How the LACOE Personnel Commission Conducts Examinations

Conducting a Merit System Examination involves a highly technical set of steps with the objective of ensuring that the examination content, methods and weights are directly related to the requirements of the job, and that candidates are ranked on the basis of the competencies needed to be successful in the job. The following are the 10 steps in developing, administering, and scoring a LACOE Merit System Examination.

1. **Identify and weight the duties of the job.** Through interviews, focus groups, or surveys of supervisors and incumbents, the staff of the PC identifies the essential duties of the job and obtains judgments on the criticality and frequency of each duty. From these criticality and frequency ratings an overall “part of the job” index is calculated. The “part of the job” (POJ) index is a percentage each duty has in overall job performance. The sum of the POJ indices equals 100%.

2. **Identify the essential competencies needed for job performance.** Through interviews, focus groups, or surveys of supervisors and incumbents, the staff of the PC identifies the essential competencies – the critical few competencies that best characterize excellent job performance.

3. **Establish competency profiles for each duty.** Again, through interviews, focus groups, or surveys, the staff of the PC determines the strength of the relationship of each competency to each duty.

4. **Establish the “competency model” for the job.** In a calculation based upon the strength of the relationship to each duty, the number of duties impacted by the competency, and the “part of the job” index of each duty, the overall weight of each competency is determined. The weight of each competency represents its contribution to overall job performance. The “competency model” is the list of competencies and weights for the job. The weights of the competencies sum to 100%.

5. **Determine assessment methods and weights.** Various assessment methods are available for evaluating competencies. Such methods include: written tests, performance tests, interviews, evaluation of submitted application material. The staff of the PC in collaboration with subject matter experts, decide which methods will be used to assess each competency. When one competency is measured by more than one method, the weight of the competency is divided across the methods. The weight of each competency and the number of competencies assessed by a method determines the computed weight of the method. Methods that measure higher-weighted competencies and more competencies carry more weight. The weights of the assessment methods sum to 100%.

6. **Develop the assessment methods and maintain examination security.** The staff of the PC, in collaboration with subject matter experts, develops the questions, exercises, and evaluation standards for each
method. The methods are designed and developed to evoke evidence of
the competencies either through direct sampling (e.g., knowledge tests
and performance exercises) or through evaluation of accomplishments
that reflect the competencies (e.g., interviews and evaluations of training
and experience). Subject matter experts who participate in the
development of examination content sign security agreements and work
under the immediate supervision of the PC staff, typically on PC premises
in secure work areas. Electronic working drafts of materials are kept on
secure, backup servers, and are encrypted to prevent unauthorized
access. Paper copies are either locked in secure cabinets or shredded.
The non-public areas of the Office of the PC are always locked to prevent
unauthorized entry.

7. **Administer the assessment methods to ensure standardization and
security.** Administration procedures for each method ensure that each
candidate has equal opportunity to provide evidence of their job-related
competencies. Candidates are asked the same questions or given the
same problems, following the same instructions, given the same time
constraints, in the same environment, and are assessed against the same
scoring standards. Some scoring is objective as with multiple choice
tests; other scoring is based upon ratings by trained subject matter
experts who follow detailed scoring guides and deliberation procedures
supervised by PC staff. All interviews are recorded to ensure process
integrity, and all candidates and raters complete security agreements to
not disclose or discuss any examination content with others.

8. **Establish passing points for the assessment methods.** Pass points
are generally set on the basis of two considerations: 1) the minimal score
expected of a marginally qualified candidate; or 2) the score that ensures
that only the strongest candidates proceed to the next examination part.
When pass points are set on the basis of minimal acceptable proficiency,
subject matter experts determine what this score should be before the
exam is administered. When a pass point is used to advance only the
strongest candidates, a pass point is based on a statistical analysis of the
distribution of candidate scores. This latter approach is used when the
number of candidates exceeds the resources available for subsequent
assessment steps. Under no conditions are pass points set below what is
judged to be minimum acceptable proficiency.

9. **Compute final grades.** Only candidates who complete all examination
parts receive a final grade. After all parts are completed, the scores on
the various parts are standardized (put on the same units of
measurement), and then weighted and combined for a final grade.
Standardizing scores is essential, for example, when combining scores
from a 60-item written test with an interview scored on a 0-4 point range.
The most common method of standardization used by LACOE is a
“rescaled score.” Rescaled scores put every passing score into a 70-100
point range, where 70 is equated to the pass point of the method used,
and 100 is equated to the maximum possible score. Continuing with the above example, if the pass point on the 60-item written test is 40 correct, the rescaled equivalent of 40 (the pass point) would be 70; and the rescaled equivalent to 60 (the highest possible score) would be 100. Similarly, if the pass point on the interview was 2.00, this number would be equated to 70; and 4.00 would be equated to 100. All scores in between would be mathematically converted to scores between 70 and 100. The differences among candidates’ scores are completely preserved in the conversion. The final weighted composite is a final grade between 70 and 100. In certain examinations, seniority credit and veteran preference points may be added; in which case it would be possible to obtain a score greater than 100.

10. **Resolve protests.** After the results for each method are sent to candidates, candidates have six days to submit a protest if they believe their scores are incorrect due to a clerical error, breakdown in fair administration procedures, or bias in judgment by assessors. These protests are reviewed and resolved, possibly resulting in rescoring if necessary. If a candidate disagrees with the outcome of the investigation, the candidate has the right to have his/her appeal heard by the Personnel Commission as a published agenda item for a public meeting.