U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

FOREIGN SERVICE SPECIALIST
ORAL ASSESSMENT STUDY GUIDE

- ✓ Composure
- ✓ Cultural Adaptability
- ✓ Experience and Motivation
- ✓ Information Integration and Analysis
- ✓ Initiative and Leadership
- ✓ Judgment
- ✓ Objectivity and Integrity
- ✓ Oral Communication
- ✓ Planning and Organizing
- ✓ Resourcefulness
- ✓ Working With Others
- ✓ Written Communication

★ CAREERS REPRESENTING AMERICA ★

careers.state.gov

U.S. citizenship is required. An equal opportunity employer.

Foreign Service Specialist

Oral Assessment Study Guide

May 2013

Table of Contents

1. Introduction 2

2. The Oral Assessment Process 2

   a) Before the Exam
   b) Oral Assessment Summary
   c) The Oral Assessment (non-Diplomatic Security Positions)
   d) The Oral Assessment for Diplomatic Security Positions

Attachment 1 - 12 Dimensions – A Quick Reference 12

Attachment 2 - Languages Tested by FSI 13

Attachment 3 – Clearances 14

Attachment 4 – The Register 16

Introduction

The Foreign Service is a unique career and, perhaps unsurprisingly, the selection process is also unique. The purpose of the "Guide to the Foreign Service Specialist Oral Assessment (FSS OA)" is to help familiarize candidates with the selection process so that they will be able to better focus on their own performance during the oral assessment rather than spend their limited time reviewing procedures. While the main elements of the FSS OA remain constant, information on details – for example, time limits or speaking order – can change quickly. Candidates should stay alert and follow the instructions provided on the day of the Oral Assessment.

This guide includes the criteria used to evaluate candidates, common sense strategies candidates might use to ensure they are performing their best, a description of the activities during the FSS OA, sample Case Management materials, as well as information on required clearances (in case the candidate passes the FSS OA), language testing, veterans' points, and final observations.

The sample test materials in this guide represent the kind of information and exercises candidates in the 22 specialist career tracks will be given during the oral exam. The 22 specialist tracks fall into eight major categories: administration, construction engineering, facility management, information technology, international information and English language programs, medical and health, office management, and security. Not every specialist category uses exactly the same OA format, so you should review the description for your particular specialty. This guide is for the FSS OA only – other guides are available for Foreign Service Officer candidates, such as the FSOT Study Guide and the FSOA Study Guide. Candidates should check with careers.state.gov for general information on a Foreign Service Career. The careers.state.gov website also offers information on Foreign Service Officer careers, Civil Service careers, professional fellowship opportunities, Limited Non-Career Appointments, and student/intern programs.

The Oral Assessment Process

Before the Assessment

Oral Assessments are generally held in Washington, DC and – budget and schedule permitting – other domestic locations in the United States. Once candidates schedule their FSS OA, they should make travel and lodging plans.

- Be rested. Candidates who are tired cannot possibly be at their best – taking the FSS OA can be a stressful experience, and candidates need to be "present" at all times during the day.
- Candidates traveling from out of town should plan to arrive at least a day in advance; candidates traveling from overseas should give themselves at least two days.

- Make allowances for delayed flights, lost luggage, broken down metro trains, stalled rush hour traffic, and taxi drivers who can't find the test center address.
- The day prior to the test, candidates should locate the test center and make sure they are familiar with how to get there.
- Do not spend the night prior to the FSS OA studying; the extra factoids candidates might cram into their brains at this point will not make a significant difference. Visit a museum, go out to a movie, visit with friends – and get to bed at a decent hour (see "Be rested" above).

The FSS OA is a job interview; candidates will want to dress for it. Men normally wear suits and ties; women wear the professional equivalent.

- That said, candidates need not go out and spend money on a new suit for the assessment. An outfit that is neat and professional is fine. It does not have to be this year's fashion. It does not have to be black, navy or grey.
- New shoes are actively discouraged. It's going to be a long day, so wear something comfortable.

The test day is tightly choreographed, so it is essential to be on time and in the right place.

Oral Assessment Summary

Candidates must report to their assigned Assessment Center no later than the time indicated in their invitation letter or e-mail. Candidates arriving late may be refused entry to the assessment. Almost all specialist assessments are conducted in Washington, DC. The invitation will specify where it will take place. In Washington, DC the Assessment Center is at State Annex 44 (SA44) at 301 4th St., SW. The assessment itself may take three to five hours for successful candidates so candidates should plan their return trip accordingly. The email message that invites candidates to the Oral Assessment also advises candidates what documents they need to bring to the Assessment Center. This list of documents can be found in the Department of State's careers.state.gov website under the Selection Process heading. It is also provided in the letter inviting candidates to the Oral Assessment. Diplomatic Security candidates will only fill out the SF86 if they pass the written and oral assessments and extended a conditional offer.. In addition to the listed documents, candidates are also asked to bring the Social Security numbers and dates of birth of family members who might be traveling with them overseas – this will help the medical clearance process. We will try to arrange provisions (known as "Reasonable Accommodations") for candidates with disabilities at the requested Assessment Center but they must be arranged with the U.S. Department of State's Board of Examiners at least one week in advance – please see our website for the most updated information, as requirements may change. Candidates are allowed to bring snacks, sandwiches, coffee and/or soft drinks to the Assessment. Some individuals might wish to bring reading material or a deck of cards to pass the time

between exam modules. Water will be available at the Assessment Center. There is secure space to store coats, purses, electronic gear, and any luggage at the Assessment Center.

The Specialist Oral Assessment measures the following 12 dimensions:

- **Composure.** To stay calm, poised, and effective in stressful or difficult situations; to think on one's feet, adjusting quickly to changing situations; to maintain self-control.
- **Cultural Adaptability**. To work and communicate effectively and harmoniously with persons of other cultures, value systems, political beliefs, and economic circumstances; to recognize and respect differences in new and different cultural environments.
- **Experience and Motivation**. To demonstrate knowledge, skills or other attributes gained from previous experience of relevance to the Foreign Service; to articulate appropriate motivation for joining the Foreign Service.
- **Information Integration and Analysis**. To absorb and retain complex information drawn from a variety of sources; to draw reasoned conclusions from analysis and synthesis of available information; to evaluate the importance, reliability, and usefulness of information; to remember details of a meeting or an event without the benefit of notes.
- **Initiative and Leadership**. To recognize and assume responsibility for work that needs to be done; to persist in the completion of a task; to influence significantly a group's activity, direction or opinion; to motivate others to participate in the activity one is leading.
- **Judgment.** To discern what is appropriate, practical, and realistic in a given situation; to weigh relative merits of competing demands.
- **Objectivity and Integrity**. To be fair and honest; to avoid deceit, favoritism, and discrimination; to present issues frankly and fully, without injecting subjective bias; to work without letting personal bias prejudice actions.
- **Oral Communication**. To speak fluently in a concise, grammatically correct, organized, precise, and persuasive manner; to convey nuances of meaning accurately; to use appropriate styles of communication to fit the audience and purpose.
- **Planning and Organizing**. To prioritize and order tasks effectively, to employ a systematic approach to achieving objectives, to make appropriate use of limited resources.
- **Resourcefulness.** To formulate creative alternatives or solutions to resolve problems, to show flexibility in response to unanticipated circumstances.
- **Working With Others**. To interact in a constructive, cooperative, and harmonious manner; to work effectively as a team player; to establish positive relationships and gain the confidence of others; to use humor as appropriate.
- **Written Communication**. To write concise, well organized, grammatically correct, effective and persuasive English in a limited amount of time.

The 12 dimensions are the core of the Foreign Service Oral Assessment process. Candidates are encouraged to read the definitions of the 12 dimensions carefully, and to spend some time thinking about what they mean. While the definition of leadership, for example, may seem obvious, it is unlikely that the average person in the street would focus on the same aspects of leadership as those highlighted by the Department's definition.

Candidates are evaluated solely against these criteria by two assessors who observe the performance of candidates in a variety of situations designed to enable the candidates to demonstrate the requisite skills. Generally the assessors are Foreign Service Officers from various career tracks and Foreign Service Specialists with expertise in the specialty for which the candidate is applying. Assessors receive training from professional consultants on how to conduct assessments in an objective manner. They learn how to observe the candidate's performance and how to correlate the candidate's performance with an established performance standard.

The Oral Assessment is not an adversarial process. Candidates are not competing against other applicants for the same position but are judged on their capacity to demonstrate skills and abilities necessary to be an effective Foreign Service Specialist.

1. The Oral Assessment (for non-Diplomatic Security Positions) Case Management or Essay

All writing exercises are done on a computer using Microsoft Word.

Except for candidates for Diplomatic Security (DS) specialties, as the first part of the OA you will be given a scenario describing issues which may typically arise in your specialty in a Foreign Service context. You will be asked to write a 1-2 page memo to your supervisor summarizing the situation and providing solutions to the problems you or your supervisor has identified. You do not need to know US Government or State Department rules and regulations – you should rely on your expert knowledge, information presented to you, and your common sense. You will have 45 minutes to complete this section.

2. Online Competency Exam

Except for DS candidates, you will next be given an online competency exam. You will have 45-60 minutes for this section. The test may include English Expression questions, questions dealing with your ability to work with others, and questions appropriate to your area of expertise, such as Microsoft usage; IT problems; hiring laws and procedures; organizing events and VIP schedules; building maintenance issues; contracting and leasing; logistics operations; budgets and accounting; and similar issues that you will be expected to work within your FS specialty.

This computer based multiple-choice exam presents a series of technical and/or situational judgment questions. It is intended to measure your job-related knowledge and how you might apply that knowledge on the job. The exam is designed to present more questions than can generally be answered in the time allowed, so candidates should not expect to answer every question.

3. The Structured Interview

All candidates participate individually in a Structured Interview conducted by two assessors. For this portion of the Oral Assessment, assessors will have reviewed portions of your application for employment so they will be familiar with your work history and information you provided in the biographical section of the application. You are expected to respond to questions based on your personal background, experience, and motivation. You should be careful to respond to the questions that are asked, rather than give a response that highlights your qualities or resume but does not reply to the specific question.

You should expect assessors to remain stone-faced throughout the interview. They have been instructed to not provide any clues – including non-verbal ones – about how you are doing. This does not mean that assessors may not be impressed with something you say or feel empathy if you are struggling – they just will not express it. During the Structured Interview, assessors may interrupt you, shuffle papers, or cut short your answers. You should not assume that this signals anything either positive or negative. The assessors may be watching the clock or may believe that they have heard all they need to on a given subject and move on.

The Structured Interview portion of the assessment consists of three testing modules lasting approximately one hour.

A. Experience and Motivation Interview

In this portion of the Structured Interview, you should convey to the examiners a clear and precise picture of yourself, including personality traits, and your understanding of the Foreign Service. Your expressed motivation to join the Foreign Service, education and work experience as well as cross-cultural skills are considered. Assessors will evaluate your potential to serve successfully as a Foreign Service Specialist. You must be succinct and persuasive in responding to the examiner's questions. It is helpful to have previously informed yourself about the Foreign Service in general, and also about the work related to the specialty you have selected.

Whenever possible and appropriate, you should go beyond just a “what” explanation, and also give the “how” and “why.” You should remember that you need to do more than describe your experiences; you need to explain what you learned from them and why they are predictive of

success in the Foreign Service. You may be interrupted as assessors probe for details and manage the time. This is normal.

B. Hypothetical Scenarios

The second assessment module in the Structured Interview consists of a series of hypothetical scenarios designed to test the candidate's situational judgment.

Dimensions scored during this exercise include: Planning and Organization, Working with Others, Cultural Adaptability, Initiative and Leadership, Judgment, Objectivity and Integrity, Information Integration and Analysis, Resourcefulness, and Composure. Although the problems presented in this exercise are hypothetical, they are closely related to real-life situations regularly encountered by Foreign Service Specialists overseas. You are advised, however, that, while the problems occur in a Foreign Service setting, you are not expected to know how an Embassy operates or to be familiar with government rules and regulations. Rather, you are asked to fashion a solution that employs good judgment, knowledge of your specialty, and common sense.

The hypothetical scenarios challenge candidates to think quickly. Assessors look for a candidate who can organize for action, take responsibility, and respond to new situations creatively and effectively. While there is no single right or correct answer, a strong candidate will demonstrate mature thinking, recognize alternative approaches, and consider both the long- and short-term consequences of responses. In responding to these questions, you should:

- Be as thorough and complete as you can be in their approach to solving the problem;
- Make sure you have covered the most important courses of action before the examiner moves on; and
- Consider more than one possible course of action.

You should not respond by throwing the hot potato into someone else's hands – the potato is yours to deal with, and you should use all the available resources. Candidates should recognize their level of authority and use it to the full extent, but not exceed it.

Sample Hypothetical Exercise

Below we present several hypothetical questions of the type used for different specialist career tracks:

1. You are the General Services Officer (GSO) at a medium-sized Consulate in a developing country. You depend on the Embassy for most supplies such as office equipment, expendable supplies, and household furnishings. Your requests for supplies

meet with indifference and frequent denials. How would you establish better relations with your Embassy counterparts and improve the support for your post?

2. You are a courier escorting three classified pouches to a neighboring post. Upon arrival, you find only the locally employed Embassy driver meets you at the airport. He does not have a security clearance and you may not hand the pouches over to him. What do you do?

3. You are the Financial Management Officer (FMO) at a large Embassy. You discover that one of the section heads has purchased expensive coffee table books to give to his contacts as holiday presents. He did not go through the regular procurement procedures and now wants you to reimburse him the several hundred dollars he spent on these books. What do you do?

4. You are the regional Human Resources Officer (HRO) for several posts. One post has never had an employee handbook, another does not follow any standard procedures for hiring new employees, and at a third one local employees threaten to take a "job action" to protest their lack of pay increases for the past three years. Visiting each of these posts requires two days of travel and time on the ground. How would you approach these problems?

5. You are the health care provider at your post. The Ambassador wants you to notify her every time an employee is too sick to come to work so she may send him get-well greetings. What do you do?

6. You are the OMS in the Management Section of a medium-size embassy. Many of your coworkers come to your boss with requests that they feel have not been addressed by other embassy sections. Some of these coworkers have come to believe that you have influence over your boss's decisions whether to approve their requests and raise their problems with you during social events such as shopping trips or community picnics. How do you respond to these approaches?

7. You are the security officer at a small embassy in a developing country. The Assistant Secretary for your region will be spending two days in your capital next week and his staff requests your recommendations for a safe and secure location for his stay. What do you do?

C. Past Behavior Interview

In the final segment of the Structured Interview, the assessors ask the candidate a series of questions to which the candidate should respond with examples from his or her own experience.

The questions are designed to assess a range of dimensions determined through a documented job analysis to be linked to successful performance as a Foreign Service Specialist. Candidates will be given a question sheet containing the different dimensions being assessed during this portion of the interview, with two questions listed under each dimension. Candidates will have five minutes to select the question they wish to discuss for each dimension (one question for each dimension) and to prepare their responses. Candidates' examples should be appropriate and drawn from their own experience. During this portion of the Structure Interview, candidates should:

- Be sure their responses relate directly to the dimension; if the response does not answer the question, the candidate will be low ranked;
- Use responses that demonstrate their best achievement in the specific dimension – candidates should avoid responses that document themselves as failures;
- Even when talking about a group project, make sure they emphasize what they did. Candidates should choose examples in which their role demonstrates the dimension being assessed.

The dimensions rated in this section of the Structured Interview are Planning and Organizing, Working with Others, Cultural Adaptability, Initiative and Leadership, Objectivity and Integrity, Composure, and Oral Communication.

Evaluating the Three Exercises

Assessors observe the candidate's performance closely and individually enter their scores for the written (Case Management) exercise and the Structured Interview into a computer spreadsheet. The score for the skills assessment is automatically computed as soon as the candidate completes that section and is entered into the master score sheet. The average of the three exercises determines a candidate's overall score. The Skills Assessment, Structured Interview, and Case Management Study each count for one-third of the total grade. The Oral Assessment cut-off to continue a candidacy is 5.25 out of a possible 7. Within the Structured Interview, the Experience and Motivation, Hypothetical and Past Behavior modules are equally weighted. Overall scoring is on a scale from 1 to 7, with 1 representing poor performance and 7 representing an outstanding performance.

Selection and Assessment Procedures for Candidates for Diplomatic Security (DS) Positions (Diplomatic Courier, Security Engineering, Security Technical Specialist, Special Agent, Security Protective Specialist):

For Special Agent candidates testing is conducted in a DS facility in Arlington, VA, and at other locations in the continental United States.

The assessment for Special Agent candidates consists of four components and applicants must be successful in each phase to proceed to the next. All candidates will go through the first two components which examine the applicant's skill set through a written, multiple choice examination followed by a brief oral examination. The multiple-choice examination is 20 minutes in which 32 questions must be answered. This is followed by an oral interview which provides the applicant the opportunity to provide examples of the type of experience claimed on the written exam. This is administered by two DS Special Agents and lasts for 25 minutes.

If successful, the candidate moves on to the third phase (Case Study) and is required to write a report based upon a scenario. Several problems are outlined in a written document and the applicant must write a report in which he/she presents the solution to each problem and properly prioritizes the sequence in which each problem is to be addressed. The report is written utilizing a laptop computer and evaluated by the Examination Team. Candidates are given 50 minutes to complete this phase. The finished report is graded on the basis of writing skills, judgment and information integration. Writing skills include proper grammar, spelling, logic, organization, vocabulary, focus, flow and cohesion. Applicants must also demonstrate an understanding of the broader implications of the problems presented and the judgment to properly prioritize their solution.

If successful, the applicant moves to the fourth and final phase – the Structured Interview – which is a 45-50 minute interview conducted by a member of the Foreign Service Board of Examiners and a DS Special Agent. Areas addressed include motivation for the position; cross-cultural experiences; objectivity and integrity; inter-personal skills and breath of knowledge. The latter component includes questions on American history; the US Government; American culture and current events. The examination also includes three scenarios in which the applicant must present a solution to the problems presented. Judgment, leadership, resourcefulness, organizational skills and initiative are some of the criteria examined. Throughout the examination, the applicant is graded upon oral communications skills and composure.

<u>Security Engineering Officers, Diplomatic Couriers, Security Technical Specialists, and Security Protective Specialists</u> do not take an on-line examination, but must apply online to an open vacancy announcement. Candidates who submit a complete application package by the closing date of the announcement, meet the minimum qualifications and cut score, will be invited to the written and oral assessments. Testing is conducted in a facility in Arlington, VA.

For Security Engineering Officers and Security Technical Specialists, in lieu of the multiple choice questionnaire, they are given an electronics type multiple choice assessment. SEOs will have 25 minutes and STS's will have 35 minutes to complete this phase.

For Diplomatic Courier candidates who make it to phase three will be given a list of topics to choose from to draft an essay. The do not complete the case study exercise. The scoring criteria remains the same as the case study.

Security Protective Specialist candidates are only given the written essay and if successful in the writing, proceed forward to the Structured interview.

All successful candidates then go on to the Structured Interview as described in the Special Agent section above.

4. Exit Interviews

After the assessors complete the integration of their scores, they notify candidates whether they have been successful in reaching the cut-off. Along with their final overall score, candidates learn whether they reached or exceeded the cut off on any of the three major components of the assessment. DS candidates are only informed whether they passed or were found not competitive.

Unsuccessful candidates are informed of their results in a private interview with two assessors. At this point, the candidate is given an opportunity to ask general questions about the assessment process or future exams. Assessors are not permitted to provide specific feedback or critiques of the candidate's performance. This would be considered personal coaching, and would constitute an unfair advantage for those who take the exam more than once.

Those candidates who pass the Oral Assessment receive an Immediate Conditional Offer and proceed to the next phase of the hiring process. Successful candidates receive a briefing on the next steps in the Foreign Service Specialist Selection Process, including information on the security background investigation, language bonus point system, veteran's preference points, the medical examination, and final suitability review. Candidates are also given the opportunity to ask questions about Foreign Service life. Diplomatic Security may then initiate background interviews.

The 12 Dimensions – A Quick Reference

What **qualities** does the State Department seek in FSO candidates? The successful candidate will demonstrate the dimensions listed below that reflect the skills, abilities, and personal qualities deemed essential to the work of the Foreign Service. Candidates should keep in mind that the 12 dimensions are the only thing that they will be rated on during the Oral Assessment. **There is no specific education level, academic major, or proficiency in a foreign language required for appointment as a Foreign Service Officer.**

- **Composure.** To stay calm, poised, and effective in stressful or difficult situations; to think on one's feet, adjusting quickly to changing situations; to maintain self-control.
- **Cultural Adaptability**. To work and communicate effectively and harmoniously with persons of other cultures, value systems, political beliefs, and economic circumstances; to recognize and respect differences in new and different cultural environments.
- **Experience and Motivation.** To demonstrate knowledge, skills or other attributes gained from previous experience of relevance to the Foreign Service; to articulate appropriate motivation for joining the Foreign Service.
- **Information Integration and Analysis.** To absorb and retain complex information drawn from a variety of sources; to draw reasoned conclusions from analysis and synthesis of available information; to evaluate the importance, reliability, and usefulness of information; to remember details of a meeting or event without the benefit of notes.
- **Initiative and Leadership.** To recognize and assume responsibility for work that needs to be done; to persist in the completion of a task; to influence significantly a group's activity, direction, or opinion; to motivate others to participate in the activity one is leading.
- **Judgment.** To discern what is appropriate, practical, and realistic in a given situation; to weigh relative merits of competing demands.
- **Objectivity and Integrity**. To be fair and honest; to avoid deceit, favoritism, and discrimination; to present issues frankly and fully, without injecting subjective bias; to work without letting personal bias prejudice actions.
- **Oral Communication.** To speak fluently in a concise, grammatically correct, organized, precise, and persuasive manner; to convey nuances of meaning accurately; to use appropriate styles of communication to fit the audience and purpose.
- **Planning and Organizing**. To prioritize and order tasks effectively, to employ a systematic approach to achieving objectives, to make appropriate use of limited resources.
- **Resourcefulness.** To formulate creative alternatives or solutions to resolve problems, to show flexibility in response to unanticipated circumstances.
- **Working With Others**. To interact in a constructive, cooperative, and harmonious manner; to work effectively as a team player; to establish positive relationships and gain the confidence of others; to use humor as appropriate.
- **Written Communication.** To write concise, well organized, grammatically correct, effective and persuasive English in a limited amount of time.

Foreign Language Bonus Points and Testing

Foreign language skills are now tested only after the candidate passes the Oral Assessment. Successful candidates will be given instructions on how to arrange for a telephone test during their Oral Assessment exit interviews. The telephone test will assess only the candidate's speaking skills.

Candidates may test in more than one language but will receive bonus points in only one. They may also retake the telephone test in the same language after six months. Language scores are valid for 18 months or the length of any candidacy initiated during the 18 month language score validity period. A candidacy begins on the date the individual applies for employment after a Vacancy Notice is published.

Effective November 2, 2012 Specialist candidates, after passing the Oral Assessment, can earn only .17 bump up points for **any one language listed here** (pdf) if they pass the telephone language test at a speaking level 3. Candidates testing in one of the following eight priority recruitment languages (Arabic; Chinese (Mandarin); Hindi; Persian (Dari); Persian (Farsi); Pashto; Urdu; and Korean) need only a level 2 speaking ability (as measured on the telephone test) to obtain the .17 language bump up points. Candidates whose specialist candidacy began prior to November 2, 2012 are grandfathered under the previous policy (outlined below).

In addition, **effective April 5, 2013**, demonstrated proficiency by a specialist candidate in one of those eight priority recruitment languages can garner higher points (.38 or .25). To be eligible for the higher bump up points, candidates who pass the telephone test will then need to pass an in-person, two-hour speaking and reading test conducted at the Foreign Service Institute in Arlington, Virginia. Any costs associated with the in-person test (travel, time in Washington, etc.) are at the candidate's expense. Those who achieve a minimum score of 3 speaking and 2 reading (S3/R2) will be eligible to receive a total of .38 bump-up points. Candidates who receive a rating of at least 2 speaking and 1 reading (S2/R1) but less than 3 speaking and 2 reading (S3/R2) will be eligible to receive a total of .25 bump-up points. Should the candidate not receive a score of S2/R1 or higher, s/he will retain the .17 points received by passing the telephone test. Language bump up points are granted for one language only. To receive the additional points candidates have to agree to serve one tour of their first two overseas assignments in a Language Designated Position (LDP) or in a country where the recruitment language is a primary language. Most candidates will need a country-specific security clearance before being granted the higher language points.

Candidates whose OA is scored on a 1-100 point scale will receive bump-up points as follows: .17 = 2.4, .25= 3.6, .38= 5.4.

Candidates may test in more than one language but will receive bump-up points in only one. They may telephone retest in the same language after six months, if necessary. Candidates who do not pass the full FSI test in one of the eight RLP languages may retest after six months; any further retests are authorized only after one year. Language scores are valid for 18 months or the length of any candidacy initiated during the 18 month language score validity period.

For information to help you assess your own speaking level, visit **http://www.govtilr.org** and click on "Speaking" under the skill level descriptions for a general description of the expected proficiency. The speaking self-assessment tool, available on the same site, will also help you estimate your language proficiency.

For candidates whose specialist candidacy began prior to November 2, 2012

Effective January 1, 2012, the Foreign Service Institute only offers phone tests in the **languages listed here** (pdf). All passing scores in languages listed garner an additional .17 points. Candidates with one of the following recruitment languages - Azerbaijani, Bengali, Chinese, Gujarati, Hindi, Kazakh, Korean, Kyrgyz, Nepali, Pashto, Persian, Punjabi, Russian, Singhalese, Tamil, Telugu, Turkish, Turkmen, Urdu, and Uzbek who pass an FSI telephone test earn a total of .40 points, while those with a passing score in Arabic based on a telephone test earn a total of .50 points.

Candidates may take the phone test after passing the Oral Assessment. The test results are valid for 18 months or for the life of the candidacy, whichever is longer. In addition, candidates may claim points in only one language but may test in a second language if s/he does not pass the test in the first language. For the phone test, an S-3 proficiency level is required for the following languages: Danish, Dutch, French, German, Haitian Creole, Italian, Norwegian, Portuguese, Romanian, Spanish and Swedish. All other languages listed require an S-2 proficiency.

For information to help you assess your own speaking level, visit http://www.govtilr.org and click on "Speaking" under the skill level descriptions for a general description of the expected proficiency. The speaking self-assessment tool, available on the same site, will also help you estimate your language proficiency.

Should there be any differences between the foreign language testing information in this publication and that listed on the Department of State's website, please assume the information on the website is more current.

Clearances Required After Passing the Oral Assessment

All Foreign Service candidates must receive valid medical, security and suitability clearances as a final condition of employment with the Department of State.

Security Clearance

Except for candidates for DS positions, all candidates should bring a completed, updated SF-86 form (Security questionnaire) to the Oral Assessment. Successful candidates are required to submit one as soon as possible, and the early submission will speed the clearance process. This applies even to candidates with existing Top Secret security clearances from the Department of State or another U.S. Government entity. Even if you have a current security clearance, an updated SF-86 is required for completion of a suitability clearance by the Final Review Panel.

Candidates who do not complete and certify their online SF-86 security questionnaires using e-QIP on the day of the Oral Assessment have 30 days after the Oral Assessment to complete this requirement. **Candidacies where this deadline is missed will be automatically terminated.** This deadline is absolute and applies to those candidates who came to the Oral Assessment without completing their SF-86 and therefore did not have a consultation with the Diplomatic Security representative, and to those who needed to add information and therefore were not able to certify their SF-86 through e-QIP at that time. The eQIP can take many hours to complete and requires information that you may not have readily at hand. You should start working on your SF-86 sooner rather than later; you can begin as early as 90 days prior to your Oral Assessment. Candidates for DS positions will be informed after their OA how to complete their SF86.

Medical Clearance

Foreign Service employees must be able to serve in a wide variety of overseas posts, many of which are remote, unhealthy, or have limited medical support. In addition to other essential qualifications for entry into the Foreign Service, each candidate must meet medical fitness standards that are, of necessity, often more rigorous than those of most other professions.

Candidates must receive an unlimited medical clearance for worldwide assignment prior to being appointed to the Foreign Service. While medical clearance for worldwide availability is an essential qualification for prospective Foreign Service employees, the Department of State does not consider the medical condition of eligible family members in its pre-employment processes. The Department does, however, require medical clearances for family members before they can travel overseas at U.S. Government expense to accompany an employee on assignment.

The same-sex partner of a candidate who has signed an affidavit (DS-7669) declaring a domestic partner relationship is eligible for the same benefits that are accorded to the opposite-sex spouse of a candidate.

Final Review Panel

In addition to receiving valid medical and security clearances, all Foreign Service candidates must receive a valid suitability clearance as a final condition of employment with the Department of State. Upon completion of the medical examination and background investigation, a Final Review Panel will examine your complete file (minus the medically confidential information) to determine whether there is any information about behavior that indicates that you fail to meet standards established in the Foreign Affairs Manual relative to suitability for employment with the Foreign Service. As described in the Foreign Affairs Manual (3 FAM, Section 4111.1, http://www.state.gov/m/a/dir/regs/fam/), the attainment of U.S. foreign policy objectives depends substantially on the confidence of the public in the individuals selected to serve in the Foreign Service. The Department of State requires the highest standards of conduct by employees of the

Foreign Service, including an especially high degree of integrity, reliability, and prudence. Given the representational nature of employment in the Service and the diplomatic privileges and immunities granted employees of the Service abroad, it is necessary that such employees observe the highest standards of conduct during and after working hours or when the employee is on leave or in travel status.

In evaluating suitability, the Final Review Panel applies standards defined in the Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM). For a full listing of suitability standards, please see 3 FAM 4137 and 4138, http://www.state.gov/m/a/dir/regs/fam/.

The Register

After candidates receive their medical, security and suitability clearances, their names will be put on the rank-ordered Register of Cleared Candidates, sorted by specialty. A candidate's rank order on the Register -- as determined by his or her Oral Assessment score, including any bonuses -- is dynamic; that is, people who go on the list after a candidate, but with higher scores, will be ranked ahead of that candidate. Similarly, that candidate will be ranked ahead of people with lower scores, regardless of how much time they have spent on the list. Candidates with the same score will be ranked by date eligible to be placed on the Register. Ranking will also change as others receive their clearances, voluntarily drop off the list, run out of eligibility time, or are offered places in a new entry-level orientation class. The Registrar's Office will make confirmed offers based on the candidate's ranking on this Register and on the Department's hiring needs for each career track. Candidates can remain on the Register for up to 18 months after they are placed on it.