

Preparation Guide

*Homeland Security Investigations (HSI)
Criminal Investigator Pre-Hire Assessments*



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to help applicants prepare for the assessment phases of the Criminal Investigator Selection Process for Homeland Security Investigations (HSI).

Assessments are pre-hire tests and a structured interview used by HSI to identify the applicants who may be well-suited for the entry-level criminal investigator role.

This guide includes a high-level overview of the complete assessment process, including summaries of the first two phases of assessments and a general overview of the structured interview phase. Applicants must successfully complete all phases of the process for consideration.

****IMPORTANT NOTE: All communications associated with the criminal investigator hiring process will be sent via email to the email address the applicant has listed in his or her USAJOBS profile.**

**It is critical that applicants check their USAJOBS profile prior to applying to ensure their email address is correct and up-to-date.
Email addresses cannot be changed during the assessment process.**

Assessment Process Overview

The hiring process for entry-level criminal investigators requires applicants to complete and pass three phases of assessments. An overview is provided on this page; additional information is provided in the sections that follow.

Each USAJOBS posting specifies a general anticipated time frame during which interested applicants must complete any required assessments; a more precise time frame is stated in the invitation email applicants receive at the beginning of an assessment phase.

Failure to complete testing within this defined time frame will result in removal of the applicant from further consideration for the current criminal investigator job opportunity.

Phase I Assessments

The two assessments in Phase I can be taken at any time during the time frame specified in the invitation email and may be completed from any computer with reliable internet access. Applicants who earn passing results on both assessments will advance to Phase II.

Phase II Assessments

Phase II assessments are completed under the supervision of a proctor at an ICE-designated testing center. This proctored testing is by appointment only; applicants who advance to Phase II will be emailed detailed information about the scheduling process and completion timeframe. Applicants who pass Phase II will advance to Phase III.

Phase III Structured Interview

Applicants earning passing results on all Phase I and II assessments will be contacted by an interview coordinator from an ICE office to schedule and complete a structured interview. Applicants must respond to the coordinator within three business days.

Applicants will receive their overall pass/fail status via email after **all** phases of assessment have concluded.

The remainder of the sections in this guide provide additional detail about the assessments, the interview process, retesting rules, as well as sample assessment questions.

Phase I Assessments

The first phase of the criminal investigator application process requires completion of two pre-hire assessments. The tests in Phase I are completed independently (not under supervision), so they are referred to as “non-proctored” assessments.

As non-proctored tests, Phase I assessments can be completed on any computer with internet access. Applicants should take these assessments at a quiet location with reliable internet access that is free from distractions.

Phase I assessments are described in greater detail below.

Automated Writing Assessment (AWA)

Written Communication is a major component of the criminal investigator role; effective writing is the cornerstone of the ability to document accurately, report comprehensively, and appropriately communicate important messages.

The AWA asks applicants to compose a short essay (at least 150 words) in response to a broad (non-job-related) writing prompt; essays are evaluated on presentation/written flow, grammar, and completeness of response.

Applicants have 25 minutes to complete the AWA.

Situational Judgment Test (SJT)

Criminal investigators regularly work with teams of other agents and often need to adjust their approach in response to different situations. Difficulty making quick, effective decisions and adjusting behavior as appropriate to specific situations can have negative consequences.

The Situational Judgment Test (SJT) presents applicants with realistic, job-related scenarios, and several potential courses of action for each. Applicants are asked to review each scenario and indicate how effective they believe each suggested course of action might be.

A sample SJT question is provided in the Sample Questions section of this guide.

Applicants have 75 minutes to complete responses to the SJT scenarios.

Advancing to Phase II in the assessment process is contingent on an applicant completing and passing both Phase I assessments within the time frame specified in the invitation email.

Phase II Assessments

Applicants who earn passing results on both Phase I assessments will be invited to complete Phase II assessments.

The two assessments in Phase II are taken under the supervision of a test proctor in an ICE-designated testing center. (Testing center locations are only available in the U.S. and its territories). **Proctored assessments are administered by appointment only; applicants are responsible for self-scheduling appointments.** A link to access a self-scheduling system and set an appointment will be distributed to qualified applicants via email.

Phase II of the process includes two assessments, described in more detail below.

All Phase II assessments are completed during the same proctored testing appointment. From beginning to end, the Phase II proctored assessment process takes approximately 2.5-3 hours.

Writing Skills Test (WST)

Criminal investigators frequently write briefs, reports, and emails – these types of written communications are vital to success in the role.

The Writing Skills Test (WST) differs from the Phase I AWA in that this Phase II test asks each applicant to review questions and demonstrate an understanding of common rules related to written English (e.g., proper sentence construction, correct word usage).

Two sample WST questions are provided in the Sample Questions section of this guide.

Applicants have 60 minutes to complete the WST questions.

Logical Reasoning Assessment (LRA)

Criminal investigators often read and study laws, legal commentary, and regulations, and then must use sound reasoning skills to apply this information and make critical decisions (which may have broad-reaching implications).

The Logical Reasoning Assessment (LRA) in Phase II evaluates each applicant's ability to interpret materials that are provided and apply critical thinking skills to related factual situations.

Two sample LRA questions are provided in the Sample Questions section of this guide.

Applicants have 90 minutes to complete the LRA questions.

Advancing to Phase III in the assessment process is contingent on an applicant completing and passing Phase II assessments within the time frame specified in the invitation email.

Phase III Structured Interview

Applicants earning passing results on all Phase I and Phase II assessments will be referred for a structured interview. Applicants will be contacted by an interview coordinator to schedule an interview. All interviews will be conducted in a virtual environment, by a panel of experienced criminal investigators. The location of the panel with which applicants' interview is assigned randomly and is unlikely to be the location of employment, should a job offer be made.

The structured interview includes a series of standardized and scored questions and takes between 30 and 60 minutes.

Applicants who have passed all phases of assessment will be assigned a category rating, as described in the job announcement, based upon the results of their assessments.

Retesting and Reusing Results

Passing results from these assessments will be used to fill vacancies for this job opportunity and may be used for future similar job opportunities requiring these tests. Applicants who do not successfully pass the assessments will not be able to retake them for one (1) year from when they were most recently completed.

When changes have been made to the HSI Entry-Level Criminal Investigator pre-hire assessments and assessment process, it will be stated in the Job Opportunity Announcement (JOA) that all applicants are required to test on all assessments. In such cases, prior passing assessment results will not be reused, and applicants with prior failing results will be allowed to retest.

Sample Questions

Situational Judgment Test (SJT)

****NOTE:** The SJT question presented on this page is NOT an actual question on the test and is provided for informational purposes only. The sample question is intended to illustrate format and structure only and may not reflect the content or difficulty level of the actual assessment.

1. You are an HSI agent assigned to a unit that works closely with several other HSI groups. Your first-line supervisor recently asked you to write a report of evidence collected during your unit's most recent search and arrest case. You eagerly begin working on this assignment, but halfway through, a second-line supervisor from one of the other HSI groups requests your assistance. She asks you to help her agents complete a report of evidence for their investigation first because it is a higher profile case. You are aware of how important each of these assignments are and that both need your immediate attention.

Please rate the effectiveness of each option below in handling this situation using the following scale:

5 = Highly effective. An ideal response to the situation.

4 = Very effective. A good response to the situation, but one or more aspects of the response could have potentially been better.

3 = Moderately effective. A reasonable response to the situation, but the solution may be incomplete or have unintended consequences.

2 = Slightly effective. There is a positive element to the response, but it generally does not address the situation very well.

1 = Ineffective. This response does nothing to address the situation or could have negative consequences.

- A) Explain the importance of your unit's investigation to the second-line supervisor and decline the assignment, since you will not be able to make it a priority.
- B) Agree to shift your priorities, then explain the circumstances to your first-line supervisor.
- C) Express your interest in assisting with the new assignment but explain that you will need to speak with your first-line supervisor before committing to it.
- D) Explain to the second-line supervisor how important your unit's case is to you, and how you would prefer she asks another agent to assist.

Writing Skills Test (WST)

****NOTE:** The WST questions presented on this page are NOT actual questions on the test and are provided for informational purposes only. Sample questions are intended to illustrate format and structure only and may not reflect the content or difficulty level of the actual assessment.

1. Select the option that represents a change that should be made to correct the sentence.
If no correction is necessary, choose option E.

Ms. Reece was a primary suspect, and the fraudulent credit cards were eventually traced back to she and Mr. Hanes.

- A) Change she and Mr. Hanes to Mr. Hanes and she.
- B) Change she and Mr. Hanes to her and Mr. Hanes.
- C) Change she and Mr. Hanes to she and he.
- D) Change she and Mr. Hanes to her and he.
- E) No correction is necessary.

2. Select the correct sentence order to form a paragraph that is organized, clear, and coherent.
If no change to the sentence order is necessary, choose option E.

- (1) Smith was arrested the following day and charged with two counts of possession and distribution of child pornography.
- (2) Agents from the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) arrested John Smith earlier this week for crimes related to child pornography.
- (3) On August 19, ICE and FBI agents executed a search warrant at the home of John Smith, seizing a computer, pornographic publications, diskettes, and documents.
- (4) If convicted, Smith could receive up to 5 years in prison and/or be required to pay fines totaling up to \$100,000.

- A) 4—3—2—1
- B) 3—1—4—2
- C) 2—3—1—4
- D) 2—1—4—3
- E) No change to the paragraph order is necessary.

Logical Reasoning Assessment (LRA)

*****NOTE: The LRA questions presented on this page are NOT actual questions on the test and are provided for informational purposes only. Sample questions are intended to illustrate format and structure only and may not reflect the content or difficulty level of the actual assessment.***

1. If a 1977 immigrant from country Y had entered the United States at 40 years of age or younger, that person was certain to elect naturalized citizenship during the subsequent 16 years. Older immigrants from country Y were not likely to naturalize. Although naturalization rates have varied according to nationality, immigration status, and other conditions, it appears that age 40 represents about the last time in life when people from country Y willingly changed citizenship. In fact, 80 out of every 100 of all the 1977 immigrants did not naturalize over the 16-year period.

From the information given above, it can be validly concluded that, in 1977, a randomly selected immigrant from country Y:

- A) was under 40 years of age, with a probability higher than 80%.
 - B) elected naturalized citizenship, with a probability higher than 80%.
 - C) did not elect naturalized citizenship, with a probability of 50%.
 - D) was over 40 years of age when entering the United States, with a probability of at least 80%.
 - E) was over 40 years old, with a probability lower than 20%.
2. Special agents arrested eight suspects at various locations in Arlington, Virginia. Everyone who was apprehended was a known member of the XYZ gang, and several of them were armed with loaded handguns. Special agents also recovered a machete, which is known as a weapon of choice for XYZ gang members.

From the information given above, it can be validly concluded that, about these arrests,

- A) there were several unarmed people who were not arrested.
- B) no one armed with a loaded handgun was a known XYZ gang member.
- C) none of the known XYZ gang members were armed with handguns.
- D) some of the known XYZ gang members were armed with handguns.
- E) all of the XYZ gang members were armed with loaded handguns.

Virtual Interviewing Tips

Below are tips to help reduce applicant issues related to virtual interviewing.

Background

Find a location with a neutral background that will avoid anything distracting for the interviewers in the virtual meeting background.

Uncontrollable Distractions

Prepare as best you can for a time and location where interruptions will be at a minimum. Have a plan for how to handle unexpected disruptions efficiently.

Familiarize Yourself

Take time to familiarize yourself with the technology platform (Microsoft Teams) prior to the interview. An SI coordinator can plan a test call with you in advance.

Technology/Connectivity

Plan for an interview location that has reliable internet connectivity and test your audio and video on Microsoft Teams in advance. Work with your SI coordinator regarding any concerns you may have and how to remedy them.