Memory Retention

Terms You’ll Need to Understand:
✓ Observation
✓ Memorization
✓ Retention
✓ Information organization
✓ Notes

Concepts You’ll Need to Master:
✓ Being a skilled observer
✓ Maximizing information retention
✓ Organizing information effectively
✓ Taking effective notes
✓ Observing and memorizing floor plans, crime scenes, and suspect information
Chapter 3

Ability to Observe Detailed Information

The ability to observe is marked as a key trait of a skilled police officer. In your daily routine as a police officer, you will come in contact with numerous people, both victims and suspects, and you will be expected to recall their faces and other factual information about them. You also will be expected to recall information when you prepare your reports, when you give information to the detectives who do follow-up investigations on your case, and when you talk to the prosecuting attorney and testify in court as a witness on behalf of the state. Having a keen power of observation and the ability to recall visual information are very important qualities. That is why police officer selection exams are designed to test an applicant’s ability to recall information after a brief observation period.

Even though the test format varies among police agencies, most current approaches in police applicant testing give a booklet to all applicants immediately before the exam. The booklet covers a variety of information. Applicants are given equal timeframes to look over the material. At the end of this period, the applicants are tested for their ability to recall information covered in the booklet.

Another approach is to give the booklet to applicants two to four weeks before the test. Applicants can read and memorize the contents of the booklet during this period, and the test covers the material in the booklet. Both approaches test applicants’ ability to recall the information in the booklet. The booklet contains a variety of photographs and sketches. Questions are based on what can be observed in the crime scene. The questions focus on the criminal activity itself, not, for example, on the price of a candy bar or soda in the store.

Maximizing Information Retention

Working as a police officer is sometimes like working with a jigsaw puzzle. As a police officer, information is one of your key assets. Your ability to observe, retain, and recall a key piece of information can make or break a case for investigators and prosecutors alike. I am sure there are some gifted people who can retain mounds of information, but in my opinion, it is a learned skill. In your daily routine, you can develop habits that will help you observe, retain, and recall information as needed. In the section that follows, we will cover two basic techniques that you can use to prepare yourself for the police officer exam. The following are two techniques that will help you retain information for the exam:
Organize the Information
Organizing and ordering information can significantly improve retention of information. For example, if you are asked to memorize 100 randomly generated letters in a particular order, it will be difficult to retain and recall this information. On the other hand, if the same randomly generated letters make a sentence that you can understand, or you construct some meaning and make links to existing knowledge, it will be very easy to retain this information. Apply the same principle when you study for the test. This approach can be applied not just to the police officer test, but also to any academic test. Organizing and adding meaning to the test material makes storage and retrieval of the information easier. The following strategies will help you organize information to increase your understanding of the material. You can organize this material on paper, similar to making an outline, or simply organize the material in your memory bank.

Create Notes from Memory
During the study session, you will be given some loose sheets of paper for note taking. You will not be allowed to keep these notes in the class, but you can use these sheets to create an outline of all the information being provided in the study guide. After this outline has been created, it will be a much shorter document to remember than the complete exam guide. When you are ready to take the test, the testers will provide additional scrap pieces of paper. Even though you are not allowed to keep your outline, you will be allowed to create the outline based on what you remember. So, as soon you enter the exam after the study session and the break, you can perform a memory dump and create an outline of everything you studied in the study session.

Because you now have some idea of how you should approach the study material, let’s see how you can apply some of these principles to the police officer test exam in particular.

Exam Information
The memory section of the exam tests your ability to observe and recall information. During the study session of the exam, you will be given a variety of information to learn and memorize in a booklet. This is a total memory section. Unlike other sections, in which the information is given to you again, scenario information from this section will not be repeated for you on the
test. The information will be presented to you in the form of scenarios or short stories similar to the way a police officer receives a call for help. You will be expected to remember the key pieces of information about each of these scenarios and images.

Most of the times the scenario will be from the following three categories.

- Crime scenes
- Suspect information
- Building floor plans

**Crime Scenes**

In the crime scene section of this memory test, you will be given a scenario. That scenario will include one or two images. After you have looked at the images and read the scenario, there will be a series of questions about the scenario. These questions cover both the image and the information given in the text.

Let's take a look at an example of a test-like scenario and a series of questions that are dependent on the scenario.

**Scenario 1**

You have been dispatched to 1200 E. 46th Street on the possibility of an armed robbery in progress. The suspect is described as a white male, armed with a handgun. Upon arrival to the scene, you see this:
Based on the scenario just given, let’s answer some of the following questions:

1. When you first arrived at the scene, how many vehicles were parked in the parking lot?
2. How many customers were inside the business?
3. Was the robber a black male or a white male?
4. In which hand was the suspect holding the gun?
5. What was the street address to which you were dispatched?

Scenario 2

While working on night shift, you and Officer Jones have been dispatched to the scene of a residential burglary in progress at 3421 Central Avenue. A black male has been seen entering a window on the south side of the house. Upon arrival on the scene, you see the following:

Based on the scenario just given, let’s answer the following questions:

1. When you first arrived on the scene, were there any cars parked in the driveway?
2. Did you see anyone run away from the scene?
3. What was your dispatch time for the call?
4. Which other officer was dispatched to the scene?

Organize information in the form of zones. For example, you can easily divide the armed robbery crime scene into outside and inside the business zones. Then further divide these zones. For instance, you could divide the outside into “people and vehicles,” and divide the inside into “customer area and employee area” or “in front of the counter” or “behind the counter.” When you have divided your crime scene into zones, concentrate on each zone. For example, for your outside zone, you can look for the following:

➤ Who is outside?
➤ How many cars in the parking lot?
➤ Is someone driving away?
➤ Are there any people sitting inside the vehicle?

Then concentrate on the inside of the business. Some of the following questions might help your breakdown of the business’s inside:

➤ How many people are inside?
➤ Is the suspect still inside the business?
➤ How many suspects?
➤ Are there weapons or no weapons?
➤ Description of the suspect?

If the image is clear enough, organize your suspect description. Start from the top of the head and end at the feet. Use the following as a guide when observing a suspect:

➤ Head gear
➤ Hair
➤ Face
➤ Shirt
➤ Pants
➤ Shoes
➤ Age
➤ Height
➤ Weight

You can use a similar approach to any type of crime scene. When you have gathered all the required information, take notes and draw a quick outline.

**Suspect Information**

As a police officer, you will come across numerous people in your professional life. These people could be victims, witnesses and, most of all, suspects. In addition to meeting people while working your designated area,
you will also receive information in various forms. One such form will be a wanted bulletin. These bulletins usually have the wanted subject’s photo and the charge that the person is wanted for. In the memory section of the test there is a portion that tests your ability to remember peoples’ faces and what they are wanted for. The idea is to replicate a wanted bulletin.

Let’s practice this idea. The following four scenarios give you subject faces that are associated with different crimes. After the fourth scenario, there will be questions that rely on your observations of the information provided in all four scenarios.

**Scenario 1**
The following three subjects are wanted for conspiracy to commit murder:

![Subject 1](image1)

1.

![Subject 2](image2)

2.

![Subject 3](image3)

3.

**Scenario 2**
The following two individuals are wanted by the financial crimes branch for check fraud:

![Subject 4](image4)

1.

![Subject 5](image5)

2.
Scenario 3
The following individual is wanted for domestic violence:

![Image of a wanted individual]

1.

Scenario 4
The following individuals are being sought for firearms-related charges:

![Image of two wanted individuals]

1. 2.

Based on the preceding scenarios, answer the following questions:

1. Which of the following individuals are wanted for domestic violence?

A. B. C. D.
2. Which of the following individuals are wanted for conspiracy to commit murder?

A.  
B.  
C.  
D.  

3. Which of the following individuals are wanted for firearms-related charges?

A.  
B.  
C.  
D.  

4. Which of the following individuals are wanted for check fraud?

A.  
B.  
C.  
D.  
Divide the photos and categorize the suspects by race. For example, in the photos, there is only one white female wanted whose charge is check fraud. There is one Latino male, and his charge is domestic battery. So, if you see a question in the exam about the individual wanted for domestic battery, it will easier to remember that it was a Latino male. Also, if you see a photo of a white female and the question relates to the charge being murder, you know that the answer is false because there was only one female wanted and that was for check fraud. This technique is similar to the common process of elimination technique for multiple-choice questions.

**Building Floor Plan**

From time to time in your career as a police officer, you will be required to serve arrest warrants, search warrants, or call for a more-specialized unit, such as a SWAT team. Members of SWAT teams rely mainly on the information provided to them by the first arriving officer. One area of crucial information is the layout of the building. By using this correct information, specialized teams can better execute search plans and arrest plans.

Let’s practice observing floor plans further. Scenarios 1 and 2 give you some floor plans. Based on these plans, answer the questions that follow.

**Scenario 1**

Let’s look at layout number 1. Figures 3.9 and 3.10 show the first and second floors, respectively, for this layout.

![Figure 3.9](image-url)  
*Figure 3.9*  First floor.
You and Officer Brown have been dispatched to 2347 Naomi Street to serve a felony warrant. You entered the residence and searched the house. The wanted subject has not been found. You suspect that the subject might be hidden in the attic. At this point, you decide to call the SWAT team. Upon SWAT’s arrival, the SWAT team leader wants to know the layout of the house. Based on this scenario, answer the following questions:

1. Does this house have a basement?
2. How many rooms are on the first floor?
3. How many rooms are on the second floor?
4. How many windows on the first floor face the north side of the house?
5. Which corner of the house has the master bedroom? Was it E, W, N, S, NE, NW, SE, or SW?

Answers
1. No
2. Four
3. Six
4. Three
5. Southeast
Scenario 2
Let’s look at layout number 2.

![First floor—scenario two.](image1)

![Second floor—scenario two.](image2)

You have been dispatched to a domestic disturbance. You have made an arrest. Now the prosecutor, who is unable to make it to the scene at the time of the arrest, wants to know the layout of the house. Based on this scenario, answer the following questions:
1. Which room of the house is located in the southwest corner of the first floor?
2. Which room of the house is located in the northeast corner of the second floor?
3. How many bathrooms are in this house?
4. How many fireplaces are in the house?
5. Does this house have a garage?

**Answers**

1. Living room
2. Bedroom number 2
3. Three
4. One
5. Yes

Take an organized approach to observing layouts. Start from the front door and imagine that you are walking though the house. Compare the layout with another house that you have visited or even your own house. Use the legend and azimuth that are provided. Pay special attention to the direction of north. North will not always be toward the top of the page. After you have determined the direction of north, all the other directions fall into place.

Do a memory dump on exam day. As soon as you get the opportunity during the test, draw a diagram while the layout is fresh in your mind. If you remember the legend items, outline them on the paper. There could be several questions, for a single layout. Your diagram will be useful and help you answer the questions.
Exam Prep Questions

You have been dispatched to the scene of a reported armed robbery in progress at the Creative Carets Jewelry Store at 325 West Main. For five minutes, study the drawing of area as it appears on your arrival. After five minutes, set the drawing aside and answer the following questions.

Crime scenario.

1. Upon your arrival at the scene, the perpetrator has already left the store. When canvassing the area for witnesses, from which office locations with windows would somebody most likely have seen the perpetrator leaving the area?
   - A. Northeast floors above city bank
   - B. Northwest floors above Creative Carats jewelry store
   - C. Northwest floors above Smith and Smith Law Offices
   - D. Northwest floors above City Bank

2. To what address were you dispatched?
   - A. 325 West Main
   - B. 335 West Main
   - C. 325 East Main
   - D. 325 North 43rd Avenue
3. What vehicle is observed pulling out into traffic on North 43rd Avenue?
   ○ A. Four-door sedan
   ○ B. Pickup truck with cab
   ○ C. Two-door sedan
   ○ D. Pickup truck

4. Which business is directly to the west of Creative Carats Jewelry Store?
   ○ A. Caroline's Café
   ○ B. Johnson's Furniture Store
   ○ C. City Bank
   ○ D. Smith and Smith Law Offices

For five minutes, study the four wanted posters. Be sure to pay attention to both the mug shot drawings and the additional information that accompanies the posters.

Wanted – Escaped Prisoner
Name: Greg Fox
Age: 24
Height: 6'3"
Eyes: Blue
Scars: Appendectomy scar
Race: White
Weight: 215
Hair: Blonde, curly
Facial hair: None
Tattoos: Numerous prison tattoos, including L-O-V-E on the fingers of his left hand and H-A-T-E on the fingers of his right hand.

Subject, who was serving a 15–20 year sentence for armed robbery, is considered likely to be armed and dangerous. Subject was known to let his hair grow for almost a year prior to his escape, so it is likely he’s altered his appearance by cutting his hair; upon his arrest two years ago, he had a buzz cut.
Wanted – Escaped Prisoner
Name: Rupert “Mad Dog” Hinckley
Age: 29
Height: 5' 9"
Eyes: Brown
Scars: Surgical scar, bullet removed from right shoulder
Race: White
Weight: 165
Hair: Light brown
Facial hair: None
Tattoos: A snake coiled around (and above) each bicep

Subject was serving a 3–5 year sentence for possession of drugs with intent to sell and possession of stolen property. He is a chronic drug user, and known to abuse prescription painkillers. Subject also has a partial plate for his two missing front teeth.

Wanted – Escaped Prisoner
Name: Jonathon Bentley Radcliff
Age: 46
Height: 6' 2"
Eyes: Hazel
Scars: None
Race: White
Weight: 180
Hair: Brown
Facial hair: None
Tattoos: None

Subject was serving a 5–10 year sentence for embezzlement. Subject is also known to have numerous international contacts, and might attempt to flee the country.
Wanted – Escaped Prisoner
Name: Jackson Williams
Age: 56
Height: 6’
Eyes: Green
Scars: None
Race: White
Weight: 220
Hair: Gray
Facial hair: None
Tattoos: None

Subject, who was serving a 20-year to life sentence for serial rape, is an alcoholic. Subject dresses well, and has been known to loiter in hotel bars and at community meetings in search of victims.

After five minutes, set the posters aside and answer the following questions:

5. Which subject has snake tattoos?

- A. 
- B. 
- C. 
- D. 

6. Which subject is known to loiter in hotel bars?

- A. 
- B. 
- C. 
- D.
7. Which subject has prison tattoos?

- A.
- B.
- C.
- D.

8. Which subject is suspected of possibly attempting to leave the country?

- A.
- B.
- C.
- D.

You are to serve a search warrant at a residence located at 7653 Briarwoods Road. Study the picture of the house and floor plan drawings for five minutes.

Cambridge.
Set aside the drawings and answer the following questions, choosing all correct answers that apply:

9. The house has stairways leading to the following:
   ♦ A. The basement
   ♦ B. The second floor
   ♦ C. The unfinished third floor
   ♦ D. The garage attic

10. What is the address of the home to which you are to serve the search warrant?
    ♦ A. 2347 Naomi Street
    ♦ B. 7653 Briarwoods Road
    ♦ C. 7653 Naomi Street
    ♦ D. 2347 Briarwoods Road

11. The garage is at which end of the house?
    ♦ A. North
    ♦ B. South
    ♦ C. East
    ♦ D. West

12. How many bathrooms are in this house?
    ♦ A. 2
    ♦ B. 3
    ♦ C. 2 1/2
    ♦ D. 3 1/2
Exam Prep Answers

1. D
2. A
3. D
4. B
5. C
6. B
7. A
8. D
9. B, C, D
10. B
11. B
12. D