

Frequently Asked Questions

Police Promotional Exam to be Administered September 23, 2023

Sergeant, Lieutenant and Captain titles

*These FAQs will be updated as HRD receives questions about the exam. Please check back for updates.
Last update: June 16, 2023*

Which police promotional exams are being administered on September 23?

On September 23, HRD will readminister the September 17, 2022, and administer the annual 2023 written exams for the following titles:

- Captain
- Lieutenant
- Sergeant

Additionally, HRD will readminister the Brookline September 17, 2022, written exam for the following titles:

- Lieutenant
- Sergeant

Why has the exam changed this year?

On October 27, 2022, Judge Douglas Wilkins issued a decision in the *Tatum v. Commonwealth of Massachusetts* lawsuit that impacted the public safety exams administered by the Commonwealth's Human Resources Division (HRD). The judge explicitly found that many of the foundational aspects of HRD's test development operations were flawed. The decision cited numerous items, but the three main critiques include:

- How frequently HRD has updated its "job analysis" of different job titles
- HRD's heavy reliance on technical knowledge multiple choice questions for its exams
- The scoring of its exams, including weighting of different components

Additionally, the judge ruled that exam content needs to be changed by reducing the cognitive load of the questions, testing on topics important to the job, and introducing scenarios that evaluate a candidate's "soft" skills, supervisory skills, or judgment.

What is changing with the new promotional exams for police sergeant, lieutenant and captain?

Historically, HRD issued multiple-choice promotional exams that consisted only of technical knowledge questions that were based upon policies and procedures found in reading list materials and also included an education and experience component.

The new test written exam, will consist of two components, along with education and experience information provided by the candidates.

The two components of the written exam are included below:

- Approximately 70 technical knowledge (TK), multiple choice questions
- Approximately 20 situational judgment test (SJT) scenarios

The education and experience section will also be updated. The education and experience (E&E) application will be available to candidates through an on-line portal and provide credit to candidates who document their experience. More information will be forthcoming.

What are technical knowledge questions?

Technical knowledge (TK) questions are the traditional type of questions utilized in past exams administered by HRD. They consist of multiple-choice questions that test candidates' knowledge of information related to effective policing and are related to [reading list materials](#) made available to candidates.

What is situational judgment testing?

Situational judgment test (SJT) questions present test takers with a description of a critical work situation or problem related to the position they are applying for and ask them to identify how they would respond in the situation. The SJT questions value the candidate's behavior and skill using hypothetical situations based on real-life, work-based situations. The questions do not utilize any city- or town-specific policies or procedures, but present generic situations applicable to all civil service communities across Massachusetts to assess a candidate's judgment when presented with a scenario.

SJT's evaluate critical-thinking, judgment, and decision-making skills. They measure some inherent characteristics of an individual, but also capture an individuals' general and job-specific knowledge and abilities.

SJT's measure the effectiveness of skills such as:

- Interpersonal skills (including Conflict Management)
- Judgment and Decision Making
- Accountability
- Adaptability
- Guiding and Developing Others
- Leadership (including Managing Activities and Building Teams)

The format of the SJTs presents a scenario that should feel familiar to test takers, similar to something they may have encountered on the job. Each scenario asks test takers several questions based upon the situation. They rate possible responses to questions such as:

- Which response is the best answer among several options?
- What would you be most likely or least likely to do to deal with the described situation effectively?

SJT questions are known in the testing field to be particularly effective at measuring supervisory and leadership skills. Studies have shown that SJT's are more valid and have less adverse impact on test takers who are not part of the predominant social group when compared to exams that are solely based on technical knowledge questions.

What is the Education and Experience (E&E) section of the exam?

The E&E section of the exam will look familiar to test takers who have taken previous promotional exams. The E&E section will be available for candidates to complete in HRD's on-line application portal from September 1 to September 30. Candidates will receive an email from HRD with instructions on when and how to complete the E&E section of the exam.

Who was involved in creating the new exam?

The exams were created by HRD's testing vendor, Talogy; HRD test development staff; and numerous subject matter experts (SMEs) from civil service police communities.

HRD utilized SMEs who represented the diverse size and geography of police departments (large, medium, small; urban, suburban, rural), in addition to the diverse population of the departments which includes gender, length of service, and race/ethnicity among police officers.

How will the new exam be graded?

For each title, the total score will be comprised of the three different exam components, which together constitute 100% of the score. Exam components are weighted differently for the different titles, reflecting the fact that supervisory and leadership skills become more important as a candidate progresses through the ranks.

The sergeant exam will have the following weights for the different sections of the exam:

- Technical knowledge test questions, written exam: 56%
- Situational judgment test questions, written exam: 24%
- Education and experience: 20%

The lieutenant exam will have the following weights for the different sections of the exam:

- Technical knowledge test questions, written exam: 52%
- Situational judgment test questions, written exam: 28%
- Education and experience: 20%

The captain exam will have the following weights:

- Technical knowledge test questions, written exam: 48%
- Situational judgment test questions, written exam: 32%
- Education and experience: 20%

How should test takers study for the SJT?

Candidates will be able access a test preparation guide through the test-taker portal. The prep guide is slated to be available in early July to registered test takers. Candidates will receive an email with information on how to access the preparation guide.

When and where is the new test being administered?

The test is being administered on September 23, 2023, in various locations including Milton, Woburn, Framingham, Dedham, Newton, Worcester and Springfield. Candidates will receive an email notification that they have been assigned either a morning or an afternoon testing session.

What steps happen after the exam is administered?

After the exam is administered, candidates have until September 30, 2023, to complete their Education & Experience (E&E) submissions.

Candidates may file fair test or multiple-choice appeals within seven days after exam administration, or until 11:59 p.m. on September 30, 2023.

Candidates are sent their score notice approximately 60 days after exam administration.

Candidates have 17 days to appeal their E&E score after score notices are released.

The eligible list is established approximately 90 days after exam administration and is made available on HRD's website on the first or 15th of the month.