

By Commander Chris Wagoner

So you want to be a cop?

What you need to know before you apply and so you don't get disqualified.

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3/17/2010

So you want to be a cop?

Part 1

OK, so you think you want to be a police officer.

First no one source can answer every question, and I readily admit I do not have all the answers, far from it. But I will talk about general issues that apply to most departments, and cover State of Florida issues in detail. Have you really thought this through? Have you thought about what it really means to be a police officer anywhere? Do you really think you can do the job? Trust me, law enforcement as a career is not for everyone, and everyone that starts out in law enforcement does not make it to retirement. This job is hard on some people, some make it, some don't, and it's just the nature of the beast.

So you may be asking first off why listen to me? Why do I think I can write this and it is worth your reading? Well I have been a cop in Florida for 29+ years (Since December 1980). I have served in both small and large agencies (3 total and a break for serving in the U.S. Army Military Police). I have served in many different units, Patrol, Traffic, DUI Task Force, Dive Rescue Team, Traffic Homicide Investigation, Training Unit, Academy Staff, and now my current position (for the last 13 years) Police Academy Commander. I teach and travel a lot, teaching all over the world. I have been as far away as Singapore to teach police officers. I still teach. I am currently the Police Academy Commander (and Police Commander) at Santa Fe College, Institute of Public Safety in Gainesville, Florida. I helped write portions of the Florida State Law Enforcement Basic Recruit curriculum assisting the Florida Department of Law Enforcement.

So I guess the first thing we need to talk about is do you know what being a cop really is like? What you see on TV and in the movies is NOT all that police work is all about. In fact even the FOX TV "reality" show "COPS" is not what law enforcement is all about. I know, I was on "COPS" twice the very first week it was on. The stuff they show is only a very small part of what actually happens out on the streets.

Being a cop means you have to be a lot of things and do a lot of things. Think about the hours we work. Cops work every hour of the day. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. We work every holiday, in the rain and snow, during

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hurricanes, and of course in Florida, the wonderful sunshine (code name "heat"). Every minute of any day there are cops working. And if you want to be a cop, you have to realize you will for a period of time work those hard hours. I have worked I think about every holiday on all shifts. I have worked 8 hour, 10 hour and 12 hour shifts. I have worked up to 14 days straight without a day off (during hurricane Andrew recovery in South Florida). I have worked a shift then gone home slept for an hour or so, and gone to work a detail for extra money. Or I have worked all day, and gone home to sleep and a few hours into sleeping, the phone rings and it's a call out (called out to a traffic homicide), so it's back up, jumpsuit on and back into the patrol car. All with a few hours sleep.

Police work is not for everyone. You need to very carefully sit down and think about the stress it will put you and your family under and can you, and your family, handle it.

It takes its toll on not only you, but your family also. Are you single? Well police work has its pitfalls for singles. Many singles find little time to go out and have dates. Many singles also find that it's hard to meet people other than those that they meet on calls. You don't meet a whole lot of nice people on calls. But sometimes you do meet nice people. But then there is a problem with department policy and dating those you meet on the job. Also it can happen where your circle of friends becomes limited to fellow cops and agency personnel. This can be good and bad.

Married? Does your husband or wife like doing things by themselves or just them and the kid(s)? How about celebrating Christmas morning alone or without you? What do they think about sleeping alone? You work midnights, they work days, you see each other in passing maybe for a few minutes in the morning or afternoon. That's just the way it is. That may be a plus for some of you, guess it depends on how much your significant other wants you around.

Fortunately that does not last your whole career. As you gain time and experience, you eventually get to change to a shift you want and things get a little better. As you gain experience and time, the stress levels get a little easier to handle. They are still there, you just learn how to work inside the system better.

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Have you thought about the pay? You know cops do not make the top pay of a professional athlete or a doctor. While we are professionals, and trained in many areas, we get paid by the government we work for and therefore that equates to average to low pay to start out. We are paid enough to be comfortable these days though. It was not always that way. My starting salary in 1980 was \$11,500. Just about poverty level I thought. When I came back from serving in the U.S. Army and got hired by the Broward County Sheriff's Office in 1987, I made about \$25,000. I have to say that pay has gotten better, the benefits (retirement, insurance, and others) are much better than they were just 10 years ago. Pay has also gone up and is now competitive with other entry level professional careers. So when thinking of law enforcement as a career, you need to look at the entire package that the department you are interested in is offering. Things like health and dental insurance, issued equipment, do they have take home police cars, retirement (VERY IMPORTANT!) promotion potential and more.

Then there is the stress. It's not easy dealing with other people's problems day in day out. It's not a lot of fun to watch people be hurt or die. It is hard mentally and sometimes physically when you get in a fight. Not all the people you come into contact with willingly go to jail when needed. Some will try to fight with you. You may get hurt and have to go to the hospital. I can remember one of my stupidest mistakes was about a year into my career when I had to go to my old high school and arrest a teenager (I was 19 myself at the time!) for possession of drugs. This little girl could not have been 5' tall and maybe 100 pounds. I thought to myself this would be an easy arrest (first mistake) and handcuffed her in front (second mistake) and allowed her to take her shoes off (they had wooden heels) and carry them (third mistake). I began to walk her out to my patrol car in the front of the school and as I was escorting her with my hand on her elbow, she whips the shoes up and blindsides me in the side of the head. Well needless to say that hurt a bit. I ended up having to take her to the ground and re-cuff her behind her back, and take all possible weapons from her. Then I was able to get her to the car under control. While driving to the station to book her in and call her parents, I looked at the nice lump and welt I had on the side of my face near my temple. That would be hard to explain to my co-workers. Never underestimate your opponent.

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There is of course the stress the job puts you under. You will have all kinds of different sources for stress as a police officer. You will have stress from the excitement of the job, stress from the danger of the job, stress from your supervisors and department making you follow certain policies and procedures, while at the same time trying to stay within the rules. Stress from the shift work I mentioned, stress from seeing what humans can do to each other and how we treat each other. Stress from seeing how children can be treated (or killed) by their parents. There are all kinds of stress. Do you know or think you can handle it?

I have taken several (read 10+) trips to the hospital for various injuries. I can think off-hand of my head, eyes, elbows, and knees. My back, my fingers, my feet and just about every other part of me has been injured in some way at one time or another. But those are stories for another time. You **want** to be cops remember!

Like I mentioned before, you will do all kinds of things as a cop. You will give first aid, and cover the dead. You will act as a family counselor, animal control officer, mechanic, and other things. And of course act as a cop and have to arrest people or give people tickets or other things they dislike.

And last but by no means least, you as a police officer may at some time have to take another human beings life. You are given a huge responsibility. One of caring for your fellow human beings, your fellow citizens, yet you are also given a power that no other has. None. No Judge, No President of the United States, no one, other than the police officer has the authority to take a life if needed on a split second decision made by the officer alone. That "power" as some call it is a life changing thing. You must temper yourself so that this ultimate act is not done based on anger or any emotion alone. Shooting a fellow human being is a very hard thing to do, and then something you must live with the rest of your life. You can do this if you prepare yourself mentally and physically. And it is not against the 10 Commandments to be a police officer and shoot a person, the Commandment says Murder not kill. There is a huge difference.

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Part 2

Minimum requirements.

So with all that said you still want to be a cop? Well I can't blame you, it's a great career. It is fulfilling and rewarding beyond most jobs. It is exciting at times and interesting at times. You get to do and see a lot of things most people only dream about or see on television.

Back when I first became a cop (1980) you could be 18 years old and become a cop. Florida law now says you must be 19 years old. You will have to check with your own states laws or P.O.S.T. (Police Officer Standards and Training) group.

Florida State Statue 943.13 says that:

- ***You must be at least 19 years of age.***

I will be honest with you and say that most agencies want someone that is older. 21 years old seems to be the general consensus. Mostly because you can't be under 21 and buy a handgun or ammunition, and they want you to have a few years of life experience after high school. Plus you have a few years after high school to get a college degree and/or serve a few years in the military. Those things make you a more desirable applicant. Plus if you serve in the military, you get veterans preference points in the hiring process.

- ***You must be a citizen of the United States***

Well this one is actually questioned a lot by people from other countries. I am listed as an expert on allexperts.com in police careers. And I get several of these questions a month from people from outside the US. They want to know how they can become US law enforcement. It is actually up to the state you are trying to become a police officer in. Some states allow legal aliens to serve, some even give you help becoming a citizen faster. In Florida you must be a United States citizen, but check with the states police officer standards you are interested in. (See the information on the states Police Officer Standards websites in the back of this book.)

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- **You must be a high school graduate or equivalent**

This is a basic one. They want you to at least have a basic education. But here I would like to mention that getting a degree these days is very important if you want to get a job as a cop. Many agencies will not hire you if you do not have at least a two year degree. Some go so far as to require a 4 year. I know of many that require you to have a degree in order to get promoted beyond officer/ deputy. Plus if you ever want to do something after your law enforcement career, or have a back-up plan in case you find that law enforcement is not for you, then a degree would be handy also. Remember you want to be competitive with the other applicants, so you need to have something they don't have or at least be the same. Many of my police recruits have two or four year degrees.

- **You must not have been convicted of any felony, or misdemeanor involving perjury or false statement, nor have received a dishonorable or undesirable discharge from any branch of the Armed Forces of the United States. Any person who, after July 1, 1981, pleads guilty or nolo contendere to, or is found guilty of a felony or of a misdemeanor involving perjury or false statement shall not be eligible for employment or appointment as an officer, notwithstanding suspension of sentence or withholding of adjudication. Notwithstanding this subsection, any person who has pled nolo contendere to a misdemeanor involving a false statement, prior to December 1, 1985 and has had such record sealed or expunged shall not be deemed ineligible for employment or appointment as an officer**

Now if you read this carefully, you will notice it does not say you cannot be convicted of any felony and not get a job as a cop, but that if you were convicted of a felony or misdemeanor for basically lying or perjury, you can't. Now you also have to consider that if you're a convicted felon in most places you cannot possess a handgun so that would disqualify you from being a cop. No agency is going to hire a convicted felon as a cop, at least none that I know of will hire one. In fact in most police departments policy guides there is a section that prohibits department

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members from associating with convicted felons. It would be hard not to associate with yourself, wouldn't it? Also in this part is the requirement about the discharge from the military. It is very clear and simple, it says you cannot have a "dishonorable" discharge. It says nothing about any other kind. So if you have something other than a dishonorable you're not automatically disqualified. But again it goes back to am I a better applicant than the person next to me applying??

- **You must agree to be fingerprinted by the employing agency or training academy**

Every cop has to be fingerprinted and the fingerprints are sent up to the FBI to be checked. Now if you won't let them do this for some strange reason, you're out. If you come back as wanted out of some state for murder, you will more than likely not get the job. This is a no brainer, if your wanted for a crime, don't apply to be a cop.

- **You must pass a physical examination by a licensed physician that will be administered upon a conditional offer of employment**

Once they give you a conditional offer of employment they will send you to a doctor for an exam. Now of course you must be physically fit enough to do the job. You can't have some things wrong with you and still pass. Cops need to be able to run, jump, crawl and other things. In fact some agencies, like the ones in my area of Florida require that you pass a physical obstacle course to be hired.

These courses vary from agency to agency, area to area. If you want to know what is required or what the course is going to be like, look them up on the internet. Most agencies have some information about the course on-line. You cannot lie to the doctor! If you do, and they find out, you're fired. This goes for anything in the process. But if you're really out of shape and can't run more than 10 feet without having to stop and catch your breath, don't apply yet. Go out and get exercise and diet correctly and supervised by a doctor. Lose the weight, get in shape, then you might stand a chance. Or you can try it and then faint during the test and look like an idiot.

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- ***You must be of good moral character***

Now this one is wide open. Good moral character? It means that you have to have a past that shows you're not lying, cheating, and stealing for a living. Your past employers will be asked about your behavior, any problems with you. Your old teachers or neighbors may be contacted. So remember that teacher you called a really bad name and did not get along with? They may be asked what they thought of you. It's funny how things go around.

- ***You must successfully complete a background investigation***

Background investigators will take your application you filled out, and all the paperwork and copies of things you submitted and check to make sure you completed it honestly. They will pull your credit report, check with your past employers, even talk to your neighbors in your neighborhood. They will ask you questions about things you put on your application. Try to catch you in a lie. You would be surprised at the number of people that lie on some part of the application. If you're going to do that, you are not starting your law enforcement career very well.

Some of the things they check and look at negatively are having a bad driving record - I mean tickets for things like speeding, reckless or careless driving, running a red light, or other tickets that show a disregard for safety. A history with a lot of tickets also is a no go in most cases. I saw a person post a question in an online forum and ask if they would qualify after having 8 tickets and being arrested twice for not paying tickets. What do you think! Suspended licenses are usually a no go also. You should have a clear record for a period of time before you bother to apply or make sure it's a minor ticket like a taillight out or something. A clear record for 3-5 years will get you by this one, or a minor ticket or two will be OK most of the time. Remember the agency has to trust you with a patrol car that you at times will have to drive in emergency mode, kind of hard to justify that in court when you had reckless driving tickets.

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The BI will check to see if you have bad credit. This one is different for different agencies, but all seem to be looking at it more. If you have bad credit (really bad, bankruptcies, or a lot of outstanding debt) you are a liability for bribery or other problems like theft. You may at times in this job find yourself handling large sums of cash and being in debt makes you a liability when doing that. The temptation is too much for some in need. So police departments really look at this. I have carried and had in my possession in excess of three quarters of a million dollars. And yes the thought went through my mind, "Where could I live on this for the rest of my life." But the thought lasted as long as it took to think it and that was it.

An item in the background investigation that really hurts a lot of applicants is one I get questions about a lot, past drug use. First let me say again each department may be a little different but most are along the same lines. Hard Drugs used even in the last 20 years is a disqualification most of the time, heroin, Speed, LSD, addiction to prescription drugs are a few automatics for most police departments. Most agencies will not touch you if you were dealing drugs at all (that is a felony in case you did not realize it). I actually had a kid ask me if he was disqualified if he had dealt pot back when he was a teenager (7 years ago), he just admitted to a felony, so of course you can guess the answer. If you used drugs in the last 3 years or so most agencies don't like it. If you're 5 or more years out, it depends on what it was and how often. Daily usage is a sign of a addictive personality and not a good candidate, weekly is still not good. Using a couple of times in a 5 year period is better.

They look at past employment, having 20 jobs in a 5 year period is not good. You should show some kind of ability to hold a job. Getting fired for failing to show up to work, calling in sick all the time, and having an ex-employer tell us that you were the "worst" employee they ever had does not look to good. Agencies depend on you to show up to work on time and ready to work. So do the other guys/gals on the shift.

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Something fairly new and a big concern now is if you have a "Social Networking Site" of your own. That's what they call the sites where you post your entire lives and everything else about yourself that you should not be posting on-line. If you have a MySpace or FaceBook page, make sure it is something you would want your prospective employer to see. They are hiring people (like me) to look them up and give them copies of everything found there. Also do a web search for yourself and any user names that you use or used in the past and see what you find. They are checking things like that. Remember, never write or put anything online that you would not want your current or future boss to see as he/she just might have seen it already!

- ***You must complete an Affidavit of Applicant form (CJSTC-68)***

You have to answer true or false to these questions and sign your telling the truth. So needless to say if you lie and they find out, you're out, and not that bright.

From the form itself:

I completed my employment application and it is true and correct, and all other information I furnished in conjunction with my application is true and correct.

If you violated this, you deserve to get disqualified. Everything law enforcement stands for is in the truth and the facts. If you start off your career by lying about something, what else are you willing to lie about?

I provided documentation of proof of my qualifications to the above listed employing agency.

These days, the background investigators are really checking to see that the documents you submit are real and not something you bought or made. With computers like we have today, and the one this book is being written on, it is easy to fake documents. Its also easy for the background investigators to check on them. You would be surprised, or maybe not, how people submit documents that use formats and backgrounds that come standard in Word, or Publisher or any myriad of other programs.

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I meet the qualifications as specified above.

Do I really need to explain this one??

I had a criminal record sealed pursuant to Section 943.059(4)(a), F.S. , or expunged pursuant to Section 943.0585(4)(a), F.S.

If you did, answer yes and be ready to answer questions about it. The best thing you can do if you have a criminal background of any kind, is to sit down while you're not under the pressure of looking at a background investigator looking at you across a desk, and compose a letter of explanation on all the things you were charged with.

I am not under investigation by a local, state, or federal agency or entity for criminal, civil, or administrative wrongdoing to the best of my knowledge and belief.

If you're under investigation for crime, do not bother applying. Wait until you're all done with this. Think about it. Why would you hire someone that is under investigation, and therefore possibly facing being fined or going to jail. No agency in its right mind will touch you while you being investigated or civilly sued.

I separated or resigned from a previous criminal justice employment while under investigation.

This one is to prevent the people jumping departments that get in trouble then jump ship, then go to another department before the investigation can find them at fault and fire them. You cannot run from trouble then get in trouble and keep trying to stay ahead of it, it will eventually catch up with you.

I am currently serving in good standing in the U.S. Military.

This is not a problem area, its just to let the agency know if your currently active military. They have to plan on the possibility of you being deployed once your hired. Its not negative, actually just the opposite in the eyes of most. But something they need to know.

I previously served in the U.S. Military.

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This one is for any veteran. It is where they find and give (with supporting paperwork) veterans preference points. If you're a veteran, you deserve the extra points. Thank you for your service.

I received a dishonorable discharge from my previous U.S. Military service.

If you have to put "yes" to this one, then don't bother filling out the rest of it or wasting your time or the departments. If you have a dishonorable (NOTE** I did not say other than honorable, or medical or anything else, just dishonorable) discharge, don't bother applying, it's a disqualification automatically. The other types of discharges are not.

After filling that out you sign it. Then any discrepancy they find, you're probably out.

- **You must comply with continuing training or education requirements as deemed by the employing agency**

Once hired this means you have to attend training some set by the State of Florida (if you in that state) and some set by your department. Different agencies train differently. Some train a lot, some a little, some not at all. The state of Florida requires that you get at least 40 hours of training every 4 years. That's only 10 hours a year required.

- **You must successfully pass the Florida Basic Abilities Test – passing scores are valid for a period of four years.**

This is the entry level test of basic adult education. If you passed your GED or high school or have a degree you should be fine.

There are a few more things that will disqualify you from being a cop. I want to talk about the Dishonorable discharge from the military again. Now notice I did not say "Other than Honorable". I said "Dishonorable". I get that question a lot also. Police departments don't really care if you failed out of basic training because you hurt

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your toe or whatever reason. As long as it's not a dishonorable discharge you will be OK in this area, as long as you have a valid explanation for the discharge.

That's a rough guide for qualifying before even bothering to apply. When in doubt you should of course ask the agency you are trying to apply to if something in particular bothers you or you're not sure if you are disqualified. It is much better to ask BEFORE you even apply to save yourself the time and money, in addition it will come out in the background if you try to hide something, and that of course is an immediate disqualification.

Also once you're disqualified from one department, sometimes, not all the time, departments will ask on the application if you applied to any other departments. If you put yes and were disqualified from that process they will want to know why. They may call that agency to find out why. Think about this, department A disqualifies you, and department B hires you. Then you do something wrong and they find out in the lawsuit against the department you were turned down by department A. It may not be good for department B. But it is not always the case. Just because you're disqualified by one department does not mean you will be disqualified by all. Do not give up if you feel this is your calling.

Part 3.

You decide to apply.

OK so now if you pass those requirements and have decided to apply to an agency. First you have to decide where you want to live and with that, what agencies are in the area. You should research the departments on the internet and see what they are, how big they are, what they do and what kind of agency they are. Look at the benefits, retirement and other things that they offer the officers. You should also talk to a few of the patrol officers. Not just one, you may get the one that is not happy because he's in trouble with the department. So make sure you get a good overall picture of the department. Look the department up in the press. I am not saying that the news is a good gauge of the department, but a department that is

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constantly in the news because of officers being in trouble may need a second look before you apply. You need to make that call. Just make sure you have all the information you can gather before sitting down with your family and talking this over.

Go to the department and get an application or go to the human resources section of the city or county or wherever you are supposed to go. I should mention here that some agencies have the applications on-line and you can get them from the net and fill them out electronically. Some even permit you to submit them that way. Do whatever the department wants you to do. But do it correctly and honestly. If you do go in person to pick up an application, males wear a suit or shirt and tie, and women wear a pants suit. It should be one that is in good taste, and not lime green (saw one in an interview!!!) or purple, just a basic suit or pants suit. Wear this every time you make contact with the department. Make sure you have taken out the purple hair coloring and all the face piercings. You need to look like you meet the appearance standards for the department or academy. Shave and make sure you look like you're going to a job interview (oral board). Remember, first impressions are very important. And over a few times you may be there, your impression you leave with the people in HR and those that see you going into and out of the department can be very important. I can tell you that the young man that sat in my orientation for the police academy in a bright orange Mohawk 6 inches tall left an impression with me. He showed up first day with a shaved head. That was a smart move.

The application process itself can be daunting. Filling out all those forms, paying for all the stuff to be done (if you have too that is). Let's cover the application process parts.

First the application, be sure to fill it out completely and accurately. Leaving something off the application can get your application put on hold or worse, disqualified. You will have to list everything it asks and they expect it to be complete. Sit down and make a list of all your past jobs, addresses and schools to help you when you fill it out. Research these things if you have too. If you have a

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tough time remembering all your jobs, you may want to pay one of the online sites that do background checks on you to give you one on yourself. It will help to jog your memory, and give you an idea of the stuff that is out there on you. Also you can use your Social Security history to help. Visit the Social Security web site to get a history of your jobs.

Make sure you type or print LEGIBLY! If they cannot read your application, it will get canned quickly. Miss-spelling, typos and other errors are also problems. If you have a real problem with writing then practice before filling it out. Follow the directions exactly as it says on the application. If they ask you to type it, type it, if they ask you to write it, write it. Not being able to follow the instructions on how to fill out the application is not a good indication that your career will be long and fruitful.

Make sure you have all the requested documents attached and in order before you turn in your application, or it will just sit there until you call about it and they tell you its on hold or to come in and fix it. Make it as easy for the department to find things as you can. If it says to get a driving history, get one and attach it. Failure to follow directions will earn your application a quick trip to the "hold and wait until they get their act together" pile.

Once you have a readable, neat, fully completed and filled out application, take it in and remember to dress accordingly like I said previously. If this is an application for entry into the police academy, follow the same guidelines.

Once you turn your application in, then you have to sit back and wait. It can take some time for them to go through all the applications and get to yours and review it, and then make arrangements for further processing if you make it that far. So give them several weeks. If you do not hear something from them say after 3 or 4 weeks, it's OK to give them a call and ask how your application process is going. Don't call every other day and bug them, which will earn you a reputation before you even get hired (if you do). Its not a good idea to make the background

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investigator mad at you for being a pest.

The testing and other processing.

Written Exams

You will more than likely be asked to take part in testing such as the CJBAT or FBAT or departmental specific testing. You should show up dressed as described above and ready to take the test. They are usually easy if you simply prepare a bit. There are all kinds of study guides out there on the market for these tests. If your fresh out of high school or college, you should not have to much trouble with these, but it never hurts to study for any written or verbal exam.

Many of you may have what we call test taking anxiety. It is very common and can cause people who know the material being tested to do poorly on a otherwise passable exam.

In order to help you out I am posting some tips that I give to my students for test taking:

1. Bring a watch to the test with you so that you can pace yourself. Set it next to your answer sheet on the table so you can see it. But of course it can not be a "data" watch and they look for that. Don't cheat, even if you need too.
2. Keep a positive attitude throughout the whole test and try to stay relaxed. If you start to feel nervous take a few deep breaths to relax.
3. When you first receive your test, do a quick survey of the entire test so that you know how to efficiently budget your time.
4. Do the easiest problems first. Don't stay on a problem that you are stuck on especially when time is a factor.

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5. Don't rush but pace yourself. Read the entire question and look for keywords.

6. Always read the whole question carefully. Don't make assumptions about what the question might be.

7. If you don't know an answer, skip it. Go on with the rest of the test and come back to it later. Other parts of the test may have some information that will help you out with that question.

8. Don't worry if others finish before you. Focus on the test in front of you.

9. If you have time left when you are finished, look over your test. Make sure that you have answered all the questions, only change an answer if you misread or misinterpreted the question because the first answer that you put is usually the correct one.

Tips on answering multiple choice questions

1. Read the question before you look at the answer.

2. Come up with the answer in your head before looking at the possible answers, this way the choices given on the test won't throw you off or trick you.

3. Eliminate answers you know aren't right.

4. Read all the choices before choosing your answer.

5. Always take an educated guess and select an answer if you don't know it. You get no points for leaving an answer blank, you do get points if you "guess" an answer you don't know!

6. Don't keep on changing your answer, usually your first choice is the right one, unless you misread the question.

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7. In "All of the above" and "None of the above" choices, if you are certain one of the statements is true don't choose "None of the above" or one of the statements are false don't choose "All of the above".

8. In a question with an "All of the above" choice, if you see that at least two correct statements, then "All of the above" is probably the answer.

9. A positive choice is more likely to be true than a negative one.

10. Usually the correct answer is the choice with the most information.

If you read these and use these tips, they should help you increase your scores and increase your chances of not being so nervous when you take an exam.

Physical Agility Course, Physical Abilities Course (or whatever your area calls it).

The physical abilities test, PAT or Agility Course or whatever your area or departmental specific test are called are not that hard, they usually involve a run (ours is 1.5 miles) and a obstacle course of some design, and maybe some basics like pushups or sit ups and such. If you are truly out of shape a terribly over weight I suggest starting to get in shape well before you have to try and take this. It is not for athletes only, but it is not for the couch potato either. Do about 4-6 months of regular exercise before you attempt this test.

Oh and please do not show up looking like your trying to get a date. Men and women included. Show up in proper clothing for running a physical course. Many require climbing and crawling, remember that. Don't show up in jeans and a tee shirt and dress shoes! Also do not show up in your old military uniform and boots. Just wear gym shorts or long sweat pants, and a tee shirt (that does not have

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profanity or sexual writing on it! I mention these things because I have seen them at the testing!

Doctors Physical Exam

You will more than likely also have to get a physical, this is self explanatory, but the doctor will decide if you are physically capable of being a police officer. This is where you ask about medications you are taking, physical and mental problems you may have that you are concerned about and such. The doctor will decide based on the states or departments standards they have set forth.

The Polygraph.

Well let me say that it's just part of the process. There is nothing you can do to prepare for this part of the process, but just go in with an open mind and tell the truth. You can read more about this test in other threads on the forum, but it's just one of the things you have to do.

The Police Oral Board..what and how???

I am sure if your reading this you have either been to an oral board already or are getting ready to go to one, or you are interested in becoming a police officer and want to know what an oral board is and what it's like, and maybe even get lucky and get some tips on how to do well in one. Well I will try to do all of those things here for you. How's that for help!!

Police oral boards are one of the most nerve racking things you will do. Most people are very nervous when they walk in the door of the room and see the oral board panel sitting there. You're before a live audience and it's time to perform your best!

What is an oral board? It's a live panel of people, usually 3-5 people (sometimes only 1 in small agencies) that ask the applicants a set of questions that they rate your answers and then score them. These scores are compared with the required

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passing score, and against other applicants. You can in some agencies be removed from the application process for not passing the oral board. It's a must pass part of the application process. You usually are seated in a room across a table from these people, they ask you questions in turn and then listen to, take notes on, and score your answers to the questions.

So how can you perform well on these boards? There are a few things that can help you do well and get a better score or make a better impression on the panel, and I will cover those here.

First thing is dress accordingly. That means for men, a suit and tie (conservative style) and women should wear a pants suit or dress. Whichever they are more comfortable in. Also ladies, a conservative cut is always best. Both male and female, you are dressing to impress, not get a date. Clean and neat hair (conservative cut), clean fingernails and no gaudy jewelry. No overpowering cologne or perfume. Take out all the facial metal piercings, and if you have tattoos on your arms, wear a long sleeve to cover them. (I have tats, so no comments about not liking them, this is for those going to an oral board) Nothing makes a worse impression than someone walking into the board in jeans and tee shirt and looking like they just woke up and crawled out of bed minutes before. First impressions are very important, so make a good one.

When you walk in, say hello and reach out to shake the first members hand. If they take it, shake the hand of each board member and introduce yourself. Your name is good enough. Shake hand, "John Jones". They will more than likely introduce themselves by name. TRY TO REMEMBER HOW THEY INTRODUCE THEMSELVES, if they use a title and name or only their name, this will come in later.

Sit down in the chair provided and place your hands on the table in front of you in a comfortable position. Don't put them down in your lap and don't pick your nose or ear. Just try to relax and be comfortable. As much as you can that is.

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They will tell you what they are doing and how the oral board will be done. If they provide a pencil and paper, use it. Use it to write down the points of the questions they want you to answer. In some oral interviews I have been a part of they will purposely ask multi-part questions and see if the interviewee writes things down to keep track of the points, and then answers them in the order they were asked.

What kind of questions will be asked? Well it varies from department to department, but they are generally structured to see if you have any knowledge of law and procedures, and to see if you will tell the truth. Also some are designed to see if you will keep the departments interest in mind over other things.

Here are a few I have seen or heard of:

1. Why do you want to be a police officer?
2. If you witnessed another officer steal something what would you do?
3. If you stopped the Mayor for drunk driving what would you do?
4. If you stopped a family member what would you do?

Those are just a few common ones. Answer questions in a chronological order. When they give you a scenario and ask you to tell them what you would do, answer from the beginning to the end and don't jump around.

Always notify your supervisor of anything that you may think of as being of that nature your boss would like to know about. And make sure you request him/her to any scene that they need to be present on. One question I remember from the boards I sat on was "You respond to a possible suicide. When you arrive it appears to be a suicide, what would you do and who would you notify?" Answer; "First I would see what I have and check the victim for signs of life if that has not been done, then I would close off the scene and notify my supervisor to respond." While that may not be to the department's exact procedure, it shows your thinking and also you know about chain of command and its proper use.

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We know you would not write your family member a ticket (unless it was that brother you hate so much..jking..) so be honest and tell them what you would do, here is a good answer I saw to this one: I told them "No I wouldn't." They of course began drilling me as to "So it's ok if your family speeds?" I said "No its not, but I certainly would not write my own Mother a ticket. However, I would tell my Mother not to speed any more, and explain that she's putting me in a bad position."

Also make sure you ALWAYS put the departments' interest first. The typical question of "You see another officer steal a candy bar from a store while you are there on a burglary call, what do you do?" is actually a very simple one. You would tell the officer you saw what he did, and you have no choice but to notify your supervisor immediately. You just observed a crime and you can not overlook that. And it places the department in a bad position. Most stores have cameras, and if they find out about it and you did not report it, you would also be fired along with the officer for failing to report the crime. Get the idea? Other officers do not pay your rent or put food in your families' mouth. You do not cover for anyone, you take care of yourself and the department. The days of cover-ups and stuff like that are gone, about 20 years ago.

Make sure to look at the person that asks you the question. Eye contact is very important, looking from one panel member to the other is a good idea. In fact here is where remembering the titles and names of the panel members would be a plus. If Lt. Johnson asks you a question, beginning your answer this way is an impressive tactic; "Lt. Johnson I would....." showing your ability to remember names and titles is a good way to make an impression on the panel members. And it shows respect for the title they used.

The question "why do you want to be a police officer?" is one of the hardest for some reason for people. A simple short decisive answer is best. "I want to be a police officer because I would like a secure, steady occupation that I can enjoy and is not the same thing day after day. One I can make a 20 year career of. I want to be able to meet people and see if I can help them when they are in need, and I

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want to be able to protect those that cannot protect themselves, and I think I would be very good at that. That's why I want to be a police officer." That short answer is a good one and does not go overboard. Please don't tell them because you want to play with or carry a gun and shoot people. Or tell them that you want to drive a police car fast and beat up on bad guys. Those are not impressive answers..

Most oral boards end with the panel asking you if there is anything you want to add. This is your chance to shine and put yourself apart from the rest. You should research the department you are applying to on the internet and see if you can gather some information on the department. When asked do you want to say or add anything, you can say (JUST AN EXAMPLE!) "Yes I would, I have looked closely at your department and I like the fact that it has 4 Districts, and a Dive team and K9 both of which I might be interested in. I like the fact your department has ____ and ____ and that the size of your department, 345 officers, is just right for where I would like to be a member of, it gives me a chance to work at _____. I think I would be a very good officer at your department." Look up some things that you can use to show the panel you have looked at the department and like it and how it is being run. If you have a particular interest and the department has this unit or program, tell them you saw they have such and such and would be interested, in due time, looking onto helping in that program or unit.

Always stick to the truth, honesty, and ethics. It's what you're supposed to stand for.

Then when they say you're done, get up, thank the panel for having you there, and excuse yourself.

If you follow those simple guidelines, you should do well enough to pass, and you may even stand out just enough to be the one at the top of the list.

Ok so that is the basic process to get into the academy or get hired by an agency.

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SO once you make it through all that, what about the academy itself?

Well since I am the Academy Commander at an academy I think I can speak on this. You need to be prepared for the type of academy you are thinking of going too.

Not all academies are created equal. Some are very different than others. There are those that are very militaristic, like most state police academies. Some you live on the academy grounds while you go to the academy, some you don't. Some you go full time 8 hours a day, some you go in the evenings. SO it really varies from place to place, state to state. But I will try to speak on those things that the majority of academies have in common.

First off, think of the academy as one big job interview. Your instructors are usually police professionals and current or past officers. They have ties to the agencies they are part of and will remember you if you do something that it merits remembering! Also you may have police officials walking around your academy at times, and when they see you standing the hallway, screwing off and talking about something you should not, they will notice you and remember your face and name.

Treat the academy like your there and being watched the whole time as a working job interview. I get a call on every single person our local agencies are thinking of hiring. They ask about the time in the academy and what they did or did not do.

Appearance is key. Professional looking uniforms (if you wear them) is important. Show the staff you can look good in a uniform.

Also you have to study. Set time aside every day to study the material you covered that day. For some people it's not new material, for others it is, either way you should go over it. The exams you are going to take are very important. In some state, like Florida, if you score under the cut off score, you fail the exam and then

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fail the academy. SO if you go through all the trouble and time and money to get in the academy, don't blow it because you did not take the time to study because you wanted to go out with your friends drinking the night before the exam.

Also if you're not in a live on academy, do not get in trouble while in the academy. In fact while you're in you should live the life of a Nun! Stay away from drinking in excess (or at all), of course I should not have to say this but do, no drugs, no criminal activity, and don't get arrested. Getting tickets do not help either. So do your very best to drive like you are supposed to anyway, and behave yourself. You want to be a police officer, not arrested or ticketed by one!

That's about the basics. There is a lot more of course, but you will have to learn as you go for some things. I know a lot more about the Florida system, but am trying to make this generalized for all states and people wanting to get into law enforcement. I hope this helps. Be safe and be PROFESSIONAL!

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OK I have done my best to gather a comprehensive list of police agency websites here.

List of Florida Police Agencies and web links. This should be helpful to those of you thinking of applying in Florida:

- <https://www.fdle.state.fl.us/Content/getdoc/8f07d091-0e0e-4633-856a-c1ed9211dc0e/Criminal-Justice-Agency-Links.aspx>

List of Florida Training Academies:

- <https://www.fdle.state.fl.us/Content/getdoc/f1431117-7788-4e70-bb0a-86d4f7717558/Training-Centers.aspx>

Canada

- Not all Police Services in Saskatchewan, let alone Canada, but you can find all the Detachments by the drop-down "Provinces" menu:
<http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca>

California

- All of California's Police Departments are here:
http://www.post.ca.gov/Resources/Law_Enforcement_Links/agency_page.asp