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## Law Enforcement Physical Abilities Tests

### What You Should Know About the Physical Abilities Test and How to Prepare.

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- [background investigations](#)
- [obstacle courses](#)
- [fitness standards](#)

An area that seems to be of concern for a lot of candidates pursuing careers in law enforcement is the physical abilities test. Attitudes among applicants vary and range from fear and nervousness to bravado, but the general theme is the same: everyone wants to know what to expect and how best to prepare to get over this particular hurdle in the [application process](#).

#### Types of Physical Abilities Tests

Physical abilities tests differ from agency to agency. Some departments incorporate an obstacle course with a time requirement, and others use the Cooper Institute's [fitness standards](#) to measure overall fitness.

Agencies that use an obstacle course believe their abilities test better simulates real-world job functions that an officer may be called on to perform. Obstacle courses will usually include a wall climb, a short (200 yards or so) run, a belly crawl, and dummy drag.

Some departments may even test your ability to fire a weapon under stress. Don't panic; the agencies aren't concerned with marksmanship. The weapon provided will be unloaded and have the firing pin removed, meaning it won't be a live weapon. Rather, departments need to assess a candidate's ability to take on multiple tasks at once and to perform necessary and potentially life-saving functions under stress.

#### Obstacle Courses

A typical obstacle course will likely be similar to the following:

- Start in a patrol car with your seatbelt on and your hands on the wheel.

- When instructed, get out of the patrol car, open the trunk and retrieve a baton and an inert firearm.
- Place the firearm on a nearby pedestal.
- While carrying the baton, run 220 yards.
- Climb or jump over a short wall.
- High step over several low hurdles.
- Belly crawl.
- Drag a dummy weighing 150 pounds or more 50 feet.
- Drop the dummy and repeat the rest of the course in reverse.
- Belly crawl.
- High step.
- Wall climb.
- Run 220 yards.
- Dry fire the handgun.
- Return to patrol car.

Obstacle courses are timed, usually allowing a candidate in the neighborhood of 5 to 6 minutes to complete the course. Candidates are not ranked by their time or performance. Completion of the obstacle course is merely pass / fail.

### **Fitness Standards**

In contrast to the obstacle course, agencies that use fitness standards record the number of sit-ups and pushups a candidate is able to complete and measure performance on a timed 1.5 mile run and 300 meter dash.

While fitness standards do not necessarily test actual job functions, agencies that use them argue that they give a better picture of overall fitness and physical ability and are in fact a good indicator of how well a candidate may care for him or herself.

Fitness standards are often based on a sliding scale that takes into account age and gender to establish a base line fitness level for an acceptable candidate. For example, a 30-year-old male may be expected to perform, at a minimum, 36 sit-ups and 27 pushups in timed intervals of 1 minute, whereas a 40-year-old male would need to be able to perform 31 sit-ups and 21 pushups in the same amount of time.

### **Get Prepared**

So, how does one prepare for a physical abilities test? The quickest and easiest answer is this: exercise. Obviously, though, it's more complicated than that.

If you are [pursuing a law enforcement career](#), your first step should be to check the requirements of the individual agency or agencies you have applied for to determine whether they uses an obstacle course or fitness standards. If fitness standards are included, you will want to spend some of your focus on building core and upper body strength.

Both tests will include some running, in which case stamina and endurance will be vital keys to success. If you are not much of a runner, there are some [simple steps you can take to get yourself prepared](#).

Start out with some brisk walking until your body let's you know its ready for more. To build both speed and endurance, consider some form of interval training. You can do this on a treadmill by running for a minute, then walking for a minute, or you can go outside and alternate running and walking between utility poles. Eventually, the time spent walking will significantly decrease while the time spent running will increase.

If your prospective agency uses an obstacle course, check with your recruiter or visit the agency's website to learn the specific requirements. If possible, consider setting up a mock obstacle course and time yourself to get a feel for where you are in terms of physical fitness so you have an idea of where you need to go.

### **Benefits of Fitness**

Physical fitness is a vital component of any law enforcement job. While it's generally well known that law enforcement officers may be required to perform physical tasks from time to time, there are other benefits besides the simple ability to perform your job.

All [careers in criminology](#) carry with them an element of stress. Exercise is a great way to reduce that stress. By establishing a sound physical fitness regimen, you will set yourself up for success in landing a great job in law enforcement, and you will be able to excel in your career for a long time to come.