

How Do I Prepare for an Exam?

Introduction

This guide is intended to help you prepare for employment examinations to become eligible for positions with the California Department of Social Services (CDSS). The resources provided are suggestions only and do not guarantee success. In many cases, your readiness for a particular type of work is dependent upon a long-term cumulative learning process, from work and educational experiences. However, taking the time to review information and/or to participate in a variety of learning activities may help improve your performance in the examination, and most importantly – help you enhance your abilities to perform in current and future positions.

Review the examination bulletin closely

- The Exam Bulletin describes the position in general, including the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that are important for success in the position. These KSAs on the bulletin provide excellent guidance regarding how to prepare. The bulletin also tells you about the exam format (interview, paper/pencil, etc.).

Learn about the CDSS mission, programs, and structure:

- CDSS Intranet Home Page <http://www.dss.ca.gov/cdss/>
- CDSS Internet - External Page <http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/cdssweb/default.htm>

Read important Department policies

- *FAST*: Equal Employment Opportunity Section <http://www.dss.ca.gov/cdss/pmd/fast/eeo.asp> includes the EEO, Age Discrimination, Zero Tolerance & Reasonable Accommodation policies in addition to other related information.
- CDSS General Policies: <http://www.dss.ca.gov/cdss/policies/genpolicies.html>
- Online training regarding the Prevention of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace: <http://training.newmedialearning.com/psh/cdss/>
- Employee Assistance Program (EAP) <http://www.dss.ca.gov/cdss/pmd/fast/eap.asp>

Learn about the job expectations

- Speak to people you know who have worked in that classification. Ask them to describe the work and the skill requirements of the job. Note: In most cases, exam candidates are prohibited from discussing the actual exam content or format.
- For management and supervisory positions, look at the performance appraisal forms used to evaluate the performance of first-line, mid-level, or upper-level managers. This will help prepare you for the expectations of managers in CDSS and the types of activities you will perform. The forms are located at: <http://www.dss.ca.gov/cdss/hrsb/training/default.asp?id=88>. Other helpful sites for supervisory and management exams include:
 - Mid-Level Management Academy (reading list and tips & tools) <http://www.dss.ca.gov/cdss/pmd/midlevel.htm>
 - *FAST*: Fast Access to Supervisory Tools was developed to give supervisors the information, policies, and forms they frequently need. Spend time reviewing the entire website to get familiar with the responsibilities of a supervisor. <http://www.dss.ca.gov/cdss/pmd/fast/>
 - CDSS Leadership Forum <http://www.dss.ca.gov/cdss/leader/default.asp?id>
Click on “Past Forums” for program materials and resources
 - Human Resource Services Branch website. This site is another source of great information for supervisors. <http://www.dss.ca.gov/cdss/hrsb/>
 - State of California Supervisor’s Handbook: A Guide to Employee Conduct and Discipline: http://www.dpa.ca.gov/general/Supervisors_Handbook.pdf
 - *FAST*: Recruitment & Hiring Section – Behavior-based interview questions: <http://www.dss.ca.gov/cdss/pmd/fast/pdf/recruitment/BEHAVIORFINAL.pdf>
 - Complete the CDSS Assessment Program - “So, You Want to be a Supervisor!?!” This on-line development tool allows you to evaluate if supervision is for you right now and helps you build a development plan. <http://www.dss.ca.gov/cdss/hrsb/training/default.asp?id=95>
 - Review *FAST*: Employee Performance & Development <http://www.dss.ca.gov/cdss/pmd/fast/empDev.asp>

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Other tips and tools

- The Training & Development website has links to outside training vendors, which will show their schedule of classes and descriptions.
<http://www.dss.ca.gov/cdss/hrsb/training/default.asp?id=99>
- You will also find descriptions of CDSS workshops offered at no or low cost.
<http://www.dss.ca.gov/cdss/hrsb/training/default.asp?id=100>
- For assistance in identifying which workshops or classes would be most appropriate for your situation, call (916) 657-2016 or SDO@dss.ca.gov.
- The Training & Development Group has a resource library of books, videos, and helpful handouts in Room 1588 at 744 P Street in Sacramento. Come browse or make an appointment for assistance. If you are out stationed, we can send materials to you. Contact us at SDO@dss.ca.gov or 916-657-2016. Be sure to search for resources that point to the knowledge, skills, and abilities mentioned in the exam bulletin.
- State Personnel Board – Jobs and Employment Information:
<http://www.spb.ca.gov/employment/>
- To improve your job interview skills:
 - See “Interview Tips” document (attached)
 - CollegeGrad.com -- Interviewing Information
<http://www.collegegrad.com/intv/>
 - Monster.Com -- Interview Center
<http://interview.monster.com/archives/tips/>
 - US Department of Labor – Job Interview Tips
<http://www.bls.gov/oco/oco20045.htm>
 - CollegeRecruiter.Com – 16 Job Interview Tips
<http://www.collegerecruiter.com/pages/articles/article35.htm>

Note: See the next page for more interview tips...

Best of luck with the exam!

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Interview Tips

Adapted from: *Winning Job Offers Through Successful Interviewing*
(Scully Career Associates, Inc.)

Always a Good Idea!

- Know your strengths and what you bring to the specific classification
- Understand your personality and relational style
- Constantly work on presenting yourself professionally, your demeanor and skills

Preparing for the Interview

1. Read the exam bulletin announcement carefully; specifically the knowledge, skills, and abilities section (KSAs)
2. Review what is on the web or in the Training and Development library related to the KSAs
3. Talk to others who may have taken a similar exam
4. Find an “exam partner” to study with and share resources
5. PRACTICE: Pair up with someone else preparing for the exam and do practice interviews

Develop Your “Ten Key Competencies” List

- Anticipate the ten most likely questions they will ask based upon KSAs
- Consider the skills they are looking for, qualities or traits they will want, and critical knowledge or experience
- Develop ten performance-based stories explaining your abilities in the ten key competency areas; stories compiled with performance - ACTION, detailed out, short: get to essence and the result

Common Interviewing Mistakes

- Being vague or unfocused
- Little practice with interviewing
- No idea how you are coming across
- Poor personal appearance
- Overbearing or desperate
- Lack of confidence
- Lack of tack and/or maturity
- Not answering the question

The “Day Before” Checklist

- Practice your stories several more times
- Get directions and be sure you know how to get there to be on time
- Make sure you have reliable transportation
- Plan to leave early
- Say positive things to yourself
- Get a good night’s rest
- Plan to eat breakfast

During the Interview

- Don’t be afraid to stop, pause, think if you get nervous or need time to formulate an answer
- Ask for the question to be repeated if you think you’ve forgotten something or just need to hear it again
- Answer each question completely, but do not just fill air time - be complete, concise