

- » Taking the beginning steps to become a police officer
- » Completing tests — written, physical, oral, medical, and psychological
- » Giving it a second try if necessary

Chapter **1**

Signing Up, Getting Screened, and Other Prep Work

The job of a police officer isn't easy. Police officers investigate crimes, arrest criminals, assist citizens in emergencies, collect and secure evidence, write reports, and testify in court. They keep a community safe by enforcing the law. Their job is an important one, so police departments carefully screen job applicants.

To land a job as a cop, you have to undergo a lengthy screening process. You must be able to solve quadratic equations and bench press 500 pounds. Okay, we're just kidding, but the screening process to become a police officer does involve passing several tests. The good news is that getting a good score on these tests is within reach for most individuals.

In this chapter, we tell you about the screening process to become a police officer. To get a job as a cop in most police departments, you must obtain a Notice of Examination (NOE), complete an application, pass a written exam and a physical ability test (PAT), and undergo a background investigation, an oral board review, and a medical and psychological evaluation. But hold on! You're not finished yet. You still have to contend with the police academy. Whether you must do this on your own before the screening process or after you pass the medical and psychological evaluations depends on the city and state where you're applying for a job.

In some parts of the country, a police department will pay for you to attend a police academy. In other areas, you must enroll in a state-certified academy at a community college, and you have to pay for this academy yourself. Should you do this before you apply for a job? You could, but keep in mind that some large cities, such as Los Angeles and New York City, still require you to attend their academies even if you've attended a state-certified academy at a community college. The moral of the story? Find out what's required in your city and state before you apply for a job and begin the screening process.

Starting with the Notice of Examination (NOE)

The first step to becoming a police officer is to find a Notice of Examination (NOE), which is also called an Exam Announcement. While many police departments post an NOE because they have job openings, other departments give the written test every so often, and the NOE may simply announce the time and place of the test. If the NOE is posted because of job openings, it indicates where and when you should submit a job application, the time and place of the test, and the test registration fee. You can see an example NOE for a job opening in Figure 1-1.



TIP

How do you find an NOE? The easiest way is to periodically check the websites of nearby police departments. Another option is to access a national police officer website such as the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) (www.theiacp.org), where you can search police officer job openings by state, city, and zip code.

POLICE OFFICER NOTICE OF EXAMINATION

The city of Happyville will conduct a written examination on June 10 at 9:30 a.m. at Happyville High School, 200 Mountain Road, Happyville, to fill existing vacancies at the Happyville Police Department. Applications for the position are available at Happyville Town Hall, 123 Main Street, Happyville, between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, or on the Happyville City's Web site (www.happyville.com). A \$100 nonrefundable fee is required to process the application. Fees must be in the form of a check or money order. Cash will not be accepted. Completed applications with signatures and the \$100 fee must be received at Happyville Town Hall by 5 p.m., Friday, May 30, 2010, to participate in the examination. Applications will not be accepted at the exam location.

Salary range is from \$22,000 to \$26,000 with excellent benefits. Police officers should expect to work overtime, weekends, holidays, and various shifts.

To be considered for a position within the Happyville Police Department, an applicant must

- be a U.S. citizen
- speak fluent English
- have a high school diploma or a GED
- have a valid Social Security number
- possess a valid driver's license
- be at least 21 years of age and not older than 34 years of age
- possess good moral character
- pass a written examination
- pass a polygraph test
- pass a background investigation
- meet a vision requirement of uncorrected 20/100 to correctable 20/20 and not be color blind
- pass a medical evaluation
- pass a psychological examination

For questions or additional information, contact the Happyville Police Department at 123-4567 or visit www.happyville.com.

The city of Happyville is an Equal Opportunity Employer (EOE).

FIGURE 1-1:
A sample
Notice of
Examination
for a police
officer
position.

TYPES OF LAW ENFORCEMENT JOBS

Those who want to work in law enforcement are committed to protecting people and property. They are good communicators and in good physical condition. That said, there are different types of law enforcement jobs. The educational requirements and training range from having a high school diploma and training at a police academy to more formal training, such as a college degree. These are some common types of law enforcement jobs:

- **Local Police Officers and Sheriff's Deputies:** Local police and sheriff's deputies must uphold the laws of their jurisdiction. They patrol their area and investigate crimes. Local police may work for their town, county, or region. Most local police departments in the United States are small and employ only a few full-time police officers. California, New York, and Texas are the states that employ the largest number of police officers in the country.

Many of the other job titles found within local law enforcement agencies include automobile patrol, foot patrol, traffic officer, bicycle patrol, motorcycle patrol, horse patrol, marine patrol, aircraft patrol, juvenile officer, canine officer, crime scene investigator, crime prevention officer, community policing officer, hostage negotiations team, bomb squad officer, warrant officer, airport police, housing police, port authority police, and transit police.

- **State Police:** Also known as State Troopers or Highway Patrol officers, state police officers engage in highway patrol and state investigations. State police assist local police with large-scale emergencies and investigations. State police departments may have more stringent requirements for candidates than local police departments. Some states require candidates to have a college degree.
- **Federal Law Enforcement:** The federal government has two broad categories of law enforcement positions — Uniformed Police Officers and Special Agents.

The U.S. Capitol Police are a good example of a uniformed police agency whose job it is to protect the personnel and property of the U.S. Capitol. Another example are FBI Police officers who protect the facilities and personnel of the FBI. The Customs and Border Protection agency is moving away from using the job title “agent” to “officer,” as in “Border Patrol Officer.”

Special Agents are federal law enforcement criminal investigators who don't wear a uniform. They're typically categorized in the GS-1811 job series. Special Agents have the statutory authority to carry firearms, conduct searches and seizures, and make arrests. Special Agents work for a number of federal agencies such as the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF), Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), and U.S. Secret Service (USSS).

- **Tribal Police:** Tribal police are a type of local police. They work on Native American reservations and serve as liaisons with local and state police. Their job involves keeping the public safe and completing incident reports. They also prepare special documents that are required by the Tribal Court System.
- **Specialized Jurisdiction Police:** Specialized jurisdiction police are local police who work in a specific area. For example, they may work for railroads and in hospitals, parks, airports, and schools.

Completing a Job Application

Before taking a written police officer test, you must pay a fee and submit a completed job application like the one shown in Figure 1-2. You must complete the application in black ink or type it, depending on the instructions on the application. The application should be neat and complete, and the information on it should be accurate. Read all the directions before you fill out the application. Keep in mind that a mistake or an omission on the job application is grounds for disqualification.



TIP

Make a few copies of the application and practice completing it. After you finish the final copy, photocopy it. You may need the information on the application later in the screening process.

Remember that neatness counts — if a police department can't read your writing, you're not likely to receive a job offer. An application for a police officer job is different from most other job applications because it asks for very detailed specific information, such as the address of every home you've ever lived in since elementary school. Why do police departments make their job application so difficult to complete? Think about it — a police officer carries a gun. Should a police department give a gun to an unstable individual who has had past run-ins with the law? Absolutely not.

Rounding up required info and paperwork

Gather the following information before you complete an application for a job as a police officer:

- » Birth certificate.
- » Driver's license.
- » Education information (names of your high school, college, and/or business school; the years you attended; and the diploma or degree you received).
- » Employment information, as shown in Figure 1-3 (list of your former employers, the position and type of work you did, the dates during which you were employed, and your reasons for leaving). Follow the directions to see how far back you must go. Some applications ask you to list each employer you had during the past ten years.
- » The names, addresses, and telephone numbers of coworkers at each job to include as references.
- » If you served in the military, your date of entry (month, day, and year) and your date of discharge (month, day, and year).
- » All former convictions, including traffic tickets.
- » The address of each residence you have lived at since graduating from elementary school (about sixth grade); the month and year you moved into each residence, and the month and year you left.
- » The names, addresses, and telephone numbers of five personal references, other than family members.
- » An itemized list of your debts, including the names and addresses of banks or places that have given you loans, the amount you owe on each loan, your monthly payment, any overdue payments, and the nature of the debt, such as a mortgage or new car loan.

Some police officer job applications require you to submit copies of the following documents along with the application:

- » Birth certificate
- » Valid driver's license
- » Certified copy of your driving record
- » Social Security card
- » High school diploma or GED certificate
- » College transcripts

- » Selective Service registration form
- » Form DD214, Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty, for each term of service if you served in the U.S. Armed Forces
- » Marriage license, divorce decree, and/or legal separation papers



TIP

If you're a male applicant born after January 1, 1960, you must show proof of your registration with the Selective Service (SSS Form 3A). If you don't have this document, you can get a copy by calling the Selective Service at (847) 688-6888 or toll-free at (888) 655-1825, or go to www.sss.gov for more information.

Understanding what will get you disqualified

Not everyone may participate in the police officer screening process. If you've done something in your past that prevents you from obtaining a permit to carry a concealed firearm, you'll be knocked out of the competition to win a job as a police officer. You may be disqualified from becoming a police officer if you

- » Are a fugitive from justice
- » Have been admitted to a mental health facility
- » Have been convicted of a felony
- » Were dishonorably discharged from the Armed Forces
- » Entered the United States illegally
- » Are currently on parole or probation
- » Have been convicted of a crime involving domestic violence or stalking
- » Are currently subject to a restraining order or protection from abuse order
- » Have an addiction to drugs or alcohol
- » Have been judicially declared incompetent or insane



WARNING

Be aware of what information and photographs appear on your social media accounts. Inappropriate comments and photos can get you disqualified. Even "liking" an inappropriate website may be grounds for disqualification.

Acting professionally

Suppose that you obtain a Notice of Examination (NOE) that says you need to drop off a completed application at the police department the week before the written test. You're in the midst of painting your apartment that week but stop by the police department to hand in your application. Your clothes aren't clean and they're splattered with paint. You're perspiring and notice that a line of candidates is waiting to hand in applications. You see an old high school friend ahead of you in line. "Hey, Joe!" you shout, slap the man on the back, and shake his hand. The officer behind the front desk is on the phone and motions for you to keep it down. Are you making a good first impression? Are you behaving professionally? No! Always act professionally — when you hand in your application, when you take your written test, and when you arrive for an oral interview.

CST pass	
PHY Qual	
To AIS	
Agility	

APPLICATION FOR EMPLOYMENT

INSTRUCTIONS: TYPE OR PRINT. SIGN IN INK. EACH REQUEST FOR APPOINTMENT REQUIRES A SEPARATE APPLICATION.

Before completing this application, read the position announcement to be sure you have the minimum qualifications for this position. Then complete the application fully. Read and sign affirmation.

OMISSIONS MAY RESULT IN REJECTION OF APPLICATION

APPLICATION FOR APPOINTMENT TO THE POSITION OF _____

1. Name in full: _____
Last First Middle

Phone number (including area code): _____

What other names have you been known by? _____

Female applicants must furnish maiden name: _____

2. Address: _____
Street City State Zip Code

How long have you lived in [city]? _____

How long have you lived in [state]? _____

3. Date of Birth: _____ Present age: _____

4. Are you a citizen of the United States? _____

5. Proof of Citizenship attached No Yes _____ (IE: Copy of Birth Certificate)

6. Do you possess a valid Operator's License? No Yes _____
State Number

7. Education:

Name & Address of School	Years Attended From To	Course Diploma or Degree
High School		
College		
Business School		

THIS SECTION CONTINUED ON ATTACHED PAGES YES NO

8. Employment Records:
 Social Security Number: _____

Name & Address of Employer	Position & Type of Work	Employed From To	Reason for leaving

9. United States Military Service: No Yes Branch of Service: _____

Date of Entry: _____
Month/Day/Year Date of Discharge: _____
Month/Day/Year

Type of Discharge: _____ Serial No.: _____

10. Have you ever previously applied for any position in the [city] Police Department or any other Law Enforcement Agency or Correctional Institution?
 No Yes What Agency? _____ When? _____

What Position? _____

11. List all convictions (include traffic arrests): _____

12. Have you ever been a defendant in any court action? No Yes Describe: _____

13. Are you now or have you ever been a member of any organization, corporation, company, partnership, association, trust, foundation, fund, club, society, committee, political party, or any group of persons, whether or not incorporated, which engages in or advocates, abets, advises or teaches, or follows a purpose which is to engage in or advocate, abet, assist in the overthrow, destruction or alteration of the Constitutional form of government of the United States or of the State of XX, or of any political subdivision of either them, by revolution, force, violence or other unlawful means?
 No Yes Describe: _____

14. I hereby affirm that there are no intentional misrepresentations or falsifications in the foregoing statements and answers to questions. I am aware that should investigation disclose any such misrepresentations or falsifications, my application shall be rejected or, if already employed, my employment may be terminated.

Applicant's Signature

Date

THIS SECTION CONTINUED ON ATTACHED PAGES YES NO

FIGURE 1-2: A sample application for a police officer job.

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

STARTING WITH THE DATE YOU LEFT HIGH SCHOOL, ACCURATELY ACCOUNT FOR ALL PERIODS OF EMPLOYMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT IN DATE ORDER, INCLUDING YOUR PRESENT EMPLOYER. INCLUDE ALL SEASONAL, TEMPORARY, OR PART-TIME JOBS YOU HAVE HELD WHILE FURLOUGHED OR LAID-OFF FROM YOUR PERMANENT JOB. ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS.

PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE

Have you ever applied for or collected unemployment compensation? Yes No

Have you ever applied for or collected workman's compensation? Yes No

Have you ever filed for bankruptcy? Yes No

Social Security Number: _____

EMPLOYER: _____ PHONE: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

EMPLOYED FROM: _____ TO: _____ SALARY: _____

REASON FOR LEAVING: _____

POSITION: _____ DUTIES: _____

CO-WORKER: _____ PHONE: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

CO-WORKER: _____ PHONE: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

SIGNATURE: _____ DATE: _____

PAGE _____ OF _____

FIGURE 1-3:

You may see several Employment History boxes like this one attached to a police officer job application.

EMPLOYMENT OUTLOOK

The employment outlook for police officers is good — and it's expected to get better. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that by 2030, the number of law enforcement jobs will increase by 7 percent. Why the increase? The population is growing, and older employees are expected to retire.

Local police departments will likely do the most hiring, particularly those in urban areas with high crime rates. Candidates who are bilingual, have military training, or have college degrees have the best chance of landing a job as a local cop.

Jobs in state and federal law enforcement will be harder to find. But candidates who are bilingual, have military experience, or hold college degrees have the best shot at these jobs as well. Those with investigative experience also have a leg up on the competition.

Taking the Written Test

After you find a Notice of Examination (NOE) and complete a job application, you need to register for the written test. In most states, you have to sign up for the written test online. Then you'll receive emails about upcoming tests that you can take. Easy peasy. But then you have to take and pass this test. Were you a good test-taker in school? Don't panic if you weren't. Most of the written tests police officers must take are fairly basic. You can easily pass them with some practice and preparation.

Not all police departments in the United States give the same written test. Some give a test called the National Police Officer Selection Test (POST). Each state has a Police Officer Standards and Training Commission that decides exactly what will be on its version of the POST; check your state's website to determine its exact requirements. Other states give a civil service test, such as the New York City (NYC) Police Officer's Entrance Exam, which is similar to the POST. We address both of these tests in this book as typical examples.



TIP

Before you take a written police officer test, find out as much as you can about the test by contacting the police department and visiting its website. Many police departments offer study guides that you can download from their website. But if you can't find what you're looking for, don't be afraid to ask questions.



REMEMBER

A few departments also require candidates to pass a video-based examination. During this test, you watch videos of scenarios instead of reading about them and then answer multiple-choice questions about the scene you've just witnessed. It's important to note that this is a common sense/good judgment test. You do not need law enforcement experience to answer the questions. You can't study or prepare for this test. If your state or department includes a video-based test, it'll be mentioned on its website, so be sure to check in advance.

Some police departments interview candidates about two to three weeks after they pass the written exam. This is an initial interview. Don't confuse it with the oral board interview, which is much longer.

National Police Officer Selection Test (POST)

The National Police Officer Selection Test, better known as the POST, has four sections, and each section is timed. The first three sections are Mathematics, Reading Comprehension, and Grammar. These sections have both multiple-choice and true-or-false questions. Most multiple-choice questions have five answer options — A, B, C, D, and E. You fill in the oval that corresponds to the answer choice that you believe is correct. The fourth section is called Incident Report Writing. You have to write out your answers to the questions in this section.



TIP

You should attempt to answer every question on the POST because there's no penalty for guessing. Your score is based only on the number of questions you answer correctly. When you don't know the answer to a question, eliminate answer options that you know are incorrect and make a good guess.

The following is a brief rundown of what to expect in each section of the POST. To find out more about the POST, turn to Chapter 2.

- » Section 1: Mathematics: The questions in the mathematics section of the POST require you to use basic arithmetic — addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. You also have to determine averages on this test. You can't use a calculator on the POST, but the test booklet has scratch paper you can use to figure out your answers. For more information about the kind of mathematics questions that are on the POST, turn to Chapter 3.

- » Section 2: Reading Comprehension: On this section of the POST, you read passages or several paragraphs about a subject and answer questions about the information in the passage. Passages are about police duty, but you don't need any knowledge of police duty to answer the questions. Everything you need to know to answer the questions is in the passage. Both multiple-choice and true-or-false questions are in the reading comprehension section of the POST. To find out more about answering reading comprehension questions, see Chapter 4.
- » Section 3: Grammar: The grammar section of the POST tests your knowledge of grammar, punctuation, and spelling. This section has two types of questions. To answer the first type of question, you choose the word that best fits in a blank in a sentence. To answer the second type of question, you choose the word in a sentence that's misspelled. We tell you more about grammar, punctuation, and spelling in Chapter 5.
- » Section 4: Incident Report Writing: Incident report writing tests your writing skills. In this section of the POST, you're given a completed (filled-out) incident report and asked questions about it. Though the information you need to answer the questions is right in the incident report, you're judged on how you write out your answer. Your answers should be complete sentences that are grammatically correct. To read more about incident reports, turn to Chapter 7.

New York City Police Officer's Entrance Exam

Though many police departments give the National Police Officer Selection Test (POST), others give a civil service test, such as the New York City (NYC) Police Officer's Entrance Exam. This exam contains about 85 questions testing your ability in these areas:

- » Inductive and deductive reasoning: Inductive reasoning questions give you a set of details and ask you to draw a conclusion based on these details. Deductive reasoning questions do just the opposite — they give you a conclusion and ask you to choose details supporting the conclusion. You can find out more about inductive and deductive reasoning questions in Chapter 4.
- » Information ordering: These questions test your ability to follow directions. You're given a series of steps that you must follow to correctly answer the questions. The questions explain that an officer has completed some steps and ask you what the officer should do next. Chapter 6 tells you more about information-ordering questions.
- » Memorization: Memorization questions on the NYC test assess your ability to remember details about what you've seen. You're given ten minutes to study a photograph or an illustration. Then, when a page is turned and you can no longer see the picture, you must answer questions about details within it.
- » Problem sensitivity: To answer these questions, you have to predict whether something is likely to go wrong in a given situation. For example, you may be given a guideline as to when police officers should evacuate persons in a building, and then you may be asked questions about information in this guideline. For more about problem-sensitivity questions, turn to Chapter 6.
- » Spatial orientation: To answer spatial orientation questions on the NYC test, you read a description and determine where you are in terms of direction (north, south, east, or west). Some spatial orientation questions include a map indicating one-way streets and roadway obstructions. To answer these questions, you have to choose the most efficient route to get from one place to another while obeying all traffic regulations. For more about memorization and spatial orientation questions, turn to Chapter 6.

- » Visualization: Imagine the street on which you live. Now imagine what this street looks like if you were standing behind the houses or buildings. Visualization questions on the NYC test ask you to envision what something looks like from a different angle or perspective. We discuss visualization questions in detail in Chapter 6.
- » Written comprehension: Written comprehension questions on the NYC test are similar to reading comprehension questions on the POST. You read a passage containing information about police duty and answer questions about the information in the passage. To read more about these types of questions, review Chapter 4.
- » Written expression: These questions assess your knowledge of grammar. You choose the sentence that presents information clearly, accurately, and completely. For more about grammar questions, see Chapter 5.

ORGANIZATION OF MUNICIPAL, COUNTY, AND STATE DEPARTMENTS

When you decide to become a cop, you probably picture yourself working for a municipal, or city, police department. This is certainly a good option, but law enforcement agencies range from small, country police departments to large federal agencies. Note that some of these law enforcement agencies have different hiring requirements than municipal police departments.

- Municipal police officers: Municipal, or local, police departments are generally divided geographically, with each department providing basic law enforcement for a city, town, or other municipality. In some cases, one local police force may serve several small communities.

These departments are staffed by uniformed police officers who patrol the area and respond to calls. These officers perform basic police duties, such as arresting criminal suspects, directing traffic, investigating crimes, and more. Officers in larger police departments are often assigned to carry out a specific duty.

Local police agencies typically organize their service areas into geographic districts. Officers are assigned to specific districts and are expected to familiarize themselves with their patrol area and be watchful for anything out of the ordinary. Some local police agencies serve unique jurisdictions that entail special enforcement responsibilities. These special police forces include college campus police, public school district police, and transportation system security. Local police officers may serve in specialized fields, such as fingerprint identification, chemical analysis, or police training. Others may also serve with special police units, such as canine units, motorcycle units, harbor patrol, or special weapons and tactics (SWAT).

- County sheriffs and deputy sheriffs: Police departments at the county level consist of sheriffs and deputy sheriffs. Most sheriffs are elected officials with job requirements comparable to those of a local police chief. Sheriff's departments are generally small, employing fewer than 50 officers. Deputy sheriffs share many of the same law enforcement responsibilities of officers in urban police departments. Some 911 call-response centers are staffed by county police departments.
- State police officers: Officers of state police agencies, often known as state troopers or highway patrol officers, have statewide jurisdiction for arresting criminals and enforcing traffic laws on state highways. These officers also have special functions at the scene of traffic accidents. In these situations, state police officers may direct traffic, provide first aid, summon additional emergency support, and write accident reports. State police agencies may also provide assistance for local police forces, particularly in rural areas and small towns, and provide executive protection for the governor and other dignitaries.

Adding the Law Enforcement Essay Exam

Because police officers complete so many written reports — they must write an incident report each time they respond to a scene — police departments consider good writing skills essential to good job performance. And many of the documents police officers write wind up in court as evidence, so good writing skills are a must. Some police departments require candidates to take the Law Enforcement Essay Exam in addition to the written police officer test. This exam measures your ability to write clearly and correctly.

The Law Enforcement Essay Exam isn't long. You respond to a single writing prompt that isn't about police work — it's personal. A prompt may ask you to recall a specific experience in your life and then reflect upon what you learned from that experience. You have 30 to 45 minutes to write your response to the prompt. You can read some sample prompts and a sample essay in Chapter 8.

Completing the Personal History Statement

Most police departments require candidates to complete a Personal History Statement — a long document in which you respond to questions about your past and your character. Although some departments ask you to complete this statement after the written test, many allow you to complete it at home and require that you have it notarized by a notary public before you turn it in.



REMEMBER

Honesty is the only policy when responding to questions on the Personal History Statement. A background investigator checks your responses, and if this person discovers that you lied or omitted something important, the police department will disqualify you from the screening process. Later in the screening process, you'll be asked to take a polygraph test, called a BOC. The Personal History Statement may serve as a road map for the questions asked on the polygraph test. Instead of a BOC, a police department may use Computer Voice Stress Analysis (CVSA). This is like a polygraph test except that it is based on the tone and stress of your voice. Therefore, it's better to tell the truth and explain the reasons for your actions on your statement. You can view a sample Personal History Statement in Chapter 9.

A Personal History Statement asks questions such as the following:

- » Have you ever been arrested or convicted of an offense? If your answer is “yes,” explain the incident in concise detail on a separate sheet of paper, giving the dates and nature of the offense, the name and location of the court, and the disposition of the case. A conviction may not disqualify you but a false statement will.
- » Have you ever been on probation or parole? If “yes,” explain the details on a separate sheet of paper.
- » Have you been involved as a party in a lawsuit? If “yes,” explain the details on a separate sheet of paper.
- » Have you ever driven a motor vehicle within the past three years without the proper insurance?
- » Have you ever had your driver's license placed on probation for receiving an excessive number of traffic violations?
- » Have you ever been placed as an assigned risk for vehicle insurance?
- » Have you filed for bankruptcy?

- » Are you under obligation to pay child support? If “yes,” are you current with payments?
- » Describe in your own words the frequency and extent of your use of alcoholic beverages.

You also have to provide the following information on a Personal History Statement:

- » Contact information (name, address, and telephone numbers)
- » Driver’s license information (driver’s license number, state, expiration date, height, weight, eye color, hair color, scars, tattoos, or other distinguishing marks)
- » Traffic record (list of all traffic citations you’ve received, except for parking tickets; list of all accidents you’ve been involved in as a driver; and list of all motor vehicles you own or operate)
- » Military service (dates of service, branch of service, and type of discharge)
- » Family members (names, addresses, and telephone numbers of immediate family members and other persons living in your home)
- » Education (names of schools/colleges, locations, dates attended, areas of study, and type of degree)
- » References (names, addresses, telephone numbers, years known, and occupations of four persons who are not relatives)
- » Employment history (list of all employers back to 17 years of age; a brief summary of your duties in each position)
- » Residences (list of all addresses, including city, state, and zip code, where you’ve lived during the last ten years, beginning with your present address; list must include names of landlords and neighbors)
- » Financial obligations (list of name/location of institutions or banks, type of accounts, and average balance; list of credit cards and names of issuing institutions)
- » Professional, fraternal, or civic association memberships (list of organizations, period of time you belonged, and the office you held)

Passing the Physical Ability Test (PAT)

If you pass the written police officer test, you then take the PAT, the physical ability test. Police work is often physically demanding. At the police academy, recruits are trained so that they’re in good enough condition to chase and cuff suspects, quickly climb stairs and fences, scale walls, and defend themselves from criminals when necessary. The physical fitness training at the academy is tough. The PAT assesses whether you’re in good enough shape to undergo this training. If you fail the PAT, you’re eliminated from the screening process. To discover how to prepare for the PAT, read Chapter 10.

The type of exercises on the PAT depends on the police department. However, many police departments test candidates’ ability to do the following in a given time period:

- » 440-yard mobility/agility run
- » 1.5-mile run
- » Dummy drag
- » Fence obstacles

- » Modified squat thrust
- » Push-ups
- » Sit-ups
- » Stair climb
- » Trigger pull
- » Vehicle exit
- » Vertical jump

If you fail either the written exam, the PAT, or the background investigation, you'll be notified by mail. If your oral board interview has been scheduled, it will be canceled.

Making a Dynamite Impression during the Oral Board Interview

The oral board interview is similar to a job interview, but it's much more intense. Many candidates are eliminated based on their performance in this interview. During an oral board interview, you face a panel of interviewers who ask you personal questions and questions based on the background investigation that was conducted after you submitted a Personal History Statement. Who are these interviewers? Many are high-ranking police officers. Community members and a psychologist may also serve on the panel. In some departments, a representative from the human resources department may also be in the room as an observer.

The panel judges your appearance, professionalism, and honesty in response to questions such as, "Why do you want to be a police officer?" and "Why do you want to work for this police department?" Members of the panel try to discover whether you exercise good judgment and common sense during stressful situations. They try to determine whether you're mature, compassionate, and — above all — honest. To get a good score, you need to answer all questions completely and professionally. You shouldn't appear to be nervous or fidgety. Read about the types of questions asked during an oral board interview in Chapter 11.

Undergoing the Medical and Psychological Evaluations

If a police department asks you to undergo a medical and psychological evaluation, you're very close to landing a conditional job offer. These evaluations are simply another final test to ensure that you're healthy and psychologically stable so that you can perform well as a police officer. Turn to Chapter 12 to find out about these tests in detail.

Medical evaluation

Before a physician examines you, he or she will ask about your family's health history, measure your height and weight, and take your temperature and blood pressure. The physician will then perform these tests, among others:

- » Vision
- » Hearing
- » Blood and urine
- » Heart and lungs
- » Muscular and skeletal

Psychological evaluation

Psychological evaluations are designed to test your mental stability and evaluate how you handle stress. During this evaluation, you're asked to respond to a list of questions. Don't lie or try to figure out how you "should" answer these questions. Be honest and consistent. The same questions may be asked several times but phrased differently. Be sure to respond the same way each time you're asked the same question. Some departments use an evaluation on their website. They may also require candidates to meet with a psychologist, who may ask about any problems revealed on the Personal History Statement or during your background investigation.

What if I Get Eliminated during the Screening Process?

You don't want to think about it, but it's possible you may be eliminated at some point during the screening process for a police officer job. Being eliminated doesn't mean you have to give up your dream of becoming a police officer, though. You can try again when another Notice of Examination (NOE) is posted on a police department's website. Most departments have a minimum waiting period before you can try again. Here are the typical waiting periods for the tests:

Written test (second attempt)	90-day wait
Written test (third attempt)	1-year wait
PAT (second and third attempts)	You may retest during the next scheduled test. You don't need to submit a new application.
PAT (fourth attempt)	1-year wait
Interview	1-year wait
Background/polygraph	1-year wait