



How To Not Fail the Sergeant's Oral Board Interview

Easy Steps to Ensure You Crush Your Interview

The oral board interview is a critical component of your promotion process, and it plays a significant role in determining whether you'll be selected for the sergeant position. Typically, this interview will consist of a panel of individuals, some from within your department and others from outside of the agency. It's important to approach this process with a combination of preparation, professionalism, and self-awareness. Below are key strategies to help you succeed and common pitfalls to avoid.

Prepare Thoroughly

Understand the Role

Before the interview, ensure you have a solid grasp of the responsibilities and expectations associated with the sergeant position. Be ready to discuss the specific duties you'll be overseeing, such as supervising officers, making tactical decisions, and fostering a positive work environment.

Also, be sure you are prepared to interview for the position you want, not the one you already have. For example, consider this exchange:

Interview Panel:

"What makes you the ideal candidate to be promoted to sergeant?"

Candidate:

"As a patrol officer I have led the department in arrests for the last 2 years. I have written 10 search warrants which shows I am good at following up on cases. Last year I received an award for making the most DUI arrests in our department. I am also on the SWAT team, so I have a lot of tactical experience."

This candidate sounds like he is interviewing for the position of proactive patrol officer. As he is answering, the panel is thinking, "Well, if we were interviewing for proactive patrol officer, we would give you the job because it sounds like you are great for it." But that isn't what he was interviewing for. Your answers need to be relevant to the job you are interviewing for. Just like if you were interviewing for both the SWAT team and the Detective Bureau, your answers would be tailored to be relevant to those very different assignments.

When interviewing to become a sergeant, you need to tell the panel how your experiences have prepared you for the position. For example, being a Field Training Officer (FTO) is a fantastic way to prepare to be a sergeant. In fact, there likely isn't a role in the department (excluding Acting-Sergeant or Corporal) that could prepare you more! Whether you are an FTO or not, take a moment and consider how you would make the connection between FTO and being prepared to be a sergeant.

Here are a few hints:

- Google the Federal definition of a supervisor. Do FTOs meet that definition?
- Is writing Daily Observation Reports as an FTO similar to a Sergeant writing annual performance evaluations of their officers?
- Read the job description of an FTO at your agency. Is it all that different from a sergeant's job functions?

Know Your Department

The panel may ask you about your department's policies, procedures, and goals. Review your agency's mission statement, core values, and current initiatives. Be prepared to talk about how you would align your leadership style with the department's objectives.

Review Common Interview Questions

Practice answering common promotion-related questions, such as:

- Why do you want to be a sergeant?
- How would you handle a conflict between officers?
- Describe a situation where you had to make a difficult decision under pressure.
- What makes you a good leader? (More about this in the next few sections.)

Demonstrate Leadership Skills

As a sergeant, you'll be expected to lead by example. During your interview, focus on showcasing your leadership abilities, such as:

- Problem-solving: Provide examples where you demonstrated strong decision-making skills in high-pressure situations.
- Conflict resolution: Share instances where you successfully resolved conflicts, either within your team or with the public.
- Team building: Explain how you would foster a collaborative and motivated team, keeping morale high while ensuring effective performance.

Maintain Professionalism and Poise

Stay Calm Under Pressure

Interviews can be nerve-wracking, especially when you're being evaluated by a panel. If you're unsure of an answer, it's okay to take a moment to gather your thoughts. Avoid rushing through your responses—speaking slowly and confidently will make a stronger impression than rambling.

Dress and Present Yourself Professionally

While you may already be familiar with the formalities of law enforcement uniforms, remember that your presentation matters in the oral board interview. Dress in professional attire (whether that is a Class A uniform or business suit), and ensure that you look polished, well-groomed, and respectful.

Make Eye Contact

During the interview, focus on making eye contact with each member of the panel. This will help demonstrate your confidence and sincerity.

Effective Communication

Listen Carefully

Pay attention to the entire question before answering. If you don't understand a question, it's better to ask for clarification than to guess at the answer.

Answering with Bullet Points

A helpful technique for answering questions in an interview is to structure your response using **bullet points**. This strategy benefits both you and the interview panel, making it easier for both parties to communicate clearly and effectively.

Here's how it works:

Start with the Key Points

When answering a question, begin by stating the main points you want to make. These should be brief, clear, and to the point—just like bullet points on a page. This provides the interviewer with an easy way to jot down the most important elements of your answer as you speak.

For example, if asked how you would handle a conflict between officers, you might answer:

- Assess the situation immediately
- Gather facts from all parties involved
- Implement a solution and follow up on resolution

Elaborate on Each Point

Once you've listed your main points, elaborate on each one in turn. This gives you the chance to expand on the important elements without risking leaving anything out. The interviewer can write down the key bullet points first and then follow along as you provide the supporting details.

Continuing the example:

- "First, I would assess the situation immediately: I would ensure to assess the situation quickly to understand the scope of the conflict, without rushing to judgment, and making sure everyone feels heard."

- “Next I would gather facts from all parties involved: I would interview the officers involved privately to understand their perspectives and ensure that all sides are heard before making any conclusions.”
- “Lastly, I would Implement a solution and follow up on resolution: After reviewing the facts, I’d propose a fair solution and make sure to follow up regularly to ensure the issue is resolved and doesn’t resurface.”

Why This Technique Works

Helps the Interviewer

Interview panels often have limited time to take notes while listening to you speak. By starting with bullet points, you give them a clear structure to write down the core of your answer. This makes it easier for them to evaluate your response and remember your key points when scoring.

Prevents You from Forgetting Key Information

When you break down your answer into main points first, it helps keep you organized and ensures you don’t forget to touch on the important aspects of your response. This structure helps keep your answer focused and prevents you from going off-topic or missing critical elements.

Clarifies Your Communication

A clear, bullet-point approach keeps your answer concise and organized, which not only helps the interviewer but also ensures you are presenting yourself in the most professional and confident manner.

By using this method, you make the interviewer’s job easier and increase the likelihood that they’ll remember and accurately capture the important aspects of your response. It’s a simple yet effective way to ensure clarity, avoid misunderstandings, and keep your answers focused on the key points that matter most.

Show Emotional Intelligence

Empathy and Understanding: In your responses, demonstrate that you understand the perspectives of both your officers and the public. Show that you are capable of handling diverse situations with empathy, balancing both authority and compassion.

Self-Awareness

Acknowledge your strengths and areas for growth. The panel will appreciate your ability to reflect on your experience and recognize how you’re continuously improving as a leader.

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

Overconfidence

While it's important to present yourself as a competent candidate, avoid coming across as arrogant. Humility and self-awareness are key traits of a strong leader.

Being Vague

Don't give vague or generic answers. Your responses should be specific and supported by real examples from your career. Panel members are looking for tangible evidence of your skills and experience.

Getting Defensive

If you receive a challenging question or feedback that you feel is unfair, resist the urge to become defensive. Stay composed and use the opportunity to provide a thoughtful, reasoned response.

Lack of Focus

Avoid going off-topic or sharing too much irrelevant information. Keep your answers concise, focused on the question at hand, and relevant to the role of sergeant.

Closing the Interview

Ask Questions

At the end of the interview, you'll likely be given the opportunity to ask questions. Prepare thoughtful questions that show you're serious about the position and the agency.

For example:

- What are some of the key challenges currently facing the department?
- What do you envision for the future of the sergeant role in the next few years?

Show Gratitude

Thank the panel for their time and consideration. A positive, respectful closing will leave a lasting impression.

By following these strategies and avoiding common pitfalls, you'll be able to approach the oral board interview with confidence and professionalism. Your preparation and execution will highlight your leadership potential will help position you for success in your pursuit of a sergeant promotion.

Conducting a Mock Oral Interview

In the next section, we have assembled some mock oral board questions. The best way to go through these questions the first time, is to do so cold and try to respond as you would during a real interview.

Here's how to get the most out of this section:

1. Set up your phone to record yourself.
2. Don't look at the questions in the next section. Have a friend play the part of the interviewer and have them ask you each question. Have your friend give you a 3-minute time limit for each response and try to write down your answers.
3. Answer each question.
4. Afterwards take a look at what your friend was able to write down. If they weren't able to get most of what you said, that's a red flag that we need to change the way you answer questions.
5. Watch the video. How is your body language? Do you say filler phrases (e.g., um) a lot?

Now we have a baseline to work from, and you have begun to identify areas for improvement.

Ready to begin? The mock oral board questions are on the next page.

Mock Oral Board Questions

1. Why do you want to be a sergeant (or whichever position you are putting in for)?
2. Considering all of the candidates for this position, why should you be selected instead of the other candidates?
3. What is the role of a sergeant at our agency?
4. What have you done to prepare for this position?
5. What would your critics or detractors say about you and your suitability for this position?
6. Of all of the areas of responsibility that a sergeant has including personnel management, tactics, investigations, training, etc. which is your weakest area?
7. Please summarize the key points of the Graham vs. Connor decision.
8. Please summarize the key points of our department's pursuit policy.
9. I am going to read you a brief scenario. Afterwards please explain how you would respond to the scenario in order of priority:

Imagine you are sergeant working in the patrol division during dayshift. The time is 1300 hours and Communications advises that a bank robbery has just occurred. The bank robber was reported to have shot a security guard in the bank and then fled in a red car with the license plate of 1SVG200. A moment later, one of your officers broadcasts that he is behind the vehicle and now in pursuit. Please explain how you would respond.

10. You have three minutes to make a closing statement.

Your Secret Weapon

Now that you have a solid grasp on how to prepare for the oral interview, you are guaranteed to get the position, right?

Wrong! The oral interview is just one of many steps to getting promoted. Even more importantly, just getting promoted in no way prepares you to actually be a sergeant!

If you are the type of promotional candidate who not only wants to outshine your competition but also wants to truly be great at the job once you get it, we have a secret weapon for you.

It's called **Introduction to Supervision**, and it's an on-demand digital course that is packed of incredible tools to help you not only get promoted to sergeant but also know what the heck you are doing on Day 1!

What's Included?

Enroll now and get immediate access to:

- 18 Chapters
- 6 Videos
- Access to 3 previously presented Savage Training Group webinars
- 1 Certificate of Completion that says you have completed our *Introduction to Supervision* course (this is going to look great on your resume!)

All this for just \$199!

**Ready to get registered?
Click here to get immediate access.**

Or visit onlinetraining.savagetraininggroup.com/course/intro-to-supervision

Chapters

- 1 Why Do You Want to Promote?
- 2 Developing a Growth Mindset
- 3 Identify Your Weaknesses and Blind Spots
- 4 Preparing for the Written Test & Scenarios
- 5 Preparing for the Oral Interview
- 6 Relationships
- 7 The Drama of the Promotional Process
- 8 Relationship Building
- 9 Congratulations! You Have Been Promoted to Sergeant – Now What?
- 10 Personnel Issues
- 11 How to Write an Employee Evaluation
- 12 Running Critical Incidents and In-Progress Crimes
- 13 Officer Involved Shooting Incidents
- 14 Personnel Complaints and Internal Affairs Investigations
- 15 The Supervisor's Response to Use of Force Incidents
- 16 Managing Crime Scenes
- 17 Reviewing Police Reports
- 18 Supervising Special Units

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I have to complete the course in one sitting?

No. This is a self-paced course. Once registered, you have unlimited access and can control the pace of the course. The videos are broken down into small chapters that also include downloads and text. Move through the material at your own pace and log in whenever you prefer. Want to watch the videos at double-speed? No problem. Consume the course material however you prefer.

Does my access to the course material expire?

No. All of our online courses allow you to log back in anytime to review the course material.

How long is the course?

If you prefer to view the entire course in one sitting and read the accompanying material, you could do so in about 8 hours. Or log in and out as you please and move at your own pace. The course is broken down into chapters so you can consume the course material at your own pace.

I need to enroll multiple officers from my department; how do I do that?

Simply **contact us** with the number of students you'd like to enroll, and we will invoice you for the total amount. Upon payment, we will send you instructions on how each student can create their own account and access the course.

Do you offer group pricing for multiple officers to attend this online course?

We're happy to offer you a group discount. What a great way to get all of your officers trained!

For orders of 10 or more students you will receive a 30% discount so you pay only \$139/per student.

When you are ready to make your group purchase, **contact us** and let us know how many students you would like to register. We'll issue you an invoice that you can pay immediately with a credit card or by check. As soon as we receive payment, we'll send you directions on how each student can access the course.

All this for just \$199!

Ready to get registered?
Click here to get immediate access.



Or visit onlinetraining.savagetraininggroup.com/course/intro-to-supervision