxing on your time. A typical program might require 8 to 12 hours a month. Your supervisor will usually agree to write a letter of recommendation or provide some type of certificate of appreciation.

Internships differ from volunteer jobs because you expect something in return. It is more of a work contract. Internships are harder to find than volunteer positions because they involve more responsibility from a supervisor. Supervisors generally feel an obligation to create useful experiences for you, whereas in a volunteer position, you are there for the company and will do whatever they need you to do. If you volunteer for a law firm, you may spend much of your time filing papers. If you intern for a law firm, you may find yourself in the courtroom taking notes for an attorney and, after court, making follow-up phone calls to clients. Some internships are paid positions, but this is rare and should not be too high of a priority. Don't pass up great opportunities being penny wise and pound foolish.

Whether you apply for a volunteer position or for an internship, if it is for a law enforcement agency, you will generally undergo a grilling testing process, which includes a background check and polygraph test. The testing experience will be valuable. If you intern at an agency you hope to work for someday, your foot is far in the door. Most agencies won't pick up interns they wouldn't consider hiring.

Education and Grades

Put importance on your grades, especially if you want to go into a law career. If you want to be accepted at a top 40 law school, you will need good grades and a good score on your Law School Admission Test (LSAT). Some law schools offer full-ride scholarships, which are contingent largely on grades and LSAT scores. To improve on your grades, research the professors and choose those who will award an A+. Look at what others are saying about the professors on RateMyProfessors.com. Try to find professors who would be a good fit for your learning style. If possible, find out what professors have reputations for writing recommendation letters.

Not all jobs require a bachelor's degree. It is common to require a bachelor's degree for law school and federal law enforcement. It might surprise you, though, what types of degrees are relevant. You might think the obvious degree for any law enforcement job would be in criminal justice. If you are interested in working for the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), they also look strongly at accounting, psychology, biology, and chemistry. The FBI generally requires either law enforcement or military experience as well.

You are generally better off working for a municipal agency for 4 or 5 years before applying to the FBI. Municipal agencies often offer tuition reimbursement as well. You can finish your degree after graduating from the police academy.

The LSAT

The LSAT is administered four times a year at various testing stations throughout the United States. It generally takes 4 hours to complete. You should plan to take the test prior to December if you want to enroll in a law school for the fall. You are allowed to take the LSAT more than once if you want to try to improve your score, but law firms can gain access to all of your scores. The LSAT consists of multiple-choice questions in the areas of logical reasoning, analytical reasoning, and reading comprehension.

You can start practicing for the LSAT test as early as you like. There are free and paid websites with practice tests. Once you choose an available practice test, try to simulate the real circumstances of the LSAT. Stay with the time allotted (35 minutes per section) and work under the pressure of the clock. For better practice taking the real test, make sure to answer every question. There is no penalty for a wrong answer, so after the process of elimination, take your best guess from what choices are left and move on. Get in the habit of moving right into the next section without a long break. On the real LSAT, you will be given 5 to 10 minutes between tests. There is also a 35-minute writing test during the LSAT, but it isn't actually scored. It is used by law firms to assess your writing skills, so it would behoove you to write it well. A superb practice program would be to take the test every week for the entire year leading up to your actual test. In reality, 10 to 15 practices would probably suffice, but as with chocolate, more is better.

The Application

There is so much competition for positions that some applicants are weeded out before they get an opportunity to participate in any part of the testing process. It isn't always because of a drug history or a criminal record; sometimes, it is for very minor mistakes on the application or seemingly incomplete information. An application for a law enforcement job can be 25 or more pages in length. You may start doubting how much you want the job by the time you complete the application. Most applications ask for similar information, so each time you fill one out, it should get easier, especially if you prepare a good portfolio to work from.

You want to stay consistent on all of your applications, so make a copy of your first one and use it as a reference for subsequent agencies. If you declare that you used marijuana 15 times on one application, stay with that

number on all applications. Also, stay consistent with dates for your jobs and degrees. You can use the same references, so keep their addresses and phone numbers together.

Written Tests

Law enforcement (and sometimes corrections) hiring includes a written test. The written test isn't something you can prepare for, but here are some samples of what you can expect to come across:

Read the notes from this call for police service. Pick the answer that most completely and correctly represents the information.

1. **Responded to domestic at 100 Main Street. Spoke with victim Jane Jones. Observed visible injury laceration on Jane Jones' right forearm. Jones refused to cooperate.**
 - a. I responded to a domestic. Upon my arrival, I spoke with the victim, Jane Jones.
 - b. I observed a visible injury laceration on her right forearm. Ms. Jones refused to cooperate with my investigation.
 - c. I responded to 100 Main Street in reference to a domestic. Upon my arrival, I spoke with the victim, Jane Jones. I observed a visible injury laceration on her right forearm. Ms. Jones refused to cooperate with my investigation.
 - d. I spoke with the victim, Jane Jones. I observed a visible injury laceration on her right forearm. Ms. Jones refused to cooperate with my investigation.
 - e. I responded to a domestic. Upon my arrival, I spoke with the victim, Jane Jones. I observed a visible injury laceration on her right forearm.

Answer: C

2. **Officer Harper responded to a residential burglary. The victim stated that, while he was on vacation between 7/2/08 at 4:00 pm and 7/8/08 at 11:00 am, person or persons unknown did unlawfully enter his residence and take his property.**

When did the victim discover the burglary to his residence?

- a. 7/2/08 at 4:00 pm
- b. 7/2/08 at 11:00 am
- c. 7/8/08 at 4:00 pm
- d. 7/8/08 at 11:00 am

Answer: D

3. **Deputy Williams responded to an armed robbery in progress. Upon his arrival, he was advised that the suspect fled in a late model blue Honda Accord sedan.**

The vehicle was described as a:

- a. 2008 blue Honda Accord
- b. late model dark blue Honda Accord
- c. late model blue Honda Accord sedan
- d. late model blue Honda Accord

Answer: C

4. Referring to the last scenario, Deputy Williams responded to:

- a. A robbery in progress
- b. An armed robbery in progress
- c. A burglary in progress
- d. An armed robbery that happened in the past

Answer: B

5. Gang Unit Investigator Smith fills out a field interview (FI) card on a suspected gang member. The gang member's street name is "Killer G" and he is a documented member of the Eastside Boys. "Killer G" has numerous tattoos that help to verify his gang status including a tear tattoo on his face, an "EB" tattoo on his left chest over his heart, and a tattoo of a compass with a large "E" on his right forearm.

"Killer G" has how many tattoos?

- a. 1
- b. 2
- c. 3
- d. 4

Answer: C

6. "Killer G" had an "EB" tattoo on his

- a. right forearm
- b. right chest
- c. face
- d. left chest

Answer: D

7. Departmental policy requires that all officers that use force must complete a written use of force report. The report must include the circumstances leading up to the officer's decision to use force, the level of force used, the justification for the force used, and the outcome of the officer's use of force.

The departmental policy requires:

- a. That officers explain to suspects why they are using force before such force is utilized
- b. That officers explain verbally the circumstances leading up to the decision to use force, the level of force used, the justification for the force used, and the outcome of the use of force.

- c. That officers explain in a use of force report the circumstances leading up the officer's decision to use force, the level of force used, the justification for the force used, and the outcome of the officer's use of force.
- d. That no use of force report be filled out if no injury resulted from said use of force.

Answer: C

8. You are a city police officer on patrol and observe a car driving left of center and not stopping for a stop sign. You stop the car and, upon speaking with the driver, you believe that the driver is DUI. You also note that the driver is a member of your employing municipality's city council. You should:
- a. Give the city council member a ride home.
 - b. Allow the city council member to go on his way in his car.
 - c. Continue as you would normally with your investigation and notify your supervisor.
 - d. Write a citation for the two traffic violations and release the driver.

Answer: C

9. You are on patrol with your Field Training Officer (FTO) and respond to a commercial burglar alarm at a grocery store. Upon responding, you and your FTO find an open door with no sign of forced entry. After successfully clearing the store, your FTO grabs a case of water and says no one will miss it. You should:
- a. Ask for your share of the water
 - b. Tell him to put the water back
 - c. Ignore the situation since you are new to the department
 - d. Report the situation to your FTO's supervisor.

Answer: D

10. Your department has a written policy that forbids officers from taking any bribes, gratuities, or gifts. You stop at a local diner and find that the waitress wants to give you, the police officer, a 50% discount. Of these four options, you should:
- a. Leave money on the table equal to the full amount of the menu price and normal tip you would have left, avoiding a scene.
 - b. Argue with the waitress and manager, insisting on paying the full bill.
 - c. Walk out not paying anything.
 - d. Pay the bill as indicated with the 50% discount.

Answer: A (Even if you might narrate a different answer in an interview, you would need to select the best choice from what you are offered. The

key word is *argue*. If the wording were different and instead said “politely discuss,” B would be a valid choice. An argument could create more of a problem than giving the impression that you accepted a gratuity.)

11. *Miranda v. Arizona* was a very important U.S. Supreme Court case from 1966 that affected law enforcement officers. Among other things, the rape case involving migrant farm worker Ernesto Miranda dictated that a warning must be given to suspects who are not free leave if they are questioned as to specifics of the case. What this says is:
- Miranda warnings must be given anytime a suspect is placed in handcuffs
 - Miranda warnings must be given if the suspect is questioned as to the specifics of the crime and he or she is not free to leave.
 - Miranda warnings must be given in rape cases.
 - Miranda warnings must be given to all people interviewed by law enforcement officers.

Answer: B

12. *Carroll v. United States* was a 1925 U.S. Supreme Court case that clarified a law enforcement exception to the search warrant requirement of the 4th Amendment. Under the Carroll Doctrine, as it is now known, law enforcement officers may search automobiles without a search warrant as long as they have probable cause to do so and the automobile is movable. In other words:
- Officers may only search an automobile with the written voluntary consent of the driver.
 - Officers may search an automobile since the car is movable.
 - Officers may search an automobile without a search warrant as long as they have probable cause to do so and the automobile is movable.
 - Officers may not search an automobile

Answer: C

13. *New York v. Belton*, a 1981 U.S. Supreme Court case, clarified that law enforcement officers, upon making an arrest, may search any the immediate “lunge area” within the reach of the arrestee including any open or closed containers. Such a search may be conducted at the same time as the arrest. Therefore:
- Officers may search the vicinity of the arrestee including any open or closed containers.
 - Officers must have consent to search the area around the arrestee.
 - Officers may search beyond the reach or “lunge area” of the arrestee.
 - Officers may not search any further than the person they have arrested.

Answer: A

14. Which sentence below is grammatically correct?

- a. I am an educated person who wants to be a police officer.
- b. I am an educated person whom wants to be a police officer.
- c. I am an educated people who wanted to be a police officer.
- d. I was an educated person who wants to be police officers.

Answer: A

15. While conducting traffic enforcement in an area with a posted speed limit of 45, the reading on your radar for a passing car is 73. How many miles over the speed limit is the vehicle driving?

- a. 23
- b. 26
- c. 28
- d. 32

Answer: C

Some agencies will use pictures as part of their written exams. You are asked to view a picture for a couple of minutes, and then, when the picture is taken away, you answer some questions based on what you can remember. The hiring written test is usually pass-fail, requiring a score of at least a 70%. Although it is a pass-fail test, scores are sometimes used to help recruiters with hiring decisions at the completion of all assessments.

Often, a written exercise accompanies the test. It is usually just a one-page essay on a topic that is not too difficult to write about, such as a personal experience. The papers would be collected and graded by an English expert of the department's choice. These are usually pass-fail, so you should brush up on your grammar and punctuation.

Although the written test isn't something you can study for, you can certainly perform better by getting plenty of sleep the night before. You can also try to take care of the little things that are on your mind so that you can concentrate on the test. Additionally, you can take care of yourself through good nutrition and exercise in order to be alert and prepared on test day.

Psychological Tests

Another step in the process for law enforcement hiring is a psychological test. This is generally a 2- to 4-hour exam consisting of anywhere from 200 to 400 questions. The test is normally multiple choice, which facilitates quick grading. The choices aren't for the right or wrong answer; instead they are "agree" or "disagree," or something similar. The questions often seem alike, even though they are slightly different. The mistake some people make is to

answer the questions the way they think they are supposed to instead of just being truthful. If the question changes, it is okay for the answer to change. It is best to not overthink it and to answer all of the questions fairly quickly. An example of similar but different questions might be the following:

I like socializing in big groups.	Agree	Disagree
I enjoy large groups more than small groups.	Agree	Disagree
Being in groups makes me uncomfortable.	Agree	Disagree
I prefer settings with just a few friends.	Agree	Disagree
I prefer large groups over being by myself.	Agree	Disagree
Large groups cause me to have some anxiety.	Agree	Disagree

You would likely answer these scenarios differently, because they are asked differently. You don't want to go back and worry that you are being inconsistent. Just answer each question according to how you interpret it. If you like socializing in big groups, it doesn't mean you prefer large groups over small groups. You also use your own frame of reference. If you interpret "large group" as referring to the audience at a concert or a professional sporting event, you might answer differently than if you were visualizing a family reunion. Just stay consistent with your interpretations, and you should be fine.

Summary

Having a wide-ranging portfolio is the means to an exceptional résumé, which is key to getting the opportunity for an interview. Building your portfolio and preparing for the testing starts now. Your portfolio is a packet containing all the documents you have collected throughout your life, including awards, certificates, recommendation letters, transcripts, and thank-you letters. You can double or triple the material in your portfolio by collecting letters from your professors and by completing some online training that provides certificates. Some helpful key phrases for your résumé are "Spanish speaking" and "grant writing."

Your one-page résumé is sometimes all you are asked to submit as a job application. Therefore, it is important to build a dazzling one. A CV is two or more pages long, containing much more information than a résumé. It is more common for academic jobs, but if you are allowed to submit more data, it would be best to have a CV ready to go. Applications for law enforcement are lengthy and can disqualify an applicant if not filled out completely. Once you fill out your first application, copy it and use it to fill out other applications. This will save you time and help keep all applications consistent.

To prepare for tests and interviews, go on a police ride-along, visit court proceedings, get some firearms training, get physically fit, volunteer wherever feasible, and apply for internships. To prepare for the LSAT, start a program of taking free online tests weekly. Although written tests for law enforcement aren't something you can study for, you can prepare more effectively by getting plenty of sleep and by taking care of any responsibilities that might be on your mind and taking away your full focus. Psychological tests are the norm for law enforcement and can be long and tedious. The key is to stay consistent and answer quickly without overthinking. Grades don't play a big part in law enforcement, but they do for law school. Search out professors at RateMyProfessors.com and find those who are a good fit for you. Find a professor who will award an A+ and will also write a recommendation letter. Grades and LSAT scores make a big difference in being accepted to top-rated law schools.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What types of items are appropriate for your portfolio?
2. What traits are common for an employer to check into during a background check?
3. What are some sources for certificates?
4. What are some typical components of a résumé?
5. How can you prepare for the LSAT?
6. What can you do to prepare for the written test?