



U.S. Army Board Preparation Guide

Prepared by: MSG Randall High, U.S. Army (ret)

Introduction

If you are scheduled to appear before a Soldier/NCO board or a promotion board, you should know that the competition will be intense. The good news is that, since you have been selected you are considered to be one of the best soldiers in your troop or company. Regardless of which type of board you are going to attend, this guide will help you arrange your preparation.

1. REVIEW YOUR RECORDS

You should schedule a records review at least 21 days prior to your board appearance. Your Official Military Personnel File (OMPF) is available to you online if you have an Army Knowledge Online (AKO) account. The items you will need to check are: correspondence course completion documentation, military and civilian course/school certification, awards, duty positions, assignments, time in service, time in grade, letters, etc. It's a good idea to maintain a paper copy of your personal records. Bring this documentation to the record review. At the records review examine your DA Forms 2A and 2-1, Military Personnel Records Jacket (MPRJ), to ensure your information is correct and/or updated.

Note for sergeants seeking promotion to staff sergeant; Sergeants should understand promotion board members are generally instructed to pay close attention to special and additional duty assignments. Boards are also tasked to consider evidence of a sergeant's initiative and performance in leadership positions and/or in jobs with increasing levels of responsibility. The NCOER is the primary document the board will use to determine leadership potential. Sergeants should always pay close attention to their NCOER and other documentation to ensure their duty performance is properly recorded. Remember board members are looking for NCOs who can lead effectively, not simply meet requirements.

2. STUDY AND PREPARATION

1. Obtain a study guide. The purpose of a study guide is to make you aware of the type of questions that board members may ask and to put the material in a "user friendly" format for study. The questions in any study guide should not be considered to be the only questions a board will ask. Some units provide a basic study guide for their soldiers. Study guides can also be purchased at the PX. One excellent study resource is the U.S Army Board Study Guide (www.armystudyguide.com). This is a free and very comprehensive online study guide.
2. Seek counsel; other soldiers in your unit who have previously been to "the board" can provide you with a wealth of valuable information.

They will be able to tell you about the process, the types of questions asked and their views on what the board members are looking for. Additionally, they can participate in a mock board to help you prepare yourself (see mock boards). Knowing what to expect can help to ease your nerves and prevent you from being surprised by unexpected questions and situations.

3. Know your unit's history, meaning of the unit crest and the unit's current mission.
4. If being considered for promotion, know the MOS and skill level that you are being recommended for. Be familiar with the Soldier's Manual and be proficient in the duties required of that skill level.
5. Be prepared to express yourself on current events (world and national and local level). Pay close attention to news programs and read the daily newspaper at least a week prior to, and up to the date of the board.

3. UNIFORM

1. Ensure your uniform is in accordance with AR 670-1 (AR 670-1 and most common Army Regulations can be found on line). Check the fit and location of sewn-on items to ensure that they are in compliance. Common uniform deficiencies are: poorly placed or frayed rank insignia and unit patch, sleeves or pant legs that are too long or short, or a coat that is too tight. Once uniform deficiencies are identified, send your uniform in for alterations and cleaning as soon as possible. If you are planning on attending future Soldier/NCO boards it could be worthwhile to purchase a polyester class A uniform. This uniform presents an outstanding appearance and will set you apart from your peers.
2. Awards and decorations: Set up your uniform in accordance with AR 670-1. Use a ruler to check placement of awards and decorations. All authorized awards and decorations should be clean, and be properly positioned on the uniform. Brass must be of the authorized type, highly shined, and correctly positioned. The name tag must be in accordance with the regulation and properly positioned on the uniform. Check that the unit crests are clean and properly positioned. If any items are scratched, faded, worn, discolored or dirty, replace them. Remove loose threads. Double-check the precedence for your awards. You may want to ask your supervisor or platoon sergeant to inspect your uniform. Once you are sure everything is correct, place it in a garment bag or cover until you are ready to put it on for the board.
3. Class A shirt and tie: Check to ensure that your shirt collar is clean and fits properly. A common mistake is to wear a shirt that is too tight or too loose in the neck. To determine the proper collar size; measure around your neck just above your collar bone, leaving 1 to 2 fingers between the tape and your neck, and round up to the nearest 1/2 inch. Ensure your tie is clean and pressed (a clip-on tie is not recommended).
4. Footgear: must be in good repair and highly shined to include the edge of shoes and soles painted with sole dressing. Also, ensure shoes are properly laced, not cracked, and heels are not worn down.
5. ID and head gear: Make sure you have your military ID card and that your ID tags are on a double chain and are around your neck. Check that the head gear is clean and the unit crest is properly positioned.

6. Grooming: Prior to the board, get a fresh haircut and ensure sideburns and mustache are properly trimmed and in accordance with current Army policy. Ensure all jewelry is in accordance with current Army policy as well. It is advisable to limit jewelry to a wristwatch (and wedding band if married).

4. **ORAL EXPRESSION, CONVERSATION SKILLS, and BOARD INTERACTION**

1. During a board appearance your ability to articulate your knowledge and opinions is a combination of good preparation and your vocabulary. Board members will prefer an individual who is comfortable within their own vocabulary level over a soldier who is always searching for word at the level above. Bottom line, speak normally and don't try to use unfamiliar words to depict your thoughts and answers to questions.
2. Opening Statement; the truth about board interviewing is that it is weighed heavily toward first impressions; therefore the opening statement is very important. Most boards require or will entertain an opening statement.
3. An opening statement will take some time to put together and should include positions held, jobs performed, military and civilian education, duty stations, significant accomplishments, and future goals. The opening statement should be written and organized into three parts as follows:
 1. Part one is a summary of your career to date (one to two sentences). In other words, your career needs to be condensed into a couple of concise sentences that encapsulates the most important aspects of your career. You may start with where you entered the service, and continue to your current assignment (dates are not important). For example; "Sergeant Major, I have an opening statement" ... "I enlisted in the Army in Fort Worth, Texas, attended 19K OSUT at Fort Knox, Kentucky , I am currently assigned to A Company 1/63 Armor."
 2. Part two should be a summary of your accomplishment(s) (one to three sentences). These should be things that you are proud of and that you feel will also capture the attention of the board members. The accomplishment(s) you chose should be easily explained, and clearly highlight the achievement. When stated correctly board members will want to inquire further, thus giving you an opportunity to further discuss your significant achievements. For example; "During OSUT, I served as the Platoon Guide of the honor platoon. I was selected as an Excellence in Armor soldier....."
 3. Part three is a summary of what you plan to do next in your career (one to three sentences). The third part may be more difficult to develop because an Army career typically spans a period of twenty plus years. This part needs to specifically address what you want to do next as well as briefly mention the highpoints of what you would like to achieve over the out years of your career. For example: "My short-term goals are to; achieve the promotion to Sergeant, and graduate PLDC with honors. My intermediate goals are to obtain a Bachelor's Degree in American History, Promotion to Staff Sgt, and attend

and graduate the Master Gunner Course. My long-term goal is to retire from the Army as a Command Sergeant Major."

4. After you have the opening statement written in a draft form, ask your supervisor to review it for content and to suggest possible revisions.
 5. Once you have the opening statement completed, practice reciting the statement until you are comfortable with it. Also, think about how you would expand on each point if asked to do so. When giving your opening statement to the board, remember to address the president of the board first, and at least once, look directly at all board members during your statement. If you adequately practice the opening statement it should help you feel relaxed and comfortable with the board process, and get you off to a good start.
4. **Inappropriate Language:** Make sure your grammar is professional and "watch your mouth". Many soldiers get in a stressful situation and can only express themselves with the use of profanity. Needless to say, this will not make a good impression during your board appearance. If you have this problem, you need to know that you can limit or even eliminate profanity from your conversations. One way you can do this is to ask peers and family members to remind you when you say a profane word. Once you become aware of the habit you can effectively change it. It will take an average of 30 days to completely get rid of profanity from your speech.

5. STANDARD PROCEDURES FOR APPEARING BEFORE THE BOARD AND INTERACTING WITH BOARD MEMBERS

1. **Reporting to the Board:** Knock loudly on the door of the board room and enter when told to do so. Approach the president of the board using proper facing movements and position yourself in front of the president of the board. Halt at attention, render a hand salute, and report to the president of the board. Example: "Sir,/Ma'am" or "Sergeant Major, Specialist (Smith) reports". Hold your salute until the president returns it.
2. If asked to be seated, look over your shoulder, step to the rear with your left foot, and be seated. While seated, sit straight with both feet flat on the floor and approximately one foot apart. Place your hands comfortably on your thighs.
3. **Opening statement:** When you begin your opening statement address the president of the board, looking directly at him. At some point during the statement remember to also look directly at all board members.
4. Begin all statements to the board members by rank ("Sergeant Major," "First Sergeant," "Sergeant," or with whatever salutation is appropriate). Direct your answer to the person asking the question, maintaining eye-to-eye contact at all times. Speak loudly enough so that all board members will hear you. If you feel your voice start to waiver because of nervousness, take a breath and raise your voice slightly this will usually help to steady it.
5. **Answering board member's questions.**
 1. When answering questions; Use a natural tone and don't deviate from your normal speaking rate. Don't mumble or begin your reply with "uh", "well", "I think", or "I believe". This

indicates indecisiveness. Whatever you do, don't continually reach for unfamiliar words to perfectly portray your thoughts and answers to questions.

2. It is helpful and impressive to repeat the question as part of your answer. For example, "Sergeant, the five colors of a topographical map are..." If you answer a question and the board member asks you "are you sure?" he or she is probably trying to see if you are indecisive and will change your answer. The best thing to do is to pause and think for a second, and then give your reply. If you think you have actually given the wrong answer, simply restate the members rank and reply with the corrected answer. Conversely, if you are confident in your original answer, state the members rank and "yes". Also, if a member responds to your answer with a follow-up probing question like "what do you mean?" or "can you explain that in depth?" they are just trying to see if you really know something about the subject or if you have just memorized answers from a study guide.
3. More than likely there will be some questions you will not know the answer to. Remember, if you don't know the answer say so! Example: "Sergeant, I do not know the answer to that question" or "Sergeant, I don't know the answer to that question, but I know the answer can be found in (give the appropriate AR, FM, TM etc.)." Also, never say "I'm sorry" when you find yourself unable to answer a question. Sometimes you may be unable to answer a particular question simply because you have never been in such a situation, if so say so. Of course if you don't understand the question, you can ask the board member to please repeat or rephrase it.
4. When asked your opinion, be sure you respond with your opinion (not what you think they want to hear). Board members do not penalize you for an opinion they do not agree with. They only want to evaluate your knowledge, and ability to intelligently present an opinion.
6. Departing the Board: Come to attention in front of the board president (if seated, stand and take a half step forward first). Render a hand salute to the president of the board and hold your salute until it has been returned. Leave the room using proper facing movements and close the door unless directed otherwise.

6. **MOCK BOARDS (practice boards)**

1. Mock boards are a tremendously efficient way to closely replicate the actual board experience, and therefore push your confidence up to the next level. Mock boards are used to help you work through your anxiety and become more confident and comfortable in the dialogue.
2. Mock board composition. Members of a mock board can be members of your platoon, and/or other personnel from your unit that have experience in this area. They will role play and ask the kinds of questions you can expect to encounter on the board. During the mock board you will respond to the questions as if it is an actual board appearance.
3. After you have completed the mock board, the members should offer you feedback on how you performed. Members should critique your

body language, overall image, as well as your answer content. Their feedback should provide you with an objective measure of your level of discussion performance. For example, maybe you are not making enough eye contact or you tap your foot when you answer the questions. After you become more confident, most of your nervous gestures begin to disappear. It is a good idea to do at least one session in the uniform you will wear on the day of the actual board. That way the mock board members can also provide you with a full critique of your overall appearance.

4. Mock boards should be conducted in accordance with the standard procedures outlined in the following steps:
 1. Convene a Mock board consisting of at least three voting members and one nonvoting member (the recorder). The President of the Board is the senior member (role play an officer or senior enlisted). For mock promotion boards, all members of the board must role play at least one grade senior to those being considered for promotion (For example, for an E-5 promotion board, all of the members must role play an E-6 or above).
 2. Each mock board member will be assigned at least one subject area. Members will ask a series of questions pertaining to that area. Questions can be obtained from: study guides, TMs, FMs, Soldier's Manuals, Army Regulations and/or from the U.S Army Board Study Guide (www.armystudyguide.com):

Board evaluation subject areas:

- * Personal appearance
 - * Oral Expression and conversation skills
 - * Knowledge of world and local affairs and current events
 - * Awareness of military programs
 - * Overall soldier knowledge (MOS Soldier's Manual, basic soldier knowledge, etc.)
 - * Soldier's attitude
3. Members will take notes and subsequently provide constructive feed back to the board interviewee.