DEVELOPMENT OF AN ESSAY-WRITING TEST FOR A LAW ENFORCEMENT JOB

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Objective

Establish a job-related, valid, and legally defensible writing sample essay test for initial selection as part of the interview process

PROBLEM AND SETTING

- New law enforcement personnel cannot write clear, well documented reports that can be used in court proceedings
- Writing is not taught to employees
- Job analysis study showed that Writing, Reading, and Reasoning Abilities are important, differentiating, and required at entry into the job
- There are many ways to evaluate writing ability; this is just one example.

Requirements

- Uniform Guidelines on Personnel Selection Procedures (43FR38290)
- 5 CFR 300A, Employment Practices, requires evidence of job-relatedness for initial selection and competitive promotions in Federal employment
- Meet professional standards

REVIEW/UPDATE THE TEST PLAN

- 14-member SME panel, GS 9 to SES, racially diverse with men and women was convened.

- SME panel was provided job analysis results.

- Different scenarios were discussed.

- SME panel decided applicants should be provided a set of data from which a report could be written and evaluated.

- Test Content would represent samples of job.

Test Plan

- SME panel developed, from actual investigative reports, a set of 15 short paragraphs of about 50 to 75 words each that describe people, things, places, and problems that could be used to write a summary investigative report.

- Names of people, places, things changed and additions made to be more meaningful.

- Material selected did not require knowledge that would be learned on the job.

Test Plan (Continued)

- Applicants would be provided set of paragraphs for 30 minutes and told they could take notes for writing report.

- Applicants would be provided two hours to write report.

- Writing exercise would be scheduled during interview.

- Completed essays would be sent to a central location for grading by a trained three-person panel.

Scoring

- Scoring criteria developed for facts presented on a 5-point scale for each of following (Reasoning):
  - WHO: Specific traffickers, significant persons
  - What: Methodology, type of drug distribution, modes of transportation
  - Where: Places of illicit activity, meeting places
  - When: Significant dates of activity, meetings
  - Why: Distribution of drugs, money laundering, other overt acts.

Scoring (Continued)

- Scoring criteria developed for organization of report (5 point scale)
- Scoring criteria developed for grammar and punctuation (5 point scale)
- Cut score established by SME panel based on level of presentation overall for the report based on summary of points

Instructions to Applicant

- Write a brief report in 2 to 3 pages describing the facts and inferred points of the investigation, including recommendations indicating what you would do in this case.

- Present the report however you think this report should be presented in order to support the facts in the situation described.

Instructions to Applicant (Continued)

- Present the report in some type of logical order.

- Give some thought to significant people in the case summary, the illicit activities, possible structure of the organization, and each significant person's role in the organization, and modes of transportation utilized by the organization.

- Be sure to distinguish between known facts and inferred points in your presentation.

Instructions to Applicant (Continued)

- Your report will be rated on the facts presented: who, what, where, when, and why and your grammatical usage and logical order of presentation.

- Your report also will be rated on your presentation of known facts and inferred points.

- Illegible handwriting will prevent us from rating your report.

Instructions to Applicant (Continued)

- All basic rules of writing will be applied and be considered in the overall evaluation, except for spelling which will not be rated.

- Remember, we will rate your report on key facts presented, logical order of events, and grammar and punctuation.

Results

- The essay test appears to sample effectively an important requirement of the job.

- The test should differentiate good and poorly prepared candidates.

- Skills tested are related to good or poor work performance.

- The test is job-related and built to have content validity.

Summary

- Hopefully, in the future most applicants will type their essays into a computer so that we can automatically analyze the results.

- Because of the small number of hires into this job, a criterion-related validation study probably will not be done.