

Test Preparation Guide for Applicant Processing



Entry-Level Special Agent Selection Process

U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration
Human Resources Division

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Purpose of the Guide	1
Organization of the Guide	1
Section I: Overview of the Selection Process	2
Initial Application	5
Phase 1: Physical Task Assessment.....	5
Phase 2: Proctored Testing.....	6
Test of Observation and Recall	6
Writing Exercise	6
Phase 3: Basic Qualification Review	7
Phase 4: Structured Panel Interview	7
Phase 5: Additional Screening Post-Conditional Offer Letter	8
Drug Testing.....	8
Medical Examination	8
Psychological Evaluation.....	8
Polygraph Examination	9
Background Investigation	9
Final Hiring Decision.....	9
Section II: Testing Logistics.....	10
Basic Testing Rules.....	11
Section III: Test Taking Tips.....	12
Section IV: Test Overview	13
Proctored Testing	13
Test of Observation & Recall.....	13
Writing Exercise	14
Structured Panel Interview	15
Final Notes	16
Appendix A: Physical Task Assessment Scoring Tables.....	17



Introduction



Purpose of the Guide

The purpose of this guide is to help you prepare for the Special Agent selection process with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). This guide will familiarize you with several phases of the selection process, including proctored testing consisting of the Test of Observation and Recall, the Writing Exercise, and the Structured Panel Interview. This guide will give you an opportunity to review some test question examples and provide you with an overview of assessments. If you do not have a lot of experience taking job selection tests, this guide will help you prepare for the testing process by letting you see questions similar to those on the actual tests.

NOTE: This guide was created to prepare the applicant for testing; the vacancy announcement is the official document and applicants should review it closely. This guide is not a replacement for the vacancy announcement.

Organization of the Guide

This guide is organized into four sections. The first section provides an overview of each phase of the entry-level DEA Special Agent selection process. The remaining three sections provide helpful information and preparation materials including sample test questions.





Section I: Overview of the Selection Process

The mission of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) is to enforce the controlled substances laws and regulations of the United States and bring to the criminal and civil justice system of the United States, or any other competent jurisdiction, those organizations and principal members of organizations, involved in the growing, manufacturing, or distribution of controlled substances appearing in or destined for illicit traffic in the United States; and to recommend and support non-enforcement programs aimed at reducing the availability of illicit controlled substances on the domestic and international markets.

In carrying out its mission as the agency responsible for enforcing the controlled substances laws and regulations of the United States, the DEA's primary responsibilities include:

- Investigation and preparation for the prosecution of major violators of controlled substance laws operating at interstate and international levels.
- Investigation and preparation for prosecution of criminals and drug gangs who perpetrate violence in our communities and terrorize citizens through fear and intimidation.
- Management of a national drug intelligence program in cooperation with federal, state, local, and foreign officials to collect, analyze, and disseminate strategic and operational drug intelligence information.
- Seizure and forfeiture of assets derived from, traceable to, or intended to be used for illicit drug trafficking.
- Enforcement of the provisions of the Controlled Substances Act as they pertain to the manufacture, distribution, and dispensing of legally produced controlled substances.
- Coordination and cooperation with federal, state and local law enforcement officials on mutual drug enforcement efforts and enhancement of such efforts through exploitation of potential interstate and international investigations beyond local or limited federal jurisdictions and resources.
- Coordination and cooperation with federal, state, and local agencies, and with foreign governments, in programs designed to reduce the availability of illicit abuse-type drugs on the United States market through non-enforcement methods such as crop eradication, crop substitution, and training of foreign officials.
- Responsibility, under the policy guidance of the Secretary of State and U.S. Ambassadors, for all programs associated with drug law enforcement counterparts in foreign countries.
- Liaison with the United Nations, Interpol, and other organizations on matters relating to international drug control programs.

What It Takes to Be a Special Agent

The DEA is America's resolute force against the illegal drug trade. DEA Special Agents pursue the most notorious trafficking and terrorist organizations that threaten our communities. We apply unique training and skills – across the country and around the world – to fight drug trafficking.

Special Agent duties include:

- Gather and prepare evidence to help prosecute major violators of U.S. drug laws
- Partner with other law enforcement agencies to target violent drug offenders in local communities
- Arrest subjects and seize assets connected to illicit drug trafficking
- Work with officials in foreign countries to share intelligence and target international criminals



Test Preparation Guide

Are you ready to be part of an elite law enforcement group that operates at the cutting edge of criminal investigations? First, you must meet our high standards for joining. We need people who measure up physically and mentally to enforce our nation's drug laws and make a difference in our fight against drug trafficking. Special Agents also must be willing and able to handle and carry firearms, and willing to relocate anywhere in the U.S.

Our rigorous selection process can take up to 12 months or more, and includes the following steps:

- Initial Application
- Physical Task Assessment
- Proctored Testing
- Basic Qualification Review
- Structured Panel Interview
- Drug Test
- Medical Examination
- Polygraph Examination
- Full-field Background Investigation
- Final Hiring Decision

Navigating The Process

The first step in the selection process is to apply to a Special Agent job announcement on USAJOBS. DEA Special Agent job announcements are posted quarterly on USAJOBS. A valuable resource for applicants who have applied and are deemed basically qualified is the Special Agent Recruitment Coordinator. You can find the appropriate Special Agent Recruitment Coordinator for your nearest office by visiting the recruitment offices page on DEA.gov. Recruitment Coordinators are DEA Special Agents in charge of recruitment efforts, can provide information on the Special Agent position, and will guide you through all that you must know about the hiring process, including:

Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible to apply, you must meet the following criteria:

- Must be 21 years old, and no older than 36 years old at the time of appointment
- Hold U.S. citizenship
- Possess a valid U.S. driver's license
- Be willing to relocate anywhere in the U.S.
- Able to obtain and retain a Top Secret security clearance
- Be in excellent physical condition
- Be willing and able to carry and handle firearms



Test Preparation Guide

Physical/Medical Requirements

You must meet the following physical/medical qualifications:

- Sharp visual and hearing acuity
- Manual dexterity with comparatively free motion of your fingers, wrists, elbows, shoulders, hip, and knee
- Sufficiently intact and functioning arms, hands, legs, and feet (if unable to meet this standard, you can ask for a medical review process to determine your eligibility)
- Sufficient vision in each eye, with or without correction, with near vision (corrective lenses permitted) sufficient for reading printed material the size of typewritten characters
- No hearing loss, as measured by an audiometer, that exceeds 35 decibels at 1000, 2000, and 3000 Hz levels
- Emotional and mental stability that allow you to perform duties that are exacting and responsible and involve activities under trying conditions
- No physical condition that would cause you to be a hazard to yourself or others

Basic Qualification Requirements

To be basically qualified, you must possess one or more of the following:

- A bachelor's degree (GPA of 2.95 or higher), a master's or a J.D. or LL.B.;
- **OR** assisting in investigations of alleged or suspected violations of the law; researching, collecting and analyzing data from a variety of sources relating to investigations; writing reports of findings, results, or accomplishments for information or action relating to law enforcement activities and/or court cases;

You must possess all of the following competencies:

- Written and oral communication capabilities
- Attention to detail/memory
- Decision-making/judgment
- Interpersonal skills
- Integrity/honesty
- Flexibility
- Problem-solving
- Self-management
- Teamwork

The Selection Process

Depending on scheduling and applicant availability, our selection process may take 12 months or longer. If you're interested in becoming a DEA Special Agent, contact your closest [DEA Special Agent Recruitment Coordinator](#) to find out how to apply. You can view the latest Special Agent (Criminal Investigator) job announcement on USAJOBS.gov. Special Agent job announcements are posted quarterly on USAJOBS. Since there is a cap on how many applications will be accepted, it is recommended that you apply the first day the announcement opens if you are interested.

DEA Special Agents are hired at the GS-7, GS-9, or GS-11 level, depending on education and experience. The salary includes federal Law Enforcement Officer base pay plus a locality payment, depending on your duty station. In addition, 25% Law Enforcement Availability Pay (LEAP) will be added to your base and locality pay. After four years of service, Special Agents are eligible to progress to the GS-13 level and can earn substantially more per year. Visit the Office of Personnel Management's website for the latest on law enforcement salaries.



Test Preparation Guide

Initial Application

Congratulations! You are ready to begin the DEA Special Agent hiring process.

If your application is accepted, you will be required to complete additional selection testing which includes a physical task assessment, proctored testing, a basic qualification review, and an oral interview. You must successfully complete (pass) these assessments to be eligible to receive a conditional letter of employment and continue in the application process.

Current or former 1811s that graduated from a Criminal Investigator Training Program may be granted a Special Agent Transition Program (SATP) waiver. **Those applicants granted an SATP waiver will not need to complete the PTA or proctored testing.** Only the basic qualification review and an oral interview will need to be passed by SATP applicants to receive a conditional letter of employment.

The remainder of the process includes: a medical evaluation, urinalysis drug screening, polygraph examination, psychological assessment, background investigation, and final hiring decision. Applicants must successfully complete and pass all of the aforementioned screening processes to be considered for employment. Failure to successfully complete/pass any of the screening processes will result in the applicant being disqualified and removed from consideration. The DEA will not reimburse costs related to selection testing such as travel to and from the testing sites.

Phase 1: Physical Task Assessment

You must successfully complete and **pass** a Physical Task Assessment (PTA) in order to be eligible to continue in the selection process. The PTA provides the DEA with an indication of the applicant's present ability to successfully participate in strenuous physical activity required during Basic Agent Training (BAT). Applicants with superior physical training and conditioning and who are accustomed to a daily fitness regime are less subject to injury during BAT. The PTA is directly correlated to the physical tasks performed during BAT and include sit-ups, push-ups, and a 1.5-mile run. Applicants will complete their PTA in a nationwide testing center with a DEA partner. In these cases, there may be slight variations to the previously mentioned exercises. These variations would only apply to the testing process and would not alter the physical activity required during BAT. The number of opportunities and time you will have to take and pass the PTA will be communicated to you during the hiring process. You may also be required to take and pass another PTA prior to being hired.

The scoring tables for the PTA can be found in Appendix A.

You must be in excellent physical condition in order to pass the PTA. Therefore, it is highly recommended that you review the [DEA PTA Training Video](#) in order to properly prepare and successfully comply with the DEA Academy PTA requirements. This training video includes the 300-meter run that is administered during BAT but not administered during the hiring process. For a complete guide on preparing for the rigors of the DEA Academy, check out the [DEA Academy's Preparation Program Tool Kit](#).

If you pass your PTA, you will be invited to complete proctored testing.



Test Preparation Guide

Phase 2: Proctored Testing

Proctored testing will occur in a nationwide testing center with a DEA partner. Applicants will be administered two computer-based tests. The tests that comprise Phase 2 – Proctored Testing of the selection process are:

- Test of Observation and Recall
- Writing Exercise

Test of Observation and Recall

Applicants will watch a video showing a law enforcement scenario. After watching the video, they will be tested on their recall of the scenario. The questions require that applicants use careful inspection and focused thought about what information is important and what information is not. The questions do not focus on conclusions to be made from the scenario; rather, they focus on relevant or detailed facts.

The Test of Observation and Recall measures the following critical skills and abilities:

- Attention to Detail
- Memory

Writing Exercise

The Writing Exercise presents the applicant with a video-based scenario related to DEA work. The applicant will then be required to write a summary of the events and information presented in the scenario. Responses must be a minimum of 150 words and may not exceed 800 words.

The Written Exercise measures the following critical skills and abilities:

- Ability to communicate in writing
- Ability to attend to detail
- Ability to evaluate information



Test Preparation Guide

Phase 3: Basic Qualification Review

Applicants who successfully complete the PTA and Proctored Assessments will have their resume and supporting documents reviewed to determine whether they meet the minimum qualification and eligibility requirements of this position. The evaluation team may exclude an applicant from consideration if the applicant's self-ratings are higher than supported by the application materials. Errors or omissions may impact eligibility.

Phase 4: Structured Panel Interview

A Structured Panel Interview comprises the next level of the selection process. A panel of two raters will ask applicants a series of questions based on competencies identified as critical for entry-level Special Agents. The structured interview measures the following critical skills and abilities:

- Teamwork
- Problem Solving
- Decision Making/Judgment
- Flexibility
- Oral Communication
- Interpersonal Skills
- Self-Management

Your DEA Special Agent Recruiter or HR Representative will contact you to schedule your Structured Panel Interview once you pass the previous three phases. Actual test scores are not shared with the applicants. Only those applicants who receive a passing score on all of the aforementioned assessments will continue to the next stage of the selection process.



Test Preparation Guide

Phase 5: Additional Screening Post-Conditional Offer Letter

Once an applicant receives their conditional offer letter of employment, he or she will be asked to complete additional screenings. The order of these screenings may vary but are described in detail below. In order to be selected for employment as a DEA Special Agent, the applicant must successfully pass each of the following screenings. Please note that failure to pass or not showing up or being available for a scheduled appointment of these screenings will result in your application being closed.

Drug Testing

All applicants tentatively selected for this position will be required to submit to urinalysis to screen for illegal drug use prior to appointment. In addition, each individual tentatively selected for a position will be notified that appointment to the position will be contingent upon the receipt of a negative drug test result. Failure to meet the drug testing requirements is a disqualifying factor for the position of Special Agent with the DEA.

Medical Examination

DEA Special Agent applicants must pass a thorough Medical Examination to determine whether any medical issue (or condition) could potentially affect the applicant's ability to perform the functions of the Special Agent position. This medical review ensures that each applicant's situation is reviewed on an individual basis to determine that the applicant is physically and medically capable of handling the job requirements efficiently and without hazard to themselves or others. Failure to meet the medical requirements is a disqualifying factor for the position of Special Agent with the DEA.

The Medical Examination also ensures that applicants meet the Special Agent Vision Requirements and Hearing Requirements. To review these requirements, visit <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/classification-qualifications/general-schedule-qualification-standards/1800/criminal-investigation-series-1811/>.

Psychological Evaluation

You may be required to complete a psychological evaluation as part of the hiring process. DEA Special Agents risk exposure on the job to extremely stressful situations, harmful substances, and injury or death. Accordingly, the DEA uses licensed clinical psychologists to obtain professional expertise in the psychological assessment of applicants for the position of Special Agent. Psychological assessments are administered to evaluate applicants on the extent to which they possess personal characteristics, such as emotional stability and the ability to work under stress, in the degree required, to successfully perform as a DEA Special Agent.



Test Preparation Guide

Polygraph Examination

A polygraph is an examination process that uses a diagnostic instrument capable of measuring and recording a person's physiological reactions as the subject answers questions. Because physiological reactions can vary when subjects are telling the truth and when they are being deceptive, by comparing a person's reactions to different questions, a polygraph examiner can detect reactions that may indicate deceptive responses to specific questions. Various components of the U.S. Department of Justice use polygraph examinations, primarily for criminal, foreign counterintelligence and counterterrorism investigations, administrative investigations (internal affairs and misconduct), and pre-employment and personnel security screening.

Applicants will be contacted by the DEA Polygraph Unit to schedule a polygraph examination. The polygraph will check the truthfulness of all of your responses on a series of questions related to sensitive issues and/or topics of national security and suitability. Failure to comply with the instructions during the polygraph examination may result in discontinuation of applicant processing. Furthermore, DEA will not hire Special Agent applicants who receive a Countermeasures (CM), Significant Response (SR), or three No Opinion (NO) results on their DEA administered polygraph examination. Therefore, if you receive CM or SR results on your polygraph, you will not be eligible for hire in a DEA Special Agent position for a period of 3 years from the date of your polygraph examination. If you receive three NO results, you will not be eligible for hire in a DEA Special Agent position for a period of 2 years from the date of your last NO polygraph examination.

Background Investigation

A background investigation (BI) is a comprehensive investigation which provides information on personal history, education and work experience, personal and professional references, as well as other necessary information. Applicants are asked to submit information necessary to begin the BI in this stage of the selection process. The BI includes credit, arrest, and internal affairs checks (if applicable); interviews with associates, personal and business references, past employers and neighbors; and verification of educational achievements and employment history. DEA Special Agents are required to obtain a Top Secret security clearance. Derogatory information which surfaces during the BI may render the applicant ineligible for employment.

Final Hiring Decision

The Final Hiring Decision is made by a Special Agent Hiring Panel. The applicant's background information file, including polygraph results, drug statement, and psychological assessment report are reviewed at this time. Applicants who are approved for hire are made a final offer of employment and placed into an upcoming Basic Agent Training (BAT) class or placed on a waiting list for class assignment. Applicants who are disapproved for hiring are notified in writing that their file has been closed.



Section II: Testing Logistics

In this section, you will find answers to most of your questions regarding logistical information and basic testing procedures for each phase of proctored testing.

When and Where Testing Occurs

The proctored testing and panel interview are to be completed in person at a designated test site. Applicants will complete their proctored tests in a nationwide testing center with a DEA partner. To schedule, reschedule, or cancel an appointment with a testing center, follow the instructions provided by the DEA partner. Special Agent Recruitment Coordinators or HR Representatives will coordinate the structured panel interview and inform applicants of the date, time, and location of the testing sessions. Applicants may be asked to attend an expedited one-day test session or multiple test sessions. An applicant must successfully pass testing in order to continue in the process.

Scheduling for Testing

Applicants will be given advanced notice of scheduled testing dates, times, and locations. Testing sessions will only be rescheduled under exceptional circumstances. Applicants with a scheduling conflict should immediately notify the Special Agent Recruitment Coordinator in the Field Division office where they applied. For proctored testing scheduled in the nationwide testing center, the applicant must follow the steps in the scheduling email to reschedule or cancel the testing appointment. Failure to show up for a scheduled testing session without prior notice may render the applicant ineligible for employment.

What to Bring to the Test Session

Applicants must bring a driver's license at each testing session. If your driver's license does not have a photo, you must provide an additional form of photo identification. Applicants are not permitted to participate in the testing process without proper photo identification.

What NOT to Bring to the Test Session

- Reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, textbooks, etc.)
- Pens and/or pencils (these will be provided)
- Reading materials (e.g., books, magazines, newspapers, etc.)
- Work-related materials
- Briefcases or bags (e.g., backpacks, suitcases, etc.)
- Papers (e.g., resumes, notification letters, notes, blank paper, etc.)
- Cellular phones, smart watches, pagers, beepers, etc. (alarms on watches must be turned off)
- For test security purposes, electronics should be turned off and held by the test administrator.
- Other electronic devices (e.g., mp3s, iPods, iPads, calculators, tape recorders, cameras, video games, etc.)
- Firearms (e.g., if you are currently in a law enforcement position you may not bring your firearm into any testing facility)

What to Wear

- Proctored Testing – No specified attire
- Panel Interview – Business attire is recommended

How Long do the Tests Take to Complete

- Proctored Testing – Approximately two hours
- Panel Interview – Approximately one hour



Test Preparation Guide

Basic Testing Rules

- **Failure to Respond** – Applicants must promptly follow the instructions and schedule an appointment in a nationwide testing center after receiving the welcome email. Applicants must also promptly respond to Special Agent Recruitment Coordinators or HR Representatives who reach out to schedule a testing session. Failure to respond will result in closure of your applicant file.
- **Show Up** – Failure to show up for a scheduled testing session will result in closure of your applicant file.
- **Tardiness** – Please arrive on time. If you are late, you will not be permitted to participate in the testing process.
- **Eating/Drinking** – Eating and drinking are not allowed during testing
- **Smoking** – Neither smoking nor chewing tobacco will be permitted during testing.
- **Restroom Use** – You may use the restroom during administration of the tests but there is no option to pause the assessment, so use your time accordingly.
- **Electronic Device Use** – You are not permitted to use any form of electronic device (e.g., cell phone, smart watch, etc.) during the testing process.
- **Time Limits** – Time limits are strictly enforced. Each assessment is timed and will end once the time runs out.
- **Talking** – There will be no talking once testing has begun.
- **Cheating** – Any attempt to see another applicant's answers; obtain assistance verbally or in writing; or record, document, or otherwise retain/discuss the questions/answers to any tests and/or interviews is considered cheating. Those caught cheating are discontinued from further consideration for the Special Agent position.
- **Discussing the Tests** – Applicants are not permitted to discuss any part of the tests and interview questions with anyone during or after the testing process. This ensures other potential applicants are not given an unfair advantage or disadvantage in the selection process. Applicants are required to sign a nondisclosure form. If an applicant is found to have violated this agreement, he or she will be disqualified.
- **Leaving the Premises** – Applicants are not permitted to leave the testing premises during testing. The breaks between tests will be short in length.
- **Reasonable Accommodations** – An opportunity to submit a request for reasonable accommodations will be provided during the scheduling process. Applicants must submit requests prior to scheduling a testing appointment.



Section III: Test Taking Tips

- You will do your best on the test if you stay calm and relaxed.
- Pay careful attention to all directions before beginning.
- For each question, read the entire question and all response options carefully before deciding upon an answer.
- If you do not know the answer to a question, eliminate the response options that you know to be incorrect or probably incorrect and then guess from the remaining response options.
- Your score is based only on the number of questions you answer correctly. You are not penalized for answering questions incorrectly. Therefore, you should answer every question, even questions that you must guess.
- Be sure that you mark your answer correctly.
- Ignore any patterns of A's, B's, C's, or D's on your answers. These correct answer positions are chosen randomly and there is no way to improve your chances by guessing based on an answer pattern.



Section IV: Test Overview

Proctored Testing

TEST OF OBSERVATION & RECALL

The ability to observe and correctly recall details is a critical competency for successful performance in the Special Agent job. Correctly remembering information is essential for decision-making and problem-solving, activities that prevail on the job. Special Agents must be able to extract relevant details from complex environments. The Test of Observation and Recall is designed to select applicants who will be able to handle the very demanding investigative work, including complex tasks such as surveillance on the job.

The questions are designed to assess your ability to understand the important elements of an action-filled scenario and to correctly recall details from it. The kind of details asked in these questions is different from ordinary situations in which recall involves a general summary of the plot. Rather, it is the kind of recall that is required with complex material when some action with the information may later be necessary.

The test format asks the applicant to recall details based on a law enforcement scenario presented in a video. The details are based on different aspects of the scenario. Therefore, answering requires careful inspection and focused thought about what information is relevant and what information is not. You will be provided with a means to take notes on what you observe and will be able to use your notes when answering the questions.

The following information will give you some suggestions about how to approach the questions and some information about how you can develop your recall skills.

- Every question on the test is drawn from a video-based fictional scenario that depicts an aspect of Special Agent work. There may be details in the video that may not actually apply to the daily aspect of Special Agent work. In answering the questions, it is important that you accept every fact in the scenario as true. Remember that you are not being judged on your knowledge of law enforcement, but rather on your ability to correctly observe and recall details on the basis of a given set of facts.
- You should be actively engaged in the video for the duration of the video. Your eyes should not leave the screen while taking notes, so you do not miss any details.
- Not all information on the test is of the same type. There can be information about events or there can be information about categories of things. Information can also be positive or negative. Usually, information is positive (for example, the tire tracks were made by a truck), but information that something is NOT the case is also useful (for example, the tire tracks were not made by a light-weight truck).
- There is no penalty for guessing on this test; therefore, you should answer every question. If you guess blindly, you have one chance in four of getting the right answer. However, your chance of choosing the right answer just by guessing is greatly improved by using a little mental detective work to eliminate one or more response options that are probably or certainly wrong.



Test Preparation Guide

WRITING EXERCISE

In the Writing Exercise, applicants are asked to write an accurate, well-organized summary of the events and information presented in a video-based scenario. The Writing Exercise does not require any prior knowledge of law enforcement.

At the start of the exercise, applicants are presented a video that depicts a scenario related to DEA work. Applicants have 45 minutes to complete the Writing Exercise. Applicants will complete their proctored tests in a nationwide testing center with a DEA partner on a computer where they will type their responses.

The Writing Exercise measures the following critical skills and abilities:

- Ability to communicate in writing
- Ability to attend to detail
- Ability to evaluate information

Tips for the Writing Exercise

- Read the instructions carefully. Make sure you understand what the exercise requires.
- The notes you took for the Test of Observation and Recall are not relevant for the Writing Exercise. These are separate assessments.
- Do not use bullets, numbering, or other formatting. Write in a conventional paragraph structure with appropriate transitions.
- You will be given a white board to take notes. However, any material written on the white board is not admissible for scoring. Only what is typed on the computer will be scored as the Writing Exercise submission.
- You should ask the proctor any questions before the video begins. Once the video begins, you will not be allowed to ask any questions. Proctors are not allowed to explain the meaning of any questions.
- This test measures your writing ability, so ensure your response reflects your individual style of writing, not a list of copied facts.
- This is a test for DEA Special Agent selection that assesses writing. Use correct spelling, grammar, punctuation, etc. with consistent use of tenses and person. It is recommended that you proofread your work thoroughly.



Structured Panel Interview

DEA uses a structured panel interview procedure to ensure reliability, validity, fairness, and practicality by: (1) asking the same job-related questions of all applicants; (2) rating all applicants according to the same standards or benchmarks (behavioral examples); and (3) having multiple independent interviewers reach agreement about each applicant's interview score.

The structured panel interview is based upon the well-researched premise that past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior. By asking applicants for specific examples of how they acted or reacted in the past, valid and reliable predictions of future behavior can be made. The panel interview is structured in the same manner for all applicants to ensure the information used to make a final selection decision is both based on the behaviors important for job success and comparable across individual applicants.

In the structured interview for entry-level Special Agent applicants, past achievements and behaviors are requested from the applicant for six standard questions and follow a standard format. The interview is administered by a panel of two Special Agents and takes approximately one hour. The two Special Agent evaluators have been trained thoroughly on how to rate applicants' performance using standardized scoring criteria.

Tips for the Structured Interview

- Be yourself.
- The evaluators will be taking notes during the interview to assist them in documenting the results. Do not let this distract you.
- Provide detailed information when answering the interview questions. Do not be modest in your responses. To provide the best examples of your skills and abilities, draw from all of your life's experiences (not just the most recent ones). Experiences can be from work, volunteer work, school, family, or social situations.
- Do not make assumptions about what the evaluators are seeking. The interview instructions are straightforward. There are no "trick" questions.

What to Expect at the Structured Interview

- When you arrive for testing, you will be checked in and asked to provide your driver's license. If your driver's license does not have a photo, you must have an additional form of photo identification.
- At the beginning of the interview, the following directions will be read to you:
"We'd like to spend some time getting to know more about you. During this time, we will be asking you questions about your past experiences and qualifications and how you have dealt with various situations. The written instructions we provided to you explain the process we will follow."
- Your interview will begin once the instructions have been read to you. The panel members will rotate asking questions. If you cannot think of an answer to a question, the interviewer will suggest that they move onto the next question and return later to the question that could not be answered. You will not be penalized for this. If, however, you fail to answer one or more questions during the interview, this may adversely affect your score.



Test Preparation Guide

- The evaluators are trained to keep the interview moving and complete it within 60 minutes. Remember to keep your answers concise and specific – answers that are too lengthy will detract from your ability to complete the interview. However, provide sufficient detail to receive full credit for your answer.

Final Notes

DEA Special Agents play a vital role in accomplishing the mission of the DEA. The screening is rigorous and can take a long time to complete. Your cooperation and patience are appreciated as you move through the process.



Appendix A: Physical Task Assessment Scoring Tables

Below are the scoring tables for the Physical Task Assessment (PTA). The 300 Meter Run is not administered during the hiring process, but included as a reference below for Basic Agent Training (BAT). During the hiring process, the point value associated with the 1.5 Mile Run is doubled. For example, a score of 2 is doubled to 4 in calculating the overall score.

Effective for the Special Agent job announcement released in July 2026:

An SAA must meet the following criteria to pass the PTA in the hiring process:

- A minimal score of 12
- The events are:
 - Sit-ups
 - Push-ups
 - 1.5-mile run-(points are doubled)
 - **300-meter sprint will not be used**
- Must score at least a 1 in each category
- May NOT have any negative scores; a negative score in any event is a failure

Effective for the Special Agent job announcement released in July 2026, hiring process PTA standards require a minimum score of 12 points. Applicants processing under announcements prior to July 2026 may have a different scoring standard for the initial PTA associated with the announcement in which they applied.



Test Preparation Guide

Sit-ups

MALE		FEMALE	
Sit-Ups Completed	Points	Sit-Ups Completed	Points
31 and below	-2	29 and below	-2
32 - 37	0	30 - 34	0
38	1	35 - 36	1
39 - 42	2	37 - 40	2
43 - 44	3	41 - 42	3
45 - 47	4	43 - 46	4
48 - 49	5	47 - 48	5
50 - 51	6	49 - 50	6
52 - 53	7	51 - 52	7
54 - 55	8	53 - 54	8
56 - 57	9	55 - 56	9
58 and over	10	57 and over	10
Maximum Sit-Ups in One (1) Minute			

Push-Ups

MALE		FEMALE	
Push-Ups Completed	Points	Push-Ups Completed	Points
19 and below	-2	4 and below	-2
20 - 29	0	5 - 13	0
30 - 32	1	14 - 18	1
33 - 39	2	19 - 21	2
40 - 43	3	22 - 26	3
44 - 49	4	27 - 29	4
50 - 53	5	30 - 32	5
54 - 56	6	33 - 35	6
57 - 60	7	36 - 38	7
61 - 64	8	39 - 41	8
65 - 70	9	42 - 44	9
71 and over	10	45 and over	10



Test Preparation Guide

1.5 Mile Run (points are doubled in calculating total score during hiring process only)

MALE		FEMALE	
1.5 Mile Run Time	Points	1.5 Mile Run Time	Points
13:30 and over	-2	15:00 and over	-2
13:29 - 12:25	0	14:59 - 14:00	0
12:24 - 12:15	1	13:59 - 13:35	1
12:14 - 11:35	2	13:34 - 13:00	2
11:34 - 11:10	3	12:59 - 12:30	3
11:09 - 10:35	4	12:29 - 11:57	4
10:34 - 10:15	5	11:56 - 11:35	5
10:14 - 9:55	6	11:34 - 11:15	6
9:54 - 9:35	7	11:14 - 11:06	7
9:34 - 9:20	8	11:05 - 10:45	8
9:19 - 9:00	9	10:44 - 10:35	9
8:59 and below	10	10:34 and below	10

300 Meter Run (only administered at BAT)

MALE		FEMALE	
300 Meter Sprint Time	Points	300 Meter Sprint Time	Points
55.1 and over	-2	67.5 and over	-2
55.0 - 52.5	0	67.4 - 65.0	0
52.4 - 51.1	1	64.9 - 62.5	1
51.0 - 49.5	2	62.4 - 60.0	2
49.5 - 48.0	3	59.9 - 57.5	3
47.9 - 46.1	4	57.4 - 56.0	4
46.0 - 45.0	5	55.9 - 54.0	5
44.9 - 44.0	6	53.9 - 53.0	6
43.9 - 43.0	7	52.9 - 52.0	7
42.9 - 42.0	8	51.9 - 51.0	8
41.9 - 41.0	9	50.9 - 50.0	9
40.9 and below	10	49.9 and below	10