

Test Preparation Tips

Test Anxiety

Some candidates express concern that they may not do well on the ministry's basic private investigator test because they have not written one before, have written few multiple-choice exams of any sort, or have not written any tests recently.

Test anxiety is an uneasiness or apprehension experienced before, during, or after a test because of concern, worry, or fear. Anxiety can be experienced either as worry or through physiological signs (e.g., rapid heart rate, sweating, shaky hands) or both. Almost everyone experiences some anxiety. It is important to know that you do not have to eliminate it entirely. Your goal should be to reduce test anxiety to a manageable level, so that you can focus on the task at hand.

Below are three general strategies for managing stress in our lives.

1. *Build a Support Network*

Social support has been shown to reduce people's stress levels. There is a lot of research to suggest that social support buffers the effect of stressors, which increases people's overall well-being (Viswesvaran, Sanchez & Fisher, 1999) but, an over reliance on this support at the expense of problem-focused strategies, such as actual studying, can impair test performance.

Your personal support network of family and friends are important to consider as you plan study strategies (e.g., managing schedules; creating distraction free time and space for study) as well as for emotional support.

Your professional network includes relations with your supervisor, mentors within the organization, colleagues, your work team as well as previous colleagues and organizational support services such as the training unit. Tap into those individuals whose area of expertise relates to your specific areas of study.

Create opportunities for both formal and informal learning, whether it's a study session offered by your service, a scheduled debriefing with a supervisor, or informal gatherings with other members preparing for exams. Sometimes just asking a question or explaining a problem to others can bring a solution into focus or provide the clarity you are looking for.

Although emotional support may be helpful, it is vital to focus on "problem-oriented" support when preparing for tests.

2. *Rest and relaxation*

Preparing to write a test requires considerable commitment, in particular with respect to time. A sustained level of hard work over a long period of time without relief can cause ill health and burnout. If we are short of sleep then our concentration, effectiveness and energy levels decline. Strive for balance!

When we are stressed and anxious we often find that thoughts keep running through our head making it difficult to get to sleep or stay asleep. If this is the case, ensure that you stop doing mentally demanding work several hours before going to bed – give your brain time to calm down before you try to sleep. Try reading a calming, undemanding book to tire your eyes and take your mind off the things that are worrying you. Should you find that your sleep is distracted by important thoughts or questions, write them down in a notebook (to be reviewed later) – get them on paper and put them out of your mind until it is time to deal with them!

3. *Exercise*

Doing frequent effective exercise is one of the best stress reduction techniques. There is evidence to support that physically fit people have less extreme physiological responses when under pressure than people who are not (B. Probert, 2003). Exercise not only improves your health and reduces stress caused by unfitness; it also relaxes muscles and helps you sleep. If you have a workout routine, do your best to maintain it. If you do not have a workout routine, consider starting one!

Study Tips

Identify Study Goals

Preparation for a test can be a significant task, but one that is much more manageable with an organized approach.

- Setting short and long term goals can help keep you on track and have been proven to improve results when specific and challenging (yet realistic) goals have been chosen.
- Try to set both a long term goal, one aimed at overall achievement, as well as short term goals which apply to daily / weekly / monthly objectives. This will help motivate as well as provide the smaller steps necessary to achieve the desired results.
- Break down your approach by topic (report writing, Canadian Legal System, *Private Security and Investigative Services Act, 2005*, surveillance, etc.).

- Set specific goals (i.e. I will read and understand topic x on Thursday from 1700 to 1900 hours).

Schedule Study Sessions

- Set aside specific times in order to study. Set yourself deadlines and stick to them in order to avoid last minute cramming.

Organize Study Material

- Keeping all study resources, texts, and supplies in one place will help you to maximize your study time.
- Maintaining a 'study kit' with the materials to be used will ensure that you are not searching for necessities when the time to study comes.

Choose a Good Study Place

- Choose a space that fits with your schedule and plan and that will be available to you whenever required.
- A space with sufficient room to work, free from distraction and interruption is ideal.
- Make sure you have good lighting, a comfortable chair, and agreeable temperature. When you have selected a good space, try to conduct all your studying there.

Take Good Notes

- Write clearly and legibly.
- Make summaries.
- Creating or using abbreviations and acronyms can aid you in recalling material, especially lists and processes.
- Keep separate points on separate lines and leave a wide margin in your notes for later questions and notations to yourself for follow-up research.

Review Regularly

An effective part of any study plan is to set aside time for review.

- Try to review your study materials on a regular basis, in order to keep the information fresh in your mind.

- Discuss the topics and content with others preparing to take the test or who have already taken the test. Being able to discuss the material with others is often a good benchmark of understanding and will make you feel more at ease when it is time to write the test.
- Try to relate what is being learned to actual job experiences and visualize how the information may help you in the future in your work.

Reward Yourself

Preparing for a test takes focus and commitment. At times it will be a challenge, so reward yourself when you feel you have accomplished one of your major tasks.

Writing the Test

Getting Ready to Write

Be ready

- Be sure to use all available strategies to help you succeed – visualization, logic, talking to yourself.
- Dress in layers so that you may remove or put on a layer according to comfort in the test location.

Be rested

- Give yourself a good rest buffer before the test. Make sure to get enough sleep.
- Try to do something to clear your mind so that you will be focused and able to concentrate fully on the test day.

Be fed

- Eat well before the test. Avoid fasting or taking stimulants you are not accustomed to (coffee, soft drinks, chocolate).

Be positive

- Approach the test with confidence.
- Stay away from others before the test, particularly those that may not have prepared properly. Anxiety can be contagious and you will do better focusing on what you know rather than what you do not.

Be on time

- Arriving early will help to alleviate any anxiety. Select a seat where you will feel comfortable (good lighting and minimal distraction).

During the Test

Be calm

- It is natural to be a bit nervous or stressed. You can channel this into positive energy.
- Try to take a couple of short mental breaks during the test. It is good to clear your head for a second and focus your eyes on a distant spot in order to refresh.
- If you find yourself experiencing a lot of anxiety close your eyes and take deep breaths.
- Small stretching exercises can also help – shoulder shrugs, leg stretches, neck rolls, etc).

Be systematic

- Before you begin the test, take a short glance through its entire contents.
- Try to budget your time, try to approximate how much time you should spend on each question.
- Read the instructions carefully.
- Answer questions you readily know the answer to.
- Do not struggle over questions that seem difficult – circle them and come back to them afterwards. Sometimes you will find that an answer will occur to you simply from being more relaxed after having successfully answered other questions.

Be focused

- Read the test question carefully, two or more times if required.
- Circle and underline important words or points.
- Eliminating obviously wrong answers can help you to focus on the correct one.

Be logical

- Change your answer only if you have a good reason for doing so.
- Do not be distracted by other individuals leaving the test before you – there are no prizes for finishing first. Use the time you are given.
- Do not expect to know everything on the test – you are likely to see some items that you are not prepared for.
- Leave yourself some time to review your work before leaving the test.

After the Test

- A good strategy is to make notes of any questions and areas that caused difficulty and to research them at a later time.
- Now that you've completed the test, it's a good idea to do something to reward yourself and to relax after all your hard work!

Summary/Conclusion

Given your work and life commitments, preparing to write the ministry's basic private investigator test is a huge endeavour. We hope that the variety of test preparation tips and strategies detailed in this guide assist you in accomplishing this undertaking, while minimizing test stress.

As many candidates have expressed, preparing and writing a test is a learning experience unto itself. We hope that the process of preparing for your basic security guard test serves you well.

References

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