Rhode Island Department of Corrections

Correctional Officer Applicant Success Guide

Training Academy

JUNE 2011

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Becoming a Correctional Officer

If you are interested in becoming a Correctional Officer, there are some basic minimum requirements you must meet before entering the screening process.

1. You must be at least 18 years of age
2. Provide proof of high school or GED diploma
3. Provide a valid photo identification card
4. Provide a valid social security card or right-to-work documentation
5. No felony or domestic violence convictions
6. No misdemeanor convictions within three years of the application date
7. No use of illegal drugs (must pass a drug screening test)
8. Must be fluent in English

CORRECTIONAL OFFICER
Duties

To be responsible for safeguarding the custody and well-being of inmates confined at the Adult Correctional Institution; to supervise their conduct and to maintain order and discipline among them; to carry out plans for their training and rehabilitation; and to do related work as required.

SUPERVISION RECEIVED: Works under the general supervision of a superior officer from whom are received general and specific orders, instructions and assignments; work is reviewed by frequent inspections for effectiveness and conformance to institutional policies, rules and regulations.

SUPERVISION EXERCISED: Supervises the work and training of inmates.

EXAMPLES OF WORK PERFORMED:

- Safeguard the custody and well-being of inmates confined in a State Correctional Institution.
- Supervise the conduct of and maintains order and discipline among inmates.
- Assist inmates on matters pertaining to their adjustment to institutional conditions and to assist them in their personal, emotional and adjustment problems or to direct them to the proper persons for guidance. To carry out plans for the training and rehabilitation of inmates.
- Operate devices for locking and unlocking security doors, cells and close custody facilities and to be accountable for all keys used for these purposes.
- Make regular and irregular inmate counts and to make reports thereon to a superior officer.
- Carry firearms in the performance of outer perimeter security duty and emergency assignments.
- Maintain proficiency in the use, care and operation of firearms.
- Responsible for strict control over rifles, tools and other items, which are hazardous from the custodial standpoint.
- Exercise constant vigilance to observe any unusual activities or movements of individuals or groups indicative of attempted escape and riot, strike of minor irregularities and to report same to a superior.
- Inspect inmate quarters to see that they are in sanitary and orderly condition.
- Directly supervise inmates in housing units, in recreational fields and assembly areas, as required by the duties of the post to which assigned.
- Search inmates and living quarters for the detection of pilferage and to prevent the possession of contraband.
- Conduct orientation training for newly committed inmates
- Complete related work as required.

REQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS FOR APPOINTMENT:

KNOWLEDGES, SKILLS AND CAPACITIES:

The ability to…

- Acquire knowledge of the practices, methods and techniques of adult correctional and custodial work
- Safeguard and supervise inmates and to maintain discipline
- Cooperate and work with other employees engaged in carrying out plans for the rehabilitation of inmates
- Meet and deal effectively with others in resolving problems related to assigned functions
- Observe the attitude and mental, physical and other reactions of inmates
- Use firearms and related capacities and abilities.

EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE:
Education: Graduation from a senior high school; and
Experience: Employment in private or public work involving the supervision of others and the enforcement of rules and regulations.

SPECIAL REQUIREMENT:
The following conditions of employment must be met at time of appointment:
Successful completion of the nine-week correctional officer training program. Must be capable of performing (with or without reasonable accommodations) the essential duties as evidenced by a physician's certificate from a physician designated by the Department of Corrections.

In accordance with RIGL 42-28.3-1, no person shall be appointed temporary, probationary, or permanent until they shall have been evaluated and tested by a certified psychologist and receive a satisfactory rating which shall be in writing.

No such appointee shall be given a permanent appointment to a position within this class unless he shall have met all of the above requirements.
"Every effort will be made to reasonably accommodate an individual who has a disability. Therefore, nothing in this specification shall be interpreted to prohibit the use of such accommodation in order to perform the essential functions of this class."

The Selection Process

1. Complete Correctional Officer candidate applications (both preliminary and supplemental)
2. Pass the written and video based examination
3. Pass a criminal records check (BCI/NCIC)
4. Pass a physical agility standards exam
5. Cooperate in the completion of a background investigation
6. Pass Director's interview panel
7. Pass psychological assessment
8. Pass full medical screening
9. Complete nine-week, non-residential pre-service Training Academy, successfully.

The Written Examination

The written exam contains several multiple-choice questions. You should mark your answers to the questions on a separate answer sheet by filling in the circle that corresponds to the same letter of the response option you choose. Mark only one circle for each question. Check often to make sure you are marking in the correct row of circles for the number of the question you are answering. Use a dark, heavy mark when filling in the circles. Erase completely any answer you wish to change. Scrap paper is provided to take notes or make calculations. Electronic devices including cell phones, calculators, organizers, thesaurus, etc. are prohibited at the examination site.

The questions contained in the written examination are designed to measure the abilities needed to perform the job of Correctional Officer. Examples of the different types of questions are provided below.

One type of question requires reading a passage and then answering questions about the information presented. Prior knowledge about the specific topics or the Correctional Officer duties are not necessary. All the information needed to answer the question is contained in the passage.

Example 1:

Each newly admitted inmate shall receive a copy of the Code upon admission to the Department of Corrections. Each inmate shall acknowledge receipt of the Code by signing a form which shall be placed in the inmate's file. An alternative process will be used to provide instructions about information in the Code to any inmate who is illiterate, mentally impaired, visually handicapped, or does not speak English or Spanish.

Special instructions about information in the Code would have to be provided to all of the following, except an inmate who:

A. is blind

B. speaks only German

C. cannot read

D. is mentally impaired

E. cannot hear

According to the above passage, the correct answer is E (cannot hear).

Another possible question may ask about information presented in a table or list format. Again, all the information you need to answer the question is contained in the table.

Example 2:

Inmate Account Number	*Cash Deposits*
10003706	$517.33
10049825	$101.27
10005656	$89.29
10109825	$527.02
11000376	$126.74

Which of the following inmate accounts currently contains the most cash?

A. 11000376

B. 10109825

C. 10005656

D. 10049825

E. 10003706

Looking at the table above, the most money ($527.02) is deposited in the Account Number 10109825. Therefore, the correct answer to this question is **B.**

Another possible question requires calculating numbers presented in the context of a realistic job situation.

Example 3:

A total of 257 inmates are housed in a cell block. During a formal inmate count at this cell block, 239 inmates are counted. How many inmates from the cellblock were not present at the time of the count?

A. 8

B. 12

C. 17

D. 18

E. 22

The correct answer to this question is 18, which corresponds to option **D.** You mark D on your answer sheet.

There may be questions that may or may not be grammatically correct. Part of each sentence is underlined. Option A is always the same as the underlined portion of the sentence. Options B, C, D, and E contain words or phrases that could be used in place of the underlined portion. Choose the option that makes the sentence grammatically correct.

Example 4:

The officer must see inmates in order to <u>counted</u> them.

A. counted

B. has counted

C. counts

D. counting

E. count

To be grammatically correct, the sentence should read. <u>The officer must see inmates in order to *count* them.</u>" The underlined word (counted) should be replaced with option E (count).

Example 5:

This type of question will ask you to choose Option A, or Option B. You are to choose the sentence that is more clearly written. If you think the first sentence is clearer than the second sentence, choose option A. If you think the second sentence is clearer than the first, choose option B. (You would *not* mark any answers C, D, or E. on your answer sheet for any of these questions because there are no options for C, D, or E.)

A. Backtracking by the officer should be frequently occurring on security patrols.

B. The officer should backtrack frequently while performing security patrols.

The second sentence (**Sentence B**) in this pair is clearer than the first sentence.

The Video Based Examination

The Correctional Officer Video Examination is designed to evaluate situational judgment skills. This test is an efficient and effective way to identify applicants early in the screening process who have a high likelihood of becoming successful officers.

Some answers are better or more appropriate than others. Choose the option that best represents what action to take in each situation. Possible points for each answer range from the best answer (five points) to the least appropriate answer (one point).

Applicants will view 84 video vignettes, which contain a wide range of scenarios that a Correctional Officer may encounter while on the job. Below are five examples.

Example 1:
During roll call, the Shift Commander reinforces that officers are to maintain a professional demeanor when dealing with visitors. During your shift you overhear an officer become engaged in a loud, angry argument with a visitor.

What action would you take in this situation?

A. Report the incident to your superior and ask for advice.

B. Separate the officer and visitor and remind the officer to maintain a professional approach when speaking with visitors.

C. Escort the visitor out and explain that such disruptive behavior could prevent future visits.

D. Continue to observe the situation to see if the officer and the visitor will resolve it on their own.

E. Ask the officer to relieve you at your assignment to get the officer away from the visitor in the hope that they will calm down.

<u>Answer</u>

B. The most appropriate; takes immediate corrective, action and the officers, resolve the problem, at their level, without intervention by others. *(5 points)*

D. The action does not stop the officer's behavior, but it allows for the officer and visitor to resolve the problem on their own. *(4 points)*

E. Is the average answer; it interrupts the problem, but does not address the problem. *(3 points)*

A. Is a fair answer; it does not immediately stop the incident and may cause future problems between the two officers. *(2 points)*

C. Ignores officer's behavior and blames the visitor. *(1 point)*

Example 2:

During roll call, the Shift Commander announces that information has been obtained that the inmates may stage a work stoppage in the shop area. When you report to work in the shop, you observe that the inmates are not at their workstations, but are gathered in small groups and are talking.

What action would you take in this situation?

A. Ask the inmates to return to work.

B. Order the inmates to return to their specific stations immediately or face disciplinary actions.

C. Take notice of what inmates are doing, make note of any leaders, and report your observations to your supervisor.

D. Walk around the work area and try to overhear the conversations.

E. Call other work areas and ask if they are having similar problems.

<u>Answer</u>

A. Directly addresses problem without confrontation. *(5 points)*

B. Directly addresses problem but may increase tension level *(4 points)*

C. Does not directly address problem but gives information up the chain of command *(3 points)*

E. Does not directly address problem but can provide valuable information for the chain of command *(2 points)*

D. Least effective as it is passive in nature *(1 point)*

Example 3:

You are assigned to the recreation yard with a second officer. It is raining, so the yard has been very quiet all day. You have a test tonight and have not read the material. You are very worried about passing the test. You have the textbook with you, and no inmates are outside at this time.

What action would you take in this situation?

A. Ask the other officer to keep an eye on things while you study, and let you know if he/she needs help.

B. Continue your duties and risk flunking the test because it is not worth getting caught reading on post.

C. Inform your supervisor that nothing is going on in the yard and request personal leave time to go home and study.

D. Read your textbook while you continue to check that no inmates have come outside.

E. Ask your supervisor to have outside recreation cancelled on account of the rain for the remainder of your shift, so you can study without worrying about keeping watch.

<u>Answer</u>

C. You are not compromising your duties and are expressing your personal need to the chain of command. *(5 points)*

B. You place your work responsibilities before your personal needs. *(4 points)*

D. Can compromise security and could put the other officer at risk. *(3 points)*

A. Possibly compromise security while involving other staff. *(2 points)*

E. Attempts to change facility procedures to meet your individual needs. *(1 point)*

Example 4:

There is a policy in the Department of Corrections that prohibits an employee from bringing a penknife inside the institutions. You went camping over the weekend and forgot to take your penknife off your key ring before you came back to work on Monday. At the end of your shift, you discover that your key ring is missing.

What action would you take in this situation?

A. Report that your personal keys are missing.

B. Do not report the missing keys because they are not institutional keys and you have a spare set at home.

C. Search the area for your lost keys on your own after your shift is over.

D. Inform your relief that you have lost your keys and ask the officer to search for them and call you if they are found.

E. Notify your supervisor that your personal keys are missing and missing and that you have a penknife on the ring.

<u>Answer</u>

E. Immediate notification to supervisor about lost keys and the penknife. *(5 points)*

A. Fails to address issue of penknife. *(4 points)*

D. Does not alert supervisor and places the responsibility to search for keys on a fellow staff member. *(3 points)*

B. Does not report lost keys and penknife and allows too much time to pass before searching for the lost keys and penknife. *(2 points)*

C. Fails to address lost keys and penknife creating a security problem. *(1 point)*

Example 5:

While you are monitoring inmate visits, a visitor becomes loud and emotional. You know that disruptive behavior can result in a visitor being barred from visiting. When you approach the visitor, she becomes upset with you.

What action would you take in this situation?

A. Order the visitor to leave the visiting room and inform her that she is barred from further visits.

B. Explain to the visitor that her emotional behavior is disrupting the visiting room and if she doesn't calm down, she will have to leave.

C. Avoid a confrontation, unless any of the other inmates or visitors complain about the situation.

D. Call the inmate over and tell the inmate to calm the visitor down or the visit will be terminated.

E. Send the inmate back to his cell until the visitor can be calmed down.

<u>Answer</u>

B Directly addresses problem, maintains professional demeanor. *(5 points)*

A. Directly addresses problem, but does not allow visitor to adjust behavior. *(4 points)*

E. An intermediate step, which allows for continuation of the visit afterwards. *(3 points)*

C. Does not address problem immediately and it could escalate the problem. *(2 points)*

D. Utilizing an inmate to address this problem would allow for future security problems, while eroding the officer's authority. **(1 point)**

Tips for Excelling on the Exams

To insure that you score as well as you can, there are a few tips you should consider prior to taking an exam. They include:

1. Prepare yourself:

a. Get a good night sleep the night before the exam.
b. Eat a good breakfast, lunch or dinner before coming to the exam site.
c. Minimize distractions by insuring that you allot sufficient time to travel to the exam site, and you know exactly where to go for the exam.

2. Understand the following about the Exams:

a. The exams require NO previous knowledge about the correctional officer job or the Rhode Island Department of Corrections.
b. The exams are designed to measure your aptitude to succeed as a correctional officer.
c. If you are not sure about the right answer to a question, make your best guess. If you leave an answer blank, it will be automatically marked wrong.
d. When you make an educated guess about an answer to a question, your first response is usually best. Going back over the question and changing the answer does not generally improve your score.
e. Regarding the video exam, do not think about trying to identify what you presume a correctional officer should do. Think about what you would do in the situation.

3. Relax and do your best.

If you have concerns, refer to the resources listed in section 9 of this guide, which can help you prepare for the test. Also, if you still have questions about the exam, the nine-week program or working in the correctional facilities, consider coming to one of the Academy sponsored information sessions detailed in section 10 of this guide.

BEST OF LUCK!

Physical Agility Testing

A correctional officer must be able to respond to a variety of physically demanding activities requiring physical strength and endurance. To insure you can successfully complete the rigorous 9-week pre-service training program as well as perform your duties once you graduate from the Academy, you will be required to meet the physical Agility requirements detailed on the charts below:

Physical Agility Test (Entrance Requirements)

This test is administered prior to your entry into the 9-week pre-service program.

MALE					
Assessment Battery	Age 18-19	Age 20-29	Age 30-39	Age 40-49	Age 50-59
1 minute push-up	29	29	24	18	10
1 minute sit-up	41	38	35	29	24
300 Meter Run (sec)	59.0	59.0	58.9	1:12	1:23.2
Sit and Reach (inches)	16.5	16.5	15.5	14.3	13.3
1.5 mile run (min)	12:29	12:29	12:53	13:50	15:14

FEMALE					
Assessment Battery	Age 18-19	Age 20-29	Age 30-39	Age 40-49	Age 50-59
1 minute Push-up	15	15	11	9	9
1 minute Sit-up	32	32	25	20	14
300 Meter Run (sec)	1:11	1:11	1:19	1:34	1:34
Sit and Reach (inches)	20.5	19.3	18.3	17.3	16.8
1.5 mile run (min)	15:05	15:05	15:56	17:11	19:10

You must obtain a passing score in all five events. Failure in one event results in your elimination from the selection process.

Physical Agility Test (Graduation Requirements)

This test is administered prior to your graduation from the 9-week pre-service training program.

MALE					
Assessment Battery	Age 18-19	Age 20-29	Age 30-39	Age 40-49	Age 50-59
300 Meter Run (sec)	56	56	57	67.6	80
1 minute push-up	33	33	27	21	15
1.5 mile run (min)	11:58	11:58	12:25	13:05	14:33

FEMALE					
Assessment Battery	Age 18-19	Age 20-29	Age 30-39	Age 40-49	Age 50-59
300 Meter Run (sec)	64	64	74	86	86
1 minute Push-up	18	18	14	11	11
1.5 mile run (min)	14:15	14.15	15:14	16:13	18:05

You must obtain a passing score in all three events. Failure in one event results in your termination from the Academy.

Diagnostic Physical Agility Test

To assist you in preparing for the physical agility test, the RI Dept. of Corrections Training Academy is offering a diagnostic physical agility test on **Saturday, June 25, 2011.** The purpose of this diagnostic test is to provide you with an opportunity to measure your readiness to take the actual Physical Agility test scheduled for **September 24, 2011.** Results of the diagnostic test will be provided to you. The Academy will not retain any scores from this event.

If you are interested in participating in this event, you must pre-register by calling the Training Academy at 462-2697 and ask to attend "the diagnostic physical agility test". On the date of the diagnostic test you must bring a valid picture I.D. card and you will be required to sign a waiver of liability prior to taking the agility test.

The Final Interview Panel

A panel of four or five diverse members of the Rhode Island Department of Corrections conducts this interview. The Director or his designee chairs the interview panel. Before each applicant is interviewed they are required to tour the Maximum Security facility, which will become a topic of questioning during the final interview. Typical questions asked by the panel are listed below:

1. Why do you want to be a Correctional Officer?

2. What are your strengths and what are your weaknesses?

3. What did you think of the Maximum Security Facility Tour?

The above questions allow the panel to gauge an applicant's personal characteristics, oral communication skills, and the ability to respond decisively and effectively to situations. The panel will develop questions based on the applicant's background investigation and criminal records check.

All applicants are encouraged to be honest and forthright throughout the entire screening process. Applicants that do not honestly answer the panel's questions or do not fully disclose information and details regarding their work history, criminal record or issues contained in their background will not pass the final board.

Grooming/Personal Appearance:

The U.S. Department of Labor has conducted extensive research in the area of employment interviewing and they have concluded that:

1. A well-groomed professional appearance by job applicants, helps them to make a positive impact on interview panels.

2. A confident demeanor and complete honesty always helps the applicant.

Resources

There are a variety of publications, available at your local bookstore, public library or by viewing the Internet, which can further assist in your preparations for the entrance examinations and job interviews. Partial lists of these publications/websites are detailed below:

Written Examination Preparation

Title	Author	Publisher	Date
Correctional Officer Examination Preparation Book	Norman Hall	Adam Media Corp	1998
How to Prepare for a Correctional Officer Examination	N/A	Barrows Educational Series	1996
Arco's Correctional Officer Examination Examination Preparation	Gary Maynard	IDG Books Worldwide	2001

Interview Skill Website References

www.net-temps.com

www.jobsearch.about.com

Academy Sponsored Information Sessions that you can attend

After reviewing this guide, you may still have questions about the application process, examinations, the pre-service training program or working as a correctional officer. To address these questions, the Training Academy is offering informational sessions throughout the application period.

The information sessions, which will be held at the Rhode Island Department of Corrections Training Academy, will include the following:

1. Mission of the Rhode Island Department of Corrections
2. Corrections Philosophy
3. Correctional Officer's Duties
4. The Application Process
5. Written examinations
6. Physical Agility Test

The information sessions will be conducted on the following dates/times

Date	Time
Wednesday, June 8, 2011	4:00 pm to 6:00 pm
Saturday, June 11, 2011	10:00 am to 12:00 pm
Tuesday, June 14, 2011	5:00 pm to 7:00 pm
Thursday, June 16, 2011	4:00 pm to 6:00 pm
Saturday, June 18, 2011	10:00 am to 12:00 pm
Monday, June 20, 2011	5:00 pm to 7:00 pm

If you are interested in attending one of these sessions you must pre-register by calling the Training Academy at 401-462-2697, at least 2 days prior to the session.