County of Yuba  
Preparing for an Oral Examination

To assist you in your career development the following guidelines will provide you with a better understanding of the oral examination/interview process in the County of Yuba. The following will help you understand the function of the interviewing process, identify your qualifications and match them to the position you are applying for, formulate effective responses to interview questions, and practice and prepare for your interview. If you have any questions or concerns regarding oral interviews, qualification appraisal panels or the recruitment process please contact the Personnel Department.

Purpose of the Oral Examination Process:
An oral examination is an extension of the application process and is used to evaluate an applicant’s ability to successfully perform a job. The County of Yuba utilizes two types of structured oral examinations/interviews; a Qualifications Appraisal Panel and a Departmental Oral Interview. Qualifications Appraisal Panels are used to assist in establishing the employment list and departmental oral interviews are used as part of the hiring decision.

What is a Qualifications Appraisal Panel?
A Qualifications Appraisal Panel (QUAP) is an oral examination, a distinct and separate part of the recruitment/selection process, which occurs prior to the establishment of the employment list and ranking assignment. The panel is comprised of a small group of members which typically includes at least one subject matter expert and a chairperson. The chairperson serves as a neutral party to monitor the process and assure consistency throughout.

Function of a Qualifications Appraisal Panel:
The basic function of a QUAP is to identify the most qualified applicants by assessing each applicant’s knowledge, skills and abilities to perform the duties of the position for which he/she is being interviewed. The panel will pose a series of pre-determined questions and listens to and evaluates each applicant’s responses to these questions. Panel members take detailed notes of each response. Each question has a set of pre-determined criteria for evaluation. The rating criterion provides a structured procedure to score each applicant’s answers to the questions. All applicants are asked exactly the same questions in exactly the same order, though the panel is allowed to ask clarification questions based on the applicant’s response. A neutral chairperson is present to ensure that the test is administered and scored in a standardized way. The ratings of the QUAP panel are used in conjunction with other rating criteria (education/experience, supplemental questionnaires, test scores etc.) to determine the final ranking for each successful applicant on the employment list. Applicants who fail to demonstrate they possess the required knowledge, skills and abilities to perform the functions of the classification may be removed from the recruitment process by the QUAP results.

What is a Departmental Oral Interview?
A departmental oral interview is conducted after the employment list has been established. Individuals in the top five remaining ranks on the employment list will be invited to attend an interview conducted by the hiring department. This process may consist of a structured (panel) interview or a “fit” interview with the appointing/hiring authority.

Functions of a Departmental Oral Interview:
The departmental oral interview is an opportunity for the interviewer(s) to determine whether the knowledge, skills and abilities of the candidate correspond with those needed for successful performance in the specific position being filled, to gain information about the specific nature and depth of an candidate’s work experience and to determine the appropriate 'fit' to the position and the department in which it is being filled. The oral interview also provides the candidate the opportunity to demonstrate and discuss his/her individual background.
and qualifications as they relate to the position and to obtain further information about the nature and responsibilities of the job. As in the QUAP, all candidates are asked the same questions in the same order (although different questions from the QUAP), though the interviewer(s) are allowed to ask clarification questions based on the candidate’s response or the candidate’s unique experience.

**Difference between a Departmental Oral Interview and a Qualifications Appraisal Panel:**
A QUAP is a step within the recruitment process and is used in establishing the employment list. A QUAP may not always be utilized and will depend on the individual recruitment. A Departmental Oral Interview is the final step in the hiring process with the interviewing individual(s) making the hiring decision and will always be utilized.

**Function of a Second Departmental Interview:**
In some circumstances second departmental interviews are conducted as a means to narrow down the candidate field. A panel is used to provide a non-biased, structured initial interview of the qualified candidate pool to determine those most qualified for the specific position. These final names are referred to a second interview with the hiring authority.

Second interviews may also be used when the original interview has resulted in two or more candidates who appear equally qualified and additional inquiry is necessary to make a final selection.

**Preparing for a QUAP or Departmental Oral Interview:**
Although you may not know exactly what will be asked of you, how prepared you are for the interview is up to you. Adequate preparation will assist you in understanding the position you are applying for, presenting your qualifications in the most favorable light, and will help you feel more confident in general.

- Learn about County Government. A job is more than a fixed set of responsibilities; rather, it must be viewed within the context of the entire organization. Public sector organizations are often vastly different than private sector agencies and being familiar with the differences can make the transition to county employment smoother and easier to navigate. Taking the time to familiarize yourself with the County of Yuba and/or the specific Department will increase your understanding of the functions of the job and reflect well on you during the interview.
- Read the job announcement carefully. The job announcement may include a more specific description of the position that is being filled and will identify the department the position is being recruited for.
- Read the classification specification. The ‘class spec’ will include a description of the purpose of the classification and a list of the knowledge, skills and abilities that are required. This will help you to identify the subject areas that are likely to be represented in the interview.
- Assess your own knowledge, skills and abilities. Now that you have read the job announcement and class specification you should think about your own education and experience that provided you with these attributes, preparing you for the position. Experience and education you possess that match the duties, responsibilities and requirements of the position is ideal to highlight in the oral examination process. Develop a mental list of the work and volunteer experience, degrees, certificates and specific coursework you have completed and earned. Then take each item on your list and ask yourself “What did I learn from the experience? What problems did I encounter and how did I overcome them? What were the most complex tasks and projects I completed? And what was my contribution to the organization or class?” Answering these questions can help you identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities you have developed or enhanced that would help you perform the job.
- Practice answering questions verbally and/or giving a presentation in front of others. Candidates often find it helpful to simulate the environment that they will face at the oral examination.
**General Information for an Oral Examination:**

The areas on which you will be assessed during the interview depend on the level of the job you are applying for and the specific duties of the position. Interviews for entry-level positions typically focus more on general skill and ability areas than on job-specific knowledge areas that you would likely have to acquire through job experience. Interviews for, including but not limited to, journey-level, specialized or entry-level positions with unique duties typically focus more on situational questions and/or a candidate’s prior experience that may be related to the position. Interviews for supervisory, management or professional positions will typically focus on situational questions and attempt to determine a specific body of knowledge as it is related to the position. Though not all inclusive, here are some examples of areas on which you may be assessed:

- **Adaptability** – To readily adjust to changing circumstances and/or modify behavior appropriately to new or changing situations in order to reach an objective.
- **Customer Service Skills** – To meet the needs of internal and external customers/clientele in a manner that is professional, courteous, helpful, timely, responsive, proactive, accurate, and knowledgeable.
- **Dependability** – To attend work on time and as scheduled; to perform under minimal or intermittent supervision; and to maintain the confidentiality of information and materials where appropriate.
- **Initiative** – To take action independent from external influence when recognizing or anticipating potential problems and identifying, developing, and implementing solutions.
- **Interpersonal Communication Skills** – To establish and maintain effective working relationships with co-workers, supervisors, subordinates, customers, etc.
- **Office Skills** – To utilize job-related equipment (i.e. personal computer, fax machine etc.) and software programs (Microsoft Word, Excel, etc.).
- **Oral communication skills** – To explain information to individuals and understand oral information and instructions from individuals while communicating in person and/or by telephone.
- **Problem-Solving/Decision-Making Ability** – To analyze relevant information and to make logical and effective decisions that are in line with organizational objectives.
- **Work Skills** – To organize and prioritize a workload and to perform accurate and detailed work.
- **Leadership Skills** – To establish and maintain effective leadership roles with subordinates and effectively manage projects and/or people.

**Types of Questions Common to Structured Interviews:**

- **Open** interview questions provide an opportunity for the candidate to share general information about their specific qualities, and set the tone for the interview. This type of question is only asked at the department oral interview and generally serves as an ice-breaker. Examples include:
  - Tell me a bit about yourself.
  - What has been the biggest accomplishment in your career?
  - What motivates you?
  - What is your ideal working environment?
  - How would you describe the pace and style at which you work?
  - What are your strongest/weakest qualities?
  - Why are you the best person for the job?
  - Why do you want to work here?

- **Experience-based** interview questions inquire about the breadth and scope of your application of job related knowledge, skills and abilities. Examples include:
  - What office equipment have you used on the job and what kinds of routine tasks did you perform using this equipment?
  - Describe your experience classifying, cataloguing, reviewing, and evaluating books within a large-sized public library system.

- **Knowledge-based** interview questions ask you to demonstrate a level of familiarity with the terminology, practices, concepts and theories related to the career field in question. For example:
o What accounting practices would you use to ensure that budget reporting obligations are fulfilled?
o What are the most important factors for a Social Worker to consider when attempting to establish a working relationship with a client, and why?

- **Personal Perspective-based** interview questions ask you to relate your viewpoint or perspective regarding a job-related variable. For example:
  o Why do you think it would be important for a person to be able to function under minimal supervision?
  o What do you believe is the most important role for a consumer advocate in today’s marketplace, and why?

- **Behavior-based** interview questions require you to apply your knowledge, skills and abilities in a job-related situation. The two types of behavior-based interview questions are past behavior and situational. Examples include:
  o Tell me about a time when you provided exemplary customer service. What were the circumstances, what did you do and what were the results? (past behavior)
  o An important client arrives at the office and demands to see your supervisor without an appointment. How would you handle this? (situational)
  o Describe a decision you made that was unpopular and how you handled implementing it. (past behavior)
  o What do you do when your schedule is interrupted? Give an example of how you would handle it. (situational)
  o Have you had to convince a team to work on a project they were not thrilled about? How did you handle it? (past behavior)
  o If you disagree with your supervisor about a decision or practice, how would you handle it? (situational)

**STAR Method for Answering Behavioral Based Questions:**
Behavior based interview questions are an effective way of determining whether a candidate is qualified for the job, while at the same time increasing the objectivity of the interview process by focusing on job-related accomplishments. Past behavior questions, which ask how you have performed in a previous, job-related circumstance, are based on the premise that past behavior and performance are good indicators of future behavior and performance. Situational questions, which ask how you would perform in a job-related situation, are based on the premise that the behaviors that you say you would perform in a situation are the actual behaviors that you will perform in a similar situation.

Formulating effective responses to behavior-based interview questions that focus on past behaviors rests on being able to tell the interviewers a story that demonstrates the nature of the task or problem, the strategies you planned and implemented, and the results of your actions. As illustrated below, the STAR method of responding will help you to form effective responses to behavior-based questions.

- **Situation** – What occurred or what was the assignment? Clearly and concisely describe the situation so that the interviewers can place themselves in your place and understand the event, the circumstances surrounding the event, and the people involved.
- **Tactics** – What strategy did you develop to handle the situation? Tell the interviewers about the plan you created to handle the problem, making sure that it adequately accounts for the details in the situation you just described.
- **Action** – How did you implement your strategy? After describing your plan, tell the interviewers the specific actions you took to resolve the problem.
- **Results** – What was the outcome? Describe the results of your actions. Make sure to highlight the specific outcomes so the interviewers fully comprehend what you accomplished. If things did not turn
out as you planned, focus on the positive by telling the interviewers what you learned from the experience and what you would do differently the next time. This lets the interviewers know that you see mistakes or failures as opportunities for growth.

On the Day of the Interview:
- Get plenty of sleep the night before and eat a good breakfast/lunch.
- If you are not sure where the interview site is, take a drive to the site before the interview date.
- On the day of the interview, you should allocate at least two hours to spend at the interview site. Interviews occasionally run later than scheduled, so be prepared to stay if necessary.
- Plan to arrive at least 15 minutes before your scheduled interview and allow time for traffic, parking and check-in.
- Have proper identification as indicated on your invitation letter, as well as anything else you have been advised to bring.
- Typical dress for an interview is business attire. Where your attire falls within this range should depend on the job for which you are interviewing. Management positions will require more traditional attire, such as suits/ties/dresses, whereas entry level positions will require business attire such as slacks/skirts/collared shirts/blouses. Very casual dress, such as wearing t-shirts, jeans, shorts or flip-flops is not appropriate. You will want to minimize the use of cologne/perfume as some interviewers will be distracted or even allergic.
- Do not bring family or friends to the examination site.
- Bring an updated copy of your resume. You may also bring samples of your work product, letters of reference, copies of certificates and anything else you forgot to include in your application or has since been expanded and needs to be updated.
- After entering the interview site, inform the receptionist of your arrival. Be polite and professional as your treatment of this individual may be the first impression you give the organization. He/She will let the interview coordinator know you are waiting. While you wait to be called take a moment to center your thoughts and get comfortable. Now is a good time to take one last look at the class specification or any notes you have made of your experience and education and how they relate to the position you are interviewing for.
- Turn off any portable audio or video devices (cell phones, pagers etc.) prior to the start of the interview. Additionally, you should refrain from making or receiving any phone calls while you are waiting to be interviewed because this would disturb other candidates who are also waiting and/or being interviewed.

During the Interview:
- The interview itself can last anywhere from 15 minutes to 1 hour, or as indicated on your invitation letter. Candidates are given the same amount of time to interview, however some candidates may not use all of their allotted time. Whether or not you use all of the allotted time is not a reflection on your interviewing skills or how well the interview went!
- Offer a firm handshake and a pleasant smile when introducing yourself to the panel.
- If there is more than one interviewer, you should direct your responses to each, not just to the one who asked the question. Additionally, make eye contact with each member of the panel. Don’t focus on one member.
- The interviewer(s) will most likely be taking notes while you respond to a question. Don’t let this distract you.
- The interviewer(s) may ask you follow-up questions to obtain more information about your response.

After the Interview:
- Once the interview has concluded be sure and thank the interviewers for their time and offer each a firm handshake.
- Because the examination process is competitive, all examination content must remain confidential. You will not be able to take notes during the interview, and you must not discuss any of the content of the
interview with anyone. If you are found to have discussed content related to the interview, you will not only put yourself at a disadvantage by helping other candidates to score higher than you, but you may also be disqualified from participating in this and any future examination.

- Write a brief “thank you note.” This is a good occasion to thank the interviewer(s) for their time and the interesting discussion you had and briefly highlight some of the qualities you expressed at the interview. The note should not be more than 3 short paragraphs and should be mailed within a day of the interview. If you have been interviewed by a panel, you should write a note to each member of the panel, if possible.

**Tips for Answering Oral Examination Questions:**

- Listen carefully to each question and make sure you understand exactly what is being asked. Oral panel members cannot interpret questions for you, but if you do not hear all of a question, or are not sure if you understand a question, ask for the question to be repeated.

- Answer the questions as if the interviewer(s) do not know you or your work experience, even if they do. Do not assume the interviewer(s) know who you are and what you have accomplished, even if this information is presented on your application.

- Don’t undersell yourself. Be proud of what you have done and accomplished and be excited to tell the panel about it.

- Pay particular attention to key words, directional words, and multiple parts of questions.

- Pause briefly after a question is asked. Take a few seconds to compose your thoughts, quickly review in your mind the parts of the question or the main areas of information that you need to cover, and organize how you will go through this before you begin to answer the question.

- If you don’t know the answer to the question, try not to panic. Just give the best answer that you can for the question. Try not to ramble if you do not know or are unsure of the answer to the question. If the question asks about a situation that you have not experienced, state that you have not encountered that scenario and then answer the question as to how you would address the situation if you were presented with it for the first time.

- Answer the question in a logical and organized manner so your answer will be clear to the panel and so that you do not forget to mention something. If the question includes more than one part, be sure to cover all of the parts in your answer. Remember, you can ask to have the question repeated if you are not certain you have answered the question completely.

- If you are given only a limited amount of time to complete your answer to the question, monitor how much time you have left as you answer the question and make sure that you cover all of the important points if you are in danger of running out of time.

- If you are given a certain amount of time to answer a given question, you do not need to use the full amount of time so long as you have given a complete answer. Rambling or repeating your answer to fill the allotted time is not an effective approach.

- If you worked as part of a team, focus on your specific role and what you specifically accomplished. Remember that the interviewers are evaluating you, not your team. To ensure that you speak about your contributions properly, speak in the first person by saying “I did” not “we did.”

- Be positive and enthusiastic. Frame your responses in a positive light. If the information is negative, think about what you learned from the situation and convey this to the interviewer.

- Typically the first question in an interview is an opener, an opportunity for you to highlight your unique qualities that you bring to the position. This question is the perfect time to give a brief overview or presentation on your special skills, talents, experiences etc, that you feel make you a strong candidate. Don’t be afraid to practice this presentation in the mirror at home and have it ready for when/if the perfect opportunity presents itself!

- Do not interrupt an interview. Wait until he/she finishes the question before you start to answer.
• Remember that each new question is a fresh start. Let the previous questions go. If you absolutely must revisit a previous question do so only at the end of the interview when the panel asks you if you have anything further to add.
• Mentally define an interview as a business meeting for the purpose of exchanging information. This mindset will help you gain the confidence you need to present yourself and your qualifications objectively.
• Avoid the use of slang, obscenities and phrases such as “um,” “ah,” “you know,” and “like” to fill in between your statements.
• Avoid using impressive words that you do not typically use in your daily conversations. You may use the word inappropriately, which will have the opposite effect of what you intended.
• Use technical jargon or acronyms related to your field only if you are required to do so in order to respond. Otherwise, it is best to stick with easily understood language.
• Avoid giving only “yes” or “no” answers. Your responses should have content that helps to distinguish you from the other candidates.
• Smile. You, and the interviewers, are more likely to feel relaxed and comfortable if you do.
• Be attentive. Keep eye contact. Lean forward slightly to indicate interest in what the interviewers are saying.
• Keep professional body language at all times. Try not to fidget during the interview or stare off into space. Pay attention to your posture and how you are seated, especially if you are wearing a skirt or dress. Avoid slumping, crossed arms, leaning backward, etc. Likewise, avoid displays of nervous mannerisms such as nail biting, hair twisting, knuckle cracking, etc.
• Be honest!
• Even if the position you have applied for is not your ideal position/career field be cautious not to sound under enthused in the interview. You should approach all opportunities as an experience worth experiencing, and express your willingness to learn new things and apply yourself.
• At the end of the interview you will most likely be asked if you have any questions for the interviewer(s). It is a good idea to have a question or two prepared. Open-ended questions will be the most effective means of getting information. Now is also the time that you can expand on any qualities that you possess that have not been made evident by the interview questions.
• Be prepared to talk about any experience, education, certificate or course that is mentioned in your employment application.
• Link the requirements of the position to your background, showing how your previous experience and knowledge will help you manage the task successfully. Be ready to provide examples.
• When answering questions, avoid criticizing colleagues and superiors or speaking negatively about prior work places. It is your strengths and not the weaknesses of others that determine your suitability for the position. Criticism may reduce your credibility.
• Do not discuss personal matters such as children, divorces, marital or financial difficulties; doing so may indicate to the interviewers that you lack judgment and discretion. These subjects do not relate to your fitness for the position, which is the reason for the interview.
• Resist the temptation to let the interviewer(s) do all the talking. If you do not participate in the interview process the interviewer(s) will not be able to effectively assess your unique qualities for the position. Likewise, your interview will blend into all the other interviews conducted on the same day. In order to stand out you must be able to effectively participate in the interview.
• Ask the interviewer(s) for a business card. This may prove useful later on when sending a thank-you note or for following up on the vacancy.

Tips for a Second Departmental Interview:
• Review your performance from the first interview. Note any questions or situations that caused you difficulty and plan on how you would handle those differently in the second interview. Think about what made you shine in the first interview and plan to do more of the same. Further, brainstorm new
information you can bring into the second interview; new accomplishments, new examples, new evidence of how much you know about the employer and the position you have applied for.

- Try and find out in advance exactly what format the second interview will have, whether it is a panel interview or will contain one individual.
- Typical dress for a second interview is business attire. A second interview is not the place to denote a more casual dress than your first interview; regardless of what your previous interviewer was wearing.
- A second interview is a good place for employer's to determine ‘fit.’ Be prepared to answer personal perspective based questions and answer them honestly. Remember, it is ok not to fit. An interview is also your opportunity to learn how the position ‘fits’ you! It is better to know this information prior to accepting an offer of employment!
- Expect to be asked some of the same questions you asked in the first interview. Second interview questions may delve more into your perspective and/or be targeted to more specific technical skills. Plan to keep your responses fresh yet consistent with your first interview.
- Be prepared with a new set of questions for you to ask of the interviewer(s).