



The promotion board process can be one of the most stressful tasks Soldiers undergo during their military service. By understanding what the board is evaluating, and with some basic preparation, Soldiers can shine during one of the most important events of their career. (U.S. Army photo by Timothy Hale)

The Board

How to Survive the "Hot Seat"

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“You’re going to the board!”

You’ve repeated these words many times in your mind since being notified. The thought of sitting in the “hot seat” in front of five senior NCOs makes you nervous. Relax. This is the normal response, but you need not keep your stomach in knots.

In the past, soldiers concentrated primarily on studying the chain of command, marksmanship, drill and ceremony, and numerous other topics. They took that knowledge before the board, but the butterflies in their stomachs kept them from answering the questions correctly.

Learning board procedures helps eliminate that nervousness and allows you to concentrate on answering the questions correctly.

Knowing the board’s composition is a great place to start in your preparation. Most boards have four voting members (comprised of first sergeants or senior NCOs) and a president (normally the battalion command sergeant major). Board members ask several questions about specific topics. Their jobs are not to belittle or embarrass you; rather they want you to demonstrate what you know. Answer the questions honestly.

Before reporting to the board, knock loudly on the door and enter the room. Choose the most direct route and march to a point about two paces in front of the board president. From the position of attention, render the salute and report to the president. A proper report, for example, would be: “Sergeant major, specialist Jones



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Daniel Starr, sponsor, rolls a lint brush along the service uniform of competitor Spc. Mitchell Fromm before reporting to an appearance board at Fort Lee, Virginia, Nov. 22, 2013. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Michel Sauret)

reports to the president of the board.” Some units use variations of this report. It would be wise to research local board procedures before reporting. Do not drop your salute until the president returns and drops his salute.

After reporting, the president instructs you to execute several facing movements. This gives all members a chance to inspect your uniform and appearance. When instructed to sit down, glance behind you to find your chair and sit down. Relax, but don't kick back. Sit in a modified position of attention sit up straight, keep your hands flat on your lap or clasped together.

Eye contact is important when addressing board members. Unfortunately, this is an unnerving thing to do. Here's a simple rule I use which I call “lock in, lock out.” Once you have locked in the person you are talking to (made eye contact), lock that person out. What you are doing is looking through his eyes. This method still gives you eye contact, but you can actually “see” your study guide instead of the person asking the questions.

This technique takes practice, but it is a valuable tool if used properly. Speak up when answering questions.

Speaking loudly has two benefits. One, it conveys a sense of confidence and bearing and, two, it helps you overcome the hesitancy in your voice.

The first question is usually asked by the president. He usually asks you to tell the members a little about yourself. They don't need to know your birthplace or where you attended grade school. Start with your Army enlistment and end with your present assignment and job. Include some personal background, like marriage and family. Practice your brief biography before you go to the board to get your dates and places correct.

The president might next ask other questions or immediately direct other board members to begin their questioning. Board procedures vary slightly, so don't get upset if things don't go in the order you expected. Address all board members by their proper rank. For board purposes, there are only four ways to address NCOs: corporal, sergeant, first sergeant, or sergeant major. Also, include the question as part of your answer. For example, if you're asked: “Sergeant, the acronym PLDC stands for Primary Leadership Development Course.”

Avoid saying “I think,” “uh” or other verbal pauses. If you have trouble recalling the answer, silently pause until you gather your thoughts. Verbal pauses indicate

indecision and lack of confidence. If you can't think of the answer, a simple, “Sergeant, I do not know the answer to your question” is a better response than trying to bluff your way through an answer.

Gestures with the hands or body should also be avoided. These tend to distract board members and can be a minus. One method for eliminating hand movement is to simply grip your leg harder (without cutting off circulation).

Some questions may seem confusing. Don't be afraid to ask board members to rephrase questions. This will give you a better chance to answer correctly.

Never argue with a board member over a question. This is unprofessional and can result in your dismissal from the board. Simply research the question after you leave the board. Return to the board president with any documentation which supports your point of view or the answer.

After the questioning is complete, the president may ask if you have any questions of board members. Now is a good time to provide the correct answer for a previously asked question. If there are no questions, you will be dismissed. Stand up and render the salute to the board president. Once again, do not drop your salute until the president has properly returned the salute. Execute the necessary facing movements and march out of the room. Your supervisor will follow you out. Some units require you to sound off with your unit motto or war cry. This is unit discretion and you should ask what is required before you go before the board.

Study habits often make the difference between a successful or unsuccessful board appearance. I have included a few methods that helped me.

Alphabetize your study notes. For example, there are four indicators of good leadership. If you remember the

first letters in each word in alphabetical order, it will be easier to remember the answer. For this question, you should think C-D-M-P, for *cohesion, discipline, morale, and proficiency*. Try this method; I think it will help.

Two categories that are usually problems are the chain of command and publications. Most people can remember them in a sequence. This can be dangerous if the questions aren't asked in sequence. The method I use is to list the publication numbers on one side of a piece of paper and the publication title on the other side. Similarly, write chain of command names on one side and the matching commands on the other. Cut these items out, line by line, then cut them apart from each other. Put these slips of paper in a box. When studying, pick out a slip of paper. If it has first aid written on it, then you should say out loud, "the FM covering first aid is *FM 21-11*." If the piece of paper has *AR 600-20* on it, you would then say "*AR 600-20* is Army Command Policy." When you get to the point where you can go through the entire box in this manner, you can be sure of answering everything about the chain of command and publications.

Another effective study method is to progressively study a list. Go to the first question and learn it. Then read the second question and dedicate it to memory. Immediately look at the first question again, without looking at the answer, and answer the question. Do the same with the second question. If you can answer both questions like this, memorize the next question. Add a question each time through. When you get to the end of your first page, you will find that at least three quarters of that page is burned into your memory.

Answering questions out loud while studying is another helpful technique. Most people can answer the question in their mind, but when it comes to speaking the answer, they hesitate.

In the text of one article, you have learned what has taken me 17 boards to learn. These are tried-and-true methods and, if used properly, will provide you with every opportunity to excel at board proceedings.

Good luck at your next board! ■

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