

# U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE INFORMATION GUIDE TO THE FOREIGN SERVICE OFFICER SELECTION PROCESS



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# Information Guide to the Foreign Service Officer Selection Process

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## What is the Foreign Service Officer Selection Process?

The Foreign Service Act of 1980 tasks the U.S. Department of State – and the Board of Examiners (BEX) specifically – with responsibility for the evaluation and selection of candidates for the Foreign Service.

The Department takes this charge seriously and has devoted significant resources to the development of a Foreign Service Officer Selection Process with the goal of providing all candidates, regardless of socioeconomic background, education, or experience, a chance to demonstrate their potential to be a Foreign Service Officer.

Candidates who participate in the selection process will find that it is designed to challenge them and to give them the opportunity to demonstrate qualities that have been identified as necessary to become a successful Foreign Service Officer. Thus, the Board of Examiners stands by the validity and integrity of the assessment process as being a fair and accurate selection method for Foreign Service Officers. Indeed, it is vital to the U.S. Department of State’s mission and purpose.

To ensure no bias in favor of any candidate, the Board of Examiners periodically revises its testing materials. It also asks all candidates to sign non-disclosure agreements before beginning portions of the assessment, and has implemented other safeguards. Please note that BEX will terminate the candidacy of anyone found to have violated the non-disclosure agreement.

The Foreign Service is a unique career and, perhaps unsurprisingly, the selection process is also unique. The Foreign Service selection process, including the Foreign Service Officer Test (FSOT), the Qualifications Evaluation Panel (QEP), and the Foreign Service Oral Assessment (FSOA), is an employment selection tool used by the Department of State to identify the most qualified candidates for Foreign Service positions.

In other words, it is a hiring process. Therefore, the nature and purpose of this assessment process are different from those of educational testing.

In education, assessment focuses on “mastery testing” and the goal is to determine if the student possesses sufficient knowledge or skill to pass a course or to practice a profession. The assessments are usually comprehensive, covering the entire body of required knowledge or skill. The scores verify current competence and command of a definite skill set. Such assessments are often accompanied by extensive feedback, and possibly remedial training and reassessment, with the ultimate objective of passing. Education assessments are not a competition; the objective is for everyone to pass.

In employment selection, the goal is to determine which candidates are the most qualified because an organization wants to hire the best. Employment assessments only sample a job-related body of knowledge or skills because assessment time is limited. The scores are used as predictors of prospective job performance, rather than indicators of current competence. Thus, tests like those used in the Foreign Service Officer selection process are not accompanied by extensive feedback or remedial training because they are not meant to measure an entire body of knowledge or skills. Moreover, the organization’s hiring process is meant to be highly selective given the limited number of openings available.

**ALERT:** *Candidates should thoroughly read the [Eight Steps to Becoming a Foreign Service Officer](#) on [careers.state.gov](#) before they submit their applications.*



## Purpose and Use of this *Guide*

The purpose of this *Guide* is to help familiarize candidates with the selection and assessment process so that they will be able to better focus on their own performance rather than spend their limited time reviewing procedures.

This introduction presents a brief overview of the FSOT, its components, and the testing process. Real-life stories from Foreign Service Officers are highlighted in the left column throughout the *Guide*.

The next section, titled **Steps to Becoming a Foreign Service Officer**, discusses the eight steps in the selection process and the qualifications that must be met to become a Foreign Service Officer. This section provides detailed instructions and procedures to help inform candidates about the FSOT and FSOA. It explains the knowledge and skill areas covered on the tests, and it offers a list of related academic areas of study.

The **Sample Question** sections in the *Guide* are designed to familiarize candidates with the types of items that will appear on the Foreign Service Officer Test and Foreign Service Oral Assessment. Candidates are informed about the content, length, format, and time limits for each section of these assessments.

## What is the FSOT?

The Foreign Service Officer Test (FSOT) is the first of eight steps in the FSO selection process. It is a computer-based test that consists of four separate test sections:

1. Job Knowledge Test
2. Situational Judgment Test
3. English Expression Test
4. Written Essay Test

The first three sections of the test contain items in a multiple-choice format. The Written Essay appears in the last section of the FSOT. Each section of the test is timed separately and must be completed within the designated time limit.

This *Guide* provides sample questions for each component of the FSOT to give candidates a general idea of the type of questions they will encounter in the test.

Although the Written Essay section is an important aspect of the test that is used to determine a candidate's qualifications, it will not be scored unless the candidate passes the Job Knowledge, Situational Judgment Test, and English Expression sections of the test.

## Test Dates

The computer-based FSOT, administered by the testing firm Pearson VUE, is offered three times each year, in February, June and October. For specific dates and applicable deadlines, candidates should visit [careers.state.gov](http://careers.state.gov) or [pearsonvue.com/fsot/](http://pearsonvue.com/fsot/). Each eight-day testing window offers multiple testing times. There is no limit on the number of times an applicant may take the FSOT, but the test can be taken only once in a 12-month period.

The test is offered throughout the United States, at some overseas Pearson Professional Centers, and at some U.S. Embassies and Consulates.

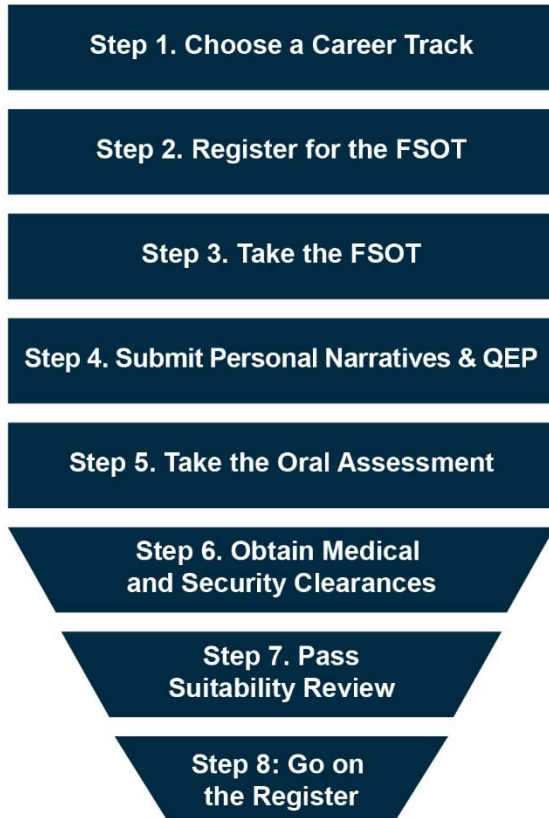
## Disability Accommodations

All applicants, including those requesting reasonable accommodations, must submit applications for the FSOT at [pearsonvue.com/fsot/](http://pearsonvue.com/fsot/). In addition to preparing and administering the FSOT, Pearson VUE is responsible for all accommodation requests for candidates with disabilities, including those planning to test at an embassy or consulate.

The accommodation approval process can be lengthy. To allow sufficient time for approval and the necessary arrangements, candidates must submit accommodations requests in writing with accompanying documentation to Pearson VUE no later than the date that the registration window opens. Follow the detailed instructions for accommodations requests provided at <http://www.pearsonvue.com/accommodations>.

# 8 STEPS TO A FOREIGN SERVICE CAREER

The FSOT is only one of the several steps in the selection process for becoming a Foreign Service Officer. The eight steps involved in the selection process are as follows:



## Step 1: Choose a Career Track

**Choosing a career track during the registration process is very important.** Applicants should fully educate themselves about the five Foreign Service careers tracks: Consular, Economic, Management, Political, and Public Diplomacy, and take time to make the best selection given their career aspirations. Once an application is submitted, it cannot be changed and candidates are locked into the chosen career track for the duration of that candidacy. The candidate may change career tracks when submitting a new application.

## Step 2: Register for the FSOT

The registration process, which includes concurrent application submission and seat selection, opens approximately five (5) weeks prior to each testing window. To register, candidates should go to [pearsonvue.com/fsot/](https://pearsonvue.com/fsot/) during the five-week period prior to a specific testing window to create an account, submit completed eligibility verification and application forms, and select a location and seat for that specific test date. The registration process closes three (3) days before the testing window opens.

A candidate's Pearson VUE account shows the progress on the five steps of the selection process that Pearson VUE manages, from application to Oral Assessment appointments. The application comprises seven sections: about you, military service, career track, education, language and proficiency, work experience, and other personal information. Finally, candidates must certify that the information provided is correct before they will be able to submit the application. *Remember that once the application is submitted it cannot be changed and applications can only be submitted during registration periods.*

Candidates who wish to update or change their application information, including career track, may choose not to take a particular test and submit a new application during the next registration window.

**Candidates will be assessed a fee of \$72.00 for failure to cancel an appointment at least 48 hours before the FSOT test date or for failure to appear for the test.** Candidates cannot reserve a seat for another testing date until any outstanding no-show fee has been paid.

Candidates should keep in mind that they are submitting a job application that will follow them throughout the selection process. They should complete their online application form with attention to detail. This is the first form the Qualifications Evaluation Panel (QEP) will consider when reviewing the files of candidates who pass the FSOT. It is also the one document, along with a candidate's Statement of Interest, that assessors will review before the Structured Interview on the day of the Oral Assessment.

## FSO STORIES FROM THE FIELD

When South Africa held its first multi-racial election, I volunteered to be an election monitor. The election was held under the auspices of the Independent Electoral Commission, or IEC. I was asked to monitor three polling stations in downtown Johannesburg while several of my Consulate colleagues covered the suburbs and outlying districts. My first priority was to examine the main polling station located in Johannesburg's City Hall.

On the morning of the election, I arrived at the Consulate very early and began my six-block walk to City Hall. My IEC cap was too small so I carried it along with my IEC armband. Although the turnout for the election was expected to be huge, I had no idea that a sea of first-time voters would extend more than three blocks from the polling station at 7:00 A.M.

As I tried to think of a way to get to City Hall, I became aware that my presence was making many of the expectant voters, at the end of the line, uncomfortable. Holding up my cap and armband, I yelled "IEC."

The effect on the crowd was electric. Many of these would-be voters were understandably skeptical that free and fair elections could be held in a nation that had not yet totally shed all aspects of Apartheid. As others took up the chant of "IEC," the crowd realized that the election would indeed be monitored. As if by magic, the crowd parted and for three city blocks I saw thousands of exultant, cheering faces, most of which were wet with tears of joy.

To this day, I believe that my feet never touched the ground until I arrived at the front steps of City Hall. Of the many uniquely "FSO experiences" I've had, this opportunity to be a part of such an epochal event was very special.

Management Officer

Candidates should keep personal information in their profiles up-to-date. Candidates are able to make some changes themselves (e-mail/physical addresses); they will need to contact Pearson VUE to make updates, such as name changes, that will require documentation.

- Candidates should list all of their jobs whether paid or unpaid, part-time or full-time, and any continuing or significant volunteer activities.
- Candidates should use the "Special Accomplishments" box to highlight skills that might make them stand out from the crowd.
- Candidates should **carefully proofread** the application before submitting it.
- Candidates are encouraged to provide *personal* email addresses in their profiles because Pearson VUE will send all correspondence to that address. Consider that employees have no expectation of privacy at work or that school addresses may no longer be accessible after graduation.
- The Board of Examiners estimates that the application will take about two hours to complete. **Candidates should not wait until just before the deadline to submit an application.** Servers get clogged, computers crash, and IT support is not available around the clock.
- Candidates are encouraged to save their application or print them. While Pearson VUE does archive the applications candidates submit, it is always best that candidates retain a separate copy as well.

## FSO STORIES FROM THE FIELD

As the holder of the fisheries portfolio at Embassy Managua, I was required to accompany U.S. fisheries officials to Nicaragua's Miskito Coast on an annual basis to ensure that shrimp trawlers were outfitted with Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs) that would prevent endangered sea turtles from becoming entangled in the nets and drowning. The residents of the Miskito Coast were separated from the rest of Nicaragua by geography (an impenetrable rain forest with no roads between the Pacific and Atlantic coasts), heritage (they were descendants of pirates, shipwrecked slaves, and various Indian tribes), and language (they spoke English, Miskito Creole, or various Indian languages rather than Spanish). It was possibly because of this sense of being different that they were sensitive to being treated with respect, and our Deputy Chief of Mission reminded Embassy personnel to make sure we dressed professionally when traveling to the area, even though it felt like going on safari to us.

I tried to strike a balance between professionalism and practicality the first time I traveled to check for TEDs. Instead of a suit, I wore a cotton shirt, a lower-than-my-knees jean skirt, and rubber-soled topsiders. I maneuvered around the first few ships with ease. Then the team boarded a small boat and motored out to a shrimp trawler farther out on the water. Boarding a boat from a dock is a very different thing than boarding a ship at high seas. One glance showed me I wouldn't be able to clamber the 20 feet up the rope ladder to get to deck unless I hiked my skirt up to my hips, so I told my team to go on without me. However, one of the crewmen had other ideas. Without saying a word, he picked me up, threw me over his shoulder like a sack of flour and clambered up the side of the ship, no joke. It probably only took ten seconds, but it seemed like hours — all under the gaze of about two dozen men including sailors, Nicaraguan government fisheries officials, and members of my own U.S. delegation. And then I had to get back down to the boat the same way. Truly, I wanted to die. They didn't prepare us for this in A-100 class.

Economics Officer

## Step 3: Take the FSOT

### On the Day of the Test

- Get plenty of rest before taking the test. Candidates who are tired cannot possibly perform at the best of their abilities on the test.
- Know where the test center is located. Candidates should familiarize themselves with how to get to their test center by checking online maps or visiting the test center beforehand.
- Make allowances for stalled rush-hour traffic, broken-down metro trains, no-vacancy parking lots, and taxi drivers who can't find the test center.
- Dress comfortably. Candidates will not come in contact with the Foreign Service Officers who may be interviewing them later in the process. Wear clothes appropriate for sitting at a computer console for 2-3 hours.
- Keep in mind that candidates are required to remove all suit coats, sweaters, and jackets, etc. Thus, candidates who arrive at the test center wearing a lightweight top under a jacket may find themselves cold and uncomfortable during the testing period.
- Avoid wearing strong fragrances, noisy jewelry, or other distracting attire.
- No sunglasses or hats are permitted.
- No food or drinks (including water or coffee) are allowed in the testing room. Candidates should have sufficient nourishment before the testing period.
- Candidates who require food and drink (for example, a candidate with diabetes or hypoglycemia) should request this through the test accommodations process.



## FSO STORIES FROM THE FIELD

I was posted in Vietnam during the Y2K scare when officials feared that computers worldwide would fail as the world passed from 1999 to 2000. In response to cable inquiries, I sent several reports back to Washington detailing what would be at risk in Vietnam should all the computers crash with the New Year (short answer – nothing). As a “reward” for my assessment, I was appointed to be control officer for a team from the Inspector General’s Office who did not believe a country could be so “uncomputerized” as to have almost no risk from the year 2000.

The second day of their visit, I took them to my favorite Hanoi restaurant and, as we were ordering, the power went off. The visitors assumed we would have to leave. I assured them that the restaurants in Hanoi dealt with these two-to four-hour blackouts nearly every day and simply cooked outdoors over charcoal.

Indeed, the only concession to the lack of electricity was to open the windows, and within a half-hour our delicious, hot meals were served. The team started to believe me that the country was still "analog," and left the country feeling confident that Y2K would not cause problems.

I never told them the charcoal used to cook their food was made (by hand) from cow dung in a village an hour away.

Management Officer

## Procedures at the Test Center

Candidates should arrive at the testing center at least 30 minutes before their scheduled appointment time. There is a video about what to expect in a Pearson VUE testing center at [https://youtube/T6tK\\_tY2AQQ](https://youtube/T6tK_tY2AQQ).

- All candidates must provide a current, government- or state-issued ID. Expired IDs or school IDs are **not** accepted. Candidates without a current, government- or state-issued ID will **not** be allowed to test. Candidates testing at overseas Pearson Professional Centers must use their U.S. passports as their primary form of identification.
- Candidates who registered in one name but whose legal name is different on the test day (for example, candidates who marry and legally change their names) must contact Pearson VUE to update this information prior to taking the FSOT. Go to [www.pearsonvue.com/fsot/contact](http://www.pearsonvue.com/fsot/contact) to find out what documentation is necessary. Candidates cannot make these profile changes themselves.
- All candidates will be required to have their photos taken at the test center for security purposes.
- All candidates will be required to sign a Candidate Rules agreement form.
- Turn off cell phones and other electronic devices — do not just put them on vibrate. Candidates will **not** be permitted to bring their cell phones or other electronic devices into the testing center.
- There will be **no** access to cell phones during the approximately 3-hour testing period. Work colleagues and family members should be informed of this situation beforehand, and any necessary arrangements made.
- Candidates will **not** be allowed to leave the immediate area during the testing period. Stepping outside to get a breath of fresh air while taking a bathroom break constitutes leaving the test center and that individual’s candidacy will be terminated.
- Individual candidates begin their tests as soon as they are completely checked in. Candidates should be quiet when entering the testing room to avoid disturbing those already testing. Ear plugs are normally available at domestic test centers upon request.

## FSO STORIES FROM THE FIELD

On the whole, I firmly believe that Foreign Service life has been a plus for my family. My children — one born in Singapore, the other in Ecuador — have developed a confidence and adaptive skills I never could have imagined in my childhood. But there were days — and nights — when my wife and I questioned our sanity.

One such night was early in our first-born's life, back in 1993. Assigned to Bogota during a particularly violent period, we had rationalized that a toddler would be safe, as he certainly wasn't going anywhere outside of our arms and his stroller. We were all a bit jumpy as the drug war violence had hit close to home, with an explosion at a pizza restaurant a block from our elegant Bogota apartment.

It was shortly after we'd put our pride-and-joy to bed when the rat-a-tat-tat sounds exploded right outside the nursery window. My wife and I, in tandem, sprinted into the baby's room, pulled him from the crib, and rolled under the crib, crouching together under the window from where the sounds seemed to emanate.

It seemed like an hour — but was probably only a minute — before we realized that the explosions were not the final showdown for Pablo Escobar, but yet another Colombia birthday party punctuated with fireworks and, soon to follow, mariachis.

We slowly — very slowly — stood up and danced a little dance to celebrate the gift of life.

Public Diplomacy Officer

## Computer-Based Testing Procedures

The FSOT is a computer-based test, and, though rare, technology sometimes fails. Candidates should remain calm in the event of a technical glitch; the computer will automatically stop the time and save the candidate's work up to that point. Candidates' testing time will not be penalized during the interruption.

The test proctor will make every effort to resolve technical issues while the candidate is present. If the test has not loaded or if the candidate has only viewed a few questions, Pearson VUE will attempt to reschedule the candidate during that testing window. If there are no appointments available, the candidate will be authorized to register during the next testing window. *If the candidate has viewed a substantial portion of the test or completes the test, but is unable to submit it, the candidate is prohibited from retesting in the current window, but will be authorized to register during the next window.*

## What to Expect During the FSOT

Each of the four sections of the FSOT – Job Knowledge, Situational Judgment Test, English Expression, and Written Essay – is timed. Each section must be completed within the designated time limit, and **candidates are not allowed to return to a previous test section if they finish a later section with time remaining**. Therefore, it is important that candidates have a strategy for pacing themselves to ensure they will complete each test section in the time allotted.

For the multiple-choice test item sections, candidates can easily figure out how much time they should spend on each question to answer them in the allotted time. However, this is an individual decision. Some people may not wish to pay attention to the time at all, but may simply prefer to work as quickly and steadily as possible.

In the timed essay, candidates may wish to spend the early part of the test organizing their ideas on the topic. Of course, there are many methods for writing an essay. The important thing to realize is that candidates should have a plan for how to organize their time. The tests are designed so that most candidates can finish them in the designated time period.

## FSO STORIES FROM THE FIELD

It was a chilly Sunday morning, and all was quiet as usual on Dragodan Hill, our residential perch above Pristina. But this Sunday – February 17, 2008 – had a different feel; Pristina was about to become the world’s newest capitol.

I had been seconded from the State Department to the International Civilian Office Preparation Team (ICO-PT) to head its community affairs unit. The ICO-PT was established by the E.U. and other concerned nations to monitor implementation of a comprehensive proposal for the future of Kosovo drafted by the U.N. Special Envoy and former Finnish President Marti Ahtisaari – the “Ahtisaari Plan”. Cooped up in hot, dusty converted apartments in a shabby corner of Pristina, my ICO-PT colleagues and I spent most of the summer of 2007 drafting detailed plans for the day – the arrival of which was by no means assured – that the plan would form the constitutional basis for an independent Kosovo.

And so, on February 17, I took my usual route to central Pristina, down 200 stairs from Dragodan, and along the thoroughfare alternately known as “Beach Street” for its many outdoor cafes and bars, or “Bird (Crap) Street” for the thousands of crows that pack its curbside trees. It was lined with honking cars, most decorated with Albanian and American flags, some with photos of U.S. Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, or Gen. Wesley Clark. I joined the crowd gathered outside the parliament for the formal announcement of the independence, and then walked over to Mother Teresa Street, which was packed with revelers. That evening, we watched the fireworks from the apartment of the deputy head of the ICO, a fellow officer on detail from State.

As I prepared to depart in May, 2008, my friends held a farewell dinner for me at a Serbian family-run restaurant on the outskirts of Pristina. We noticed that the lone waitress, who had left Kosovo immediately following independence, had returned to work. We took this as a hopeful sign for Kosovo’s future.

Public Diplomacy Officer

For each section of the test, candidates should consider the following:

- Read the directions carefully. The urge to quickly scan the directions to the test and start answering the questions is a natural one, but it is also unwise. It is important to read each question and its answer choices carefully before responding. Skipping over key words or concepts could lead to making mistakes and inadvertently answering an item incorrectly.
- At times, candidates may be unsure of the answer to a particular question. One strategy is to skip these questions, go on to the questions they can answer, and return to the more difficult questions later while time still remains *before exiting that section of the test*. **NOTE:** Once candidates exit a test section, they will not be allowed to return to it. Candidates need to balance their time in answering the items as accurately as possible throughout the test.
- Because the Job Knowledge and English Expression sections of the FSOT contain multiple-choice questions, it is most advantageous for candidates to answer all of the questions — even if they have to guess. *There is no penalty for guessing*. The number of questions that candidates answer correctly on these two multiple-choice item tests determines their score. If candidates can eliminate one of the answer choices, they have a better chance of choosing the correct answer.
- One strategy for guessing that should be avoided is choosing answers in a pattern. Standardized tests are designed so that the correct answers to items are randomly distributed and do not follow any “guessing patterns.” Thus, candidates should avoid using this guessing tactic, because it is likely to be ineffective and detrimental to candidates’ scores.

When contemplating a strategy for completing the test in the required time, candidates should try to factor in time to review their answers. Candidates may need to return to questions they skipped or reconsider questions about which they were unsure of the answer when they first read them. Candidates should keep in mind that all test-taking tips are general and should determine a test-taking strategy that works best for them.

## FSOT Knowledge and Skill Areas

Success on the FSOT involves much more than studying for a test. The FSOT assesses knowledge and skills that the candidate has acquired from reading widely from many different sources, study or course work in a number of related fields, and other career or life experiences.

In the development of the FSOT, a job analysis was conducted of the positions held by Foreign Service Officers to identify the knowledge and skills critical to success on the job. Then, a detailed test blueprint was created.

The test blueprint provides an outline of the required knowledge and skill areas and their relative importance to the job. The knowledge and skill areas covered on the FSOT are listed below.

- **Correct grammar, organization, writing strategy, sentence structure, and punctuation required for writing or editing reports:** This knowledge area encompasses English expression and language usage skills required for preparing or editing written reports, including correct grammar and good writing at the sentence and paragraph level.
- **United States Government:** This knowledge area encompasses a general understanding of the composition and functioning of the federal government, the Constitution and its history, the structure of Congress and its role in foreign affairs, as well as the United States political system and its role in governmental structure, formulation of government policies, and foreign affairs.
- **United States History, Society, Customs, and Culture:** This knowledge area encompasses an understanding of major events, institutions, and movements in national history, including political and economic history, as well as national customs and culture, social issues and trends, and the influence of U.S. society and culture on foreign policy and foreign affairs.
- **World History and Geography:** This knowledge area encompasses a general understanding of significant world historical events, issues, and developments, including their impact on U.S. foreign policy, as well as knowledge of world geography and its relationship to U.S. foreign policy.
- **Economics:** This knowledge area encompasses an understanding of basic economic principles, as well as a general understanding of economic issues and the economic system of the United States.
- **Mathematics and Statistics:** This knowledge area encompasses a general understanding of basic mathematical and statistical procedures. Items requiring calculations may be included.
- **Management Principles, Psychology, and Human Behavior:** This knowledge area encompasses a general understanding of basic management and supervisory techniques and methods. It includes knowledge of human psychology and behavior, leadership, motivational strategies, and equal employment practices.
- **Communications:** This knowledge area encompasses a general understanding of the principles of effective communication and public-speaking techniques, as well as general knowledge of public media, media relations, and the goals and techniques of public diplomacy and their use to support work functions.
- **Computers and the Internet:** This knowledge area encompasses a general understanding of basic computer operations such as word processing, databases, spreadsheets, and using e-mail and the Internet.



## FSO STORIES FROM THE FIELD

It was September 17, 2008. I was only three weeks into my first Foreign Service tour, as a vice consul at Embassy Sana'a, and my stress level was high. It was the end of the week and I was in the best mood I had been in since arriving in Yemen. Today, I thought, would be different.

Years of false alarms had numbed me to fire drills. So when the high-low alarm went off in the embassy, I kept working. Then I heard the explosion. The whole room shook and dust started to fall from the ceiling. My colleagues were all already under their desks. "Get down!" someone yelled. I scrambled to the floor, trying to get a grip on the situation. Before I could figure out how to fit myself into the small box of a space between a file cabinet and my computer, the second explosion hit. I began to wonder if the half-inch of wood above my head would give me any protection. We were under our desks for more than an hour. We counted six explosions. Everyone stayed calm. We cracked jokes to ease the silence. Humor means you're still alive.

Around 11 a.m. we were ushered into a "safe room" by security personnel. For those who had been at the embassy for the March attack six months earlier, the entire procedure appeared routine. I was in shock. I knew enough to get some water, but just sat dazed on the corner for about 20 minutes. When one of the nurses came over and started making small talk, I began to snap out of it. Eventually all of the people in the consular waiting room were brought to the interior holding area. Our local staff did a phenomenal job attending to the crowd.

In the meantime, I got hold of myself and realized I could be more useful standing up. I escorted people to the bathrooms and played secretary for our press spokesman, who was answering nonstop calls from the international media. I was impressed watching the section heads mobilize to manage the situation and get messages out. Equally impressive were the embassy medical staff, looking after our wounded guards (one of whom died before he could receive full medical attention). These were experienced diplomats in action.

For a second, under the desk, I had thought, Why should I issue one more visa? But then I remembered all the people in the waiting room, huddled under cover too. I thought about our local staff. I thought about the local guards and the soldiers. I couldn't blame Yemen and I couldn't hate these people. This attack was bad for all of us. This was the job I fought for, and these are the places we need diplomats. No one ever said it was going to be easy.

Political Officer

## Related Areas of Study

Success on the FSOT is not necessarily dependent on a specific course of study. However, the curriculum of the following college-level courses often helps to familiarize a candidate with the information assessed by the test. The names of the courses are general and may differ from institution to institution.

- English Composition/Rhetoric
- American History
- American Studies (including cultural and social history)
- American Political Thought
- United States Political System
- American Economic History
- Introduction to Economics (micro and macro)
- World History (Western and non-Western)
- World Geography
- International Economics
- World Religions
- Introduction to Statistics
- Introduction to Management Principles
- Intercultural Communication
- Mass Communication
- Psychology

## Once the Test Session is Over

At the completion of the testing session, candidates should raise their hand in order to be escorted from the testing area. Since individual candidates may have begun their tests at different times, they also may be leaving as others are still testing. Please be considerate and try to minimize any disruptions.

Bring any testing irregularities to the proctor's attention immediately or, at the very least, before leaving the test center. Pearson VUE and the Department of State work hard to provide candidates with appropriate testing environments and the proper tools, and they need to know if anything fails to meet appropriate standards. Filing a complaint with the proctor will NOT have any bearing on whether a candidate passes the FSOT.

Pearson VUE sends out results notifications advising candidates to check their accounts for score reports no later than three weeks after the close of the testing window. Even if candidates do not receive an email directing them to retrieve their online score reports from Pearson VUE, they can log into their accounts to retrieve them. To prevent difficulties in receiving results, candidates should:

- Check their spam folders.
- Make sure their spam filters accept emails from [PearsonVUEConfirmation@pearson.com](mailto:PearsonVUEConfirmation@pearson.com).
- Make sure the email address they provided to Pearson VUE is the same email they are currently using. Candidates can update the email address in their profile themselves.

Neither Pearson VUE nor the Department of State will be responsible for the failure of candidates' Internet servers to deliver email in a timely fashion.

## How to Get Started

A booklet entitled *Becoming a Foreign Service Officer* can be downloaded (in PDF format) from the State Department website at [careers.state.gov](http://careers.state.gov).

Online registration for the FSOT is available during the five-week registration period prior to a specific testing window through the following website address [pearsonvue.com/fsot/](http://pearsonvue.com/fsot/).

## FSO STORIES FROM THE FIELD

On November 15, 2007, Cyclone Sidr slammed into southwestern Bangladesh, killing thousands and leaving millions homeless. The fragile interim government in Dhaka had limited capacity to deliver food, water and shelter to people devastated by the natural disaster, so the U.S. government stepped in to help.

The United States staged aerial relief efforts from an airfield in a Barisal, small city in Southern Bangladesh, to deliver food and other supplies to remote villages further south. The local military and U.S. Marines jointly set up an operations center to stage the drop-off and pick-up of relief supplies. Colleagues from USAID and I, representing the embassy's political/economic section, established a liaison office at this forward operating base to coordinate military and civilian relief activities.

Thanks to combined U.S.-Bangladeshi efforts, we delivered literally tons of relief materials to the cyclone victims. As relief supplies from around the world poured into Dhaka, C-130 cargo planes from the U.S. Marines, the U.S. Air Force, and the Bangladeshi Air Force ferried the supplies down to our base. The USS *Kearsarge* and the USS *Tarawa*, anchored off the coast in the Bay of Bengal, sent U.S. Navy and Marine helicopters to pick up food, blankets, and household items dropped off by the C-130s and delivered them to remote areas that could not be reached by road.

Meanwhile, my USAID colleagues fanned out from Barisal to assess the damage. Food, health, and shelter specialists visited villages and outlying areas to evaluate what people needed immediately and in the long run. I met with government officials to brief them on our work, helped obtain supplies for the operations centers, coordinated communications with the command center in Dhaka, and escorted visitors and media, highlighting U.S.-Bangladeshi cooperation during the crisis.

Despite the tragedy, it was inspiring to see the U.S. diplomacy, development, and defense coming together to help a country in need.

Economic Officer

## Step 4: Submit Personal Narratives for QEP Review

In addition to test scores, the Department of State screens candidates for job-related qualities that indicate a candidate's ability to perform Foreign Service work successfully. This is done through the Qualifications Evaluation Panel (QEP) review, which looks at a candidate's total file: the FSOT and Written Essay scores, work history, education, personal experiences, and any language ability validated by the Foreign Service Institute.

Candidates who pass the FSOT are invited to submit six Personal Narratives (PNs), of no more than 1,300 characters each, in which they answer questions describing the knowledge, skills, and abilities they would bring to the Foreign Service. Candidates will be asked to address the following six areas: Leadership Skills, Interpersonal Skills, Communication Skills, Management Skills, Intellectual Skills, and Substantive Knowledge.

**Candidates are allowed 3 weeks after receiving their FSOT results to submit their PNs;** there is no flexibility in this deadline. The invitation to complete the PN is included in the Passing Letter received from Pearson VUE. To gain access to the Passing Letter, candidates must log-in to their account, as instructed in the email from Pearson VUE, and download a PDF of their FSOT results letter. A link is provided in the Passing Letter for candidates to launch the survey to complete their PNs. Candidates should check their spam filters and contact Pearson VUE if they have not received the email notification that they passed the FSOT with the invitation to submit their PNs. **NOTE: If candidates fail to submit their PNs, their candidacy will be terminated.**

Keep the following in mind when drafting PNs:

- Candidates should respond appropriately to the questions asked. A candidate may have a great story that highlights his or her unique qualities, but if the response does not directly address the question, the candidate will be low ranked.
- The PNs allow candidates to draw attention not only to what they have done, but also how they did it, why it mattered, and what effect it had. Simple lists of accomplishments, recaps of candidates' resumes, or theories learned in school are not helpful.

## FSO STORIES FROM THE FIELD

I was a newly assigned Political Military officer in a Scandinavian country. As an African-American woman on her second day in the country, I attended a meeting at the Ministry of Defense regarding NATO issues. I arrived at the meeting hall where people were milling around. As I didn't know anyone there (yet), I sat down and waited for the meeting to proceed. After five minutes with the Chair looking at his watch repeatedly, I asked the person next to me what we were waiting for.

He glanced at me briefly and said, "We are waiting for the American — he hasn't arrived yet." I said nothing.

After a few more minutes went by, the Chair rose and stated, "Well I guess the American isn't coming today." At this point, I gave him a smile and a wave.

First, he looked puzzled, then shocked, and finally he smiled hurriedly so as to cover up his initial two reactions. Much later, when I got to know the Chair better, he sheepishly admitted to not having expected the American diplomat to be either female or black. He went on to say, "You, Americans. We never know what to expect when an American is coming through the door for the first time." I have repeatedly heard this sentiment while overseas — in some form or fashion — and it makes me proud to have been able to serve the United States.

Political Officer

- The QEP panels are composed of experienced, trained current or former Foreign Service Officers who have read the PNs from hundreds of candidates and are familiar with the type of experience a candidate acquires when spending two weeks in Africa for a graduate school project or working as a summer intern in the State Department. While candidates should not be shy about reporting their accomplishments, inflating the facts or their work positions is counterproductive and very likely to work against them.
- Candidates should not make assumptions about the types of responses the Department of State is looking for or the type of candidate it wishes to hire. While most candidates have had some overseas experience — e.g., travel, study, or business — many have not. It is possible that a candidate's summer job at a local animal shelter could provide a better response to a PN question than the experience acquired during study abroad.
- Before submitting their PNs, candidates should make sure they have provided responses that not only answer the specific question, but also are appropriate to the career track selected when they registered. Candidates are rank-ordered with other candidates in the same career track. If the consular career track is selected, it is not likely that a candidate will be ranked highly if he or she only provided responses demonstrating the potential to be an economic officer.
- During every test administration, the QEP panels discover several PN submissions — many of which are very high quality — that indicate the candidate is applying for a Foreign Service Officer position as, for example, a political officer, when the actual career track selected was consular. This mistake is particularly common for candidates who reached the QEP stage on another occasion and are simply recycling their previous responses. Responses such as these will be low ranked.
- Neither the Department of State nor Pearson VUE has the ability to change candidates' career tracks once they have been selected during the registration process.



## FSO STORIES FROM THE FIELD

On July 23, 2005, I was a first-tour officer about halfway through my two-year consular assignment at Embassy Cairo. In the wee hours of the night I received a phone call from the consul general summoning me to the embassy. There I learned that three coordinated terrorist bombings had occurred in a resort town in the Sinai earlier that morning. The consul general asked me to go to the scene to determine if any of the casualties were American citizens and, if so, to render all necessary consular assistance. Well before dawn I was travelling in a motor pool vehicle heading for Sharm el-Sheikh.

When I arrived six hours later, I connected with colleagues from the regional security office and the legal attaché's office who had also been sent. There were no initial reports of American casualties. I had never before been in a morgue. I entered with trepidation, and while it was an extremely unpleasant experience, I found I was able to remain calm and focused as I looked at the bodies of the victims and noted their physical characteristics and clothing – in case any Americans were reported missing after the fact. After working through the day without a break, my embassy colleague and I gathered for dinner that evening, exhausted. Halfway through dinner, my cell phone rang. It was the consul general, telling me a hotel manager had called to report that two guests, an American girl and her British boyfriend, were missing. We went to the hotel immediately to talk to the manager and inspect their rooms. They had left behind their digital cameras, and by reviewing their photos on the memory card, we were able to learn about their physical characteristics. I spent the next day visiting hospitals and police stations looking for the American girl. I found her at a morgue in the small town of El Tur, about an hour away.

During these extraordinary four days, I came to understand the immense responsibility placed on consular officers in times of crisis. As emotionally wrenching as it was, I found the work incredibly meaningful. I am a career public diplomacy officer, but my experience in Egypt led me to seriously consider changing to the consular track. I deeply respect the vital work performed by consular officers every day of the week throughout the world.

Public Diplomacy Officer

It is important to note that there is no “Pass” or “Fail” in the QEP review. Rather, candidates receive a relative ranking compared to other candidates in the same career track. Thus, the higher a candidate's score, the more likely the candidate will be invited to take the Oral Assessment. There is no preset cut-off score.

## Step 5: Take the Oral Assessment

The Department of State issues invitations to take the Oral Assessment based on its anticipated hiring needs. Candidates should understand that the percentage of candidates who passed the FSOT and those who are invited to take the Oral Assessment varies over time. Many candidates with excellent qualifications may receive an invitation to take the Oral Assessment at a time when there are more new positions available at the Department of State. Conversely, candidates with excellent qualifications may **not** be invited to take the Oral Assessment when the Department of State's hiring targets are lower. The process is very competitive, and many candidates repeat the selection process.

## Before the Oral Assessment

Oral Assessments are held in Washington, DC and – budget and schedule permitting – in San Francisco twice a year (January and May). Once candidates schedule the FSOA, they should make travel and lodging plans.

- Be rested. Candidates who are tired cannot possibly be at their best. The FSOA 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 FSOA studying; extra factoids at this point will not make a difference. Visit a museum, go out to a movie, visit with friends – and get to bed at a decent hour (see “Be rested” above).

## FSO STORIES FROM THE FIELD

As an FSO, you seldom realize the true impact of your actions. As the Consular Section Chief in Calcutta, it was near the end of the day when the consulate received word that two missionary children had been admitted to a local hospital. Along with a member of our American Citizens' Services staff, I immediately proceeded there and was escorted to the family's room. The father and mother were in their 30s. They explained that they had been in India for six months and their mission was some 80 miles north of Calcutta. Their two daughters, ages four and six, had become seriously ill and were rushed to the hospital in Calcutta where the physicians determined they were exposed to *E. Coli* infection (or contamination). The youngest daughter recovered, but the eldest daughter remained in intensive care. As we entered the intensive care unit, it was clean, quiet, and dimly lit. The child, unconscious, was attached to several monitors. She was not doing well, and the prognosis was not good. I recall the mother lovingly stroking the child's black hair. I spoke with the attending physician and staff and gave them my card. As we left, I informed the family they should call us for any assistance they might need. I felt helpless; there was nothing I could do.

Two years passed, and I was in my office in Washington, DC, providing a briefing to an FSO who was scheduled to begin work at the Consular Section in Bolivia. When he learned I had been stationed in India, he related a story that his wife — a former missionary — had told him. She had been assigned to India and had heard about two seriously ill missionary children being sent to a hospital in Calcutta. While the younger child soon recovered, her older sister remained in critical condition. Anguished, the family felt that the hospital staff was not doing enough to help her. The family related that the American Consul from Calcutta visited them and also spoke with the hospital staff. They added that following the Consul's visit, their child received increased care and attention — and she survived. I felt I had done nothing, but that young couple credited me with helping save their child's life.

Consular Officer

The FSOA is a job interview; candidates will want to dress for it. Men normally wear suits and ties; women normally 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. Not all candidates have the same schedule, so do not rely on another candidate's schedule to know when to take or return from a break. A candidate who is late, even by a few minutes, would necessitate changes in the schedules of all other candidates. For this reason, we are unable to accommodate late arrivals.

## Oral Assessment Procedures

***Candidates must report to their assigned Assessment Center no later than 6:45 a.m. on their scheduled day.***

In Washington, DC the Assessment Center is located at 1800 G Street, NW (18<sup>th</sup> and G Streets).

Candidates will be notified of the exact location of the San Francisco offsite approximately 30 days prior to the offsite commencing.

The assessment may end as late as 7:00 p.m. for successful candidates, so individuals who need to plan return travel should make arrangements accordingly. The list of documents a candidate needs to bring to the FSOA can be found in the list of downloads on the Department of State's [careers.state.gov](https://careers.state.gov) website.

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 expedite the medical clearance process.

Provisions (known as “Reasonable Accommodations”) for candidates with disabilities will be made available at each Assessment Center. If you have a disability requiring accommodations, you need to send an e-mail immediately to [ReasonableAccommodations@state.gov](mailto:ReasonableAccommodations@state.gov).

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 assessment modules. Water will be available at the Assessment Center, and all candidates will have 45 minutes for a lunch break. There is secure space to store coats, purses, and any luggage at the Assessment Center.

**The Oral Assessment measures the following 13 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.
- **Quantitative Analysis.** To identify, compile, analyze, and draw correct conclusions from pertinent data; to recognize patterns or trends in numerical data; to perform simple mathematical operations.
- **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 13 dimensions are the core of the Foreign Service Oral Assessment process. Candidates are encouraged to read the definitions of the 13 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 four assessors who observe the performance of candidates in a variety of situations designed to enable the candidates to demonstrate the requisite skills. The assessors are Foreign Service Officers from various career tracks with a wide variety of experience in the geographic and functional Bureaus of the State Department. Assessors receive training from professional consultants on how to conduct assessments in an objective manner in which the candidate's performance is observed and where the candidate's score correlates to an established performance standard.

The Oral Assessment is not an adversarial process. Candidates do not compete against one another but instead are judged on their capacity to demonstrate skills and abilities necessary to be an effective Foreign Service Officer. It is possible that all the candidates taking the FSOA on a specific day will be successful in reaching the minimum cut-off score necessary to continue their candidacy, or that none of them will.

All candidates must sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement before starting any of the assessment activities.

## The Oral Assessment

### 1. The Group Exercise

#### Preparation Phase

For the first exercise of the day, candidates are brought together in a group of three to six individuals to comprise an Embassy task force charged with allocating resources to competing projects in their host country. Each candidate receives a package of common background materials, as well as a five-page candidate-specific project to read and absorb (30 minutes). During this phase of the exercise, candidates must work individually – the group rooms are monitored to ensure candidates do not talk or communicate among themselves. Candidates may take notes at any time.

#### Common Materials Given to Each Candidate

- General instructions
- Memorandum from a senior U.S. Embassy official in one of various fictional countries appointing the candidate to a task force to consider proposals for use of scarce resources
- The U.S. Country Plan and Objectives
- Country Background Notes
- Lists of key American Embassy and host government officials
- A map of the country (Note – In the practice materials of this guide, no map is included.)

#### Project Specific Information

- Eight descriptions of individual candidate projects (Note – In the practice materials of this guide, each project is only two pages long.) Each candidate will receive one project.

#### Presentation Phase

When the 30-minute preparation time is over, four BEX assessors will join the group and take seats in the corners of the room. At this point in the assessment, the assessors know nothing about the candidates. The assessors do not participate; they only observe the group exercise.

The lead assessor briefs candidates on the ground rules and invites them to begin their individual project presentations in any order they choose. Candidates should listen closely to all the instructions, including the warning against comparing or lobbying for projects during the presentation phase.

Each candidate has six minutes to present his or her project to the others, and should cover all relevant facets of the project, including both negative and positive points, U.S. interests, and required resources. Time may be left at the end of each presentation for questions from other candidates.

#### Discussion Phase

After the last presentation has been made, the lead assessor informs the group that it is now entering the discussion phase of the exercise – the stage in which the candidates must reach a consensus on project selection and allocation of their limited resources. More instructions will be given. Please note that money is not necessarily the limited resource. In those cases, do not talk about “funding” a project – “supporting” or something similar may be more apt.

In this phase, candidates have two goals. One is to advocate the project they were given. The second goal is to help the group reach consensus within the time allotted on which project(s) or parts of projects to recommend to the Ambassador. It is acceptable to give up your project in favor of another candidate’s project after the merits and/or drawbacks of all the



projects have been thoroughly reviewed by the group – just explain your reasons for doing so.

The time allotted for the discussion phase is normally 20-25 minutes, depending on group size.

Under no circumstances should candidates change or alter the projects they are given, or add information not provided. *Candidates may not make up a new project if they do not like the one they are given. Candidates may not bring in real life facts or situations to bolster their arguments (e.g., “Plan Colombia was a real success in stemming the flow of drugs to the U.S. and this project would do the same thing”).*

Candidates should keep in mind that the purpose of the exercise is to make a recommendation to the Ambassador. Candidates should help the group reach a consensus on what to recommend. In the discussion phase, candidates may want to suggest reasonable ways of making a decision among the proposals being reviewed. Candidates should keep in mind that the Group Exercise is not adversarial – they are not competing against each other.

### **The Ambassador’s Briefing**

The Ambassador’s briefing simulates a situation frequently experienced by FSOs. Following the conclusion of the group’s discussion, each candidate will have three to four minutes privately to brief two assessors on the results of the group’s deliberations. One of these assessors will play the role of the Ambassador and ask the candidate several follow-up questions, while the second assessor will escort the candidate from the group exercise room to the interview room. Both assessors remain in the room for the duration of the conversation.

Since the dynamics of each group will vary, a candidate’s ability to prepare for the briefing will be limited. However, candidates may find it useful to practice oral briefing skills. It will also be critical that candidates fully understand the group’s final decision and the rationale that led to that decision. Although candidates may take notes during the presentation and discussion phases, these notes will not be available during the Ambassador’s briefing.

**The specific dimensions rated during the group exercise include:** Composure, Information Integration and Analysis, Initiative and Leadership, Judgment, Objectivity and Integrity, Oral Communication, Planning and Organizing, and Working with Others.

Strong candidates are those who keep in mind the objective of the exercise – to help the Ambassador decide how best to allocate limited U.S. Government resources among a number of worthy projects. They have the ability to integrate information, not just about their own projects, but also about projects presented by their colleagues. They may suggest original ideas and solutions. A good leader can draw out others and help move the group to consensus.

**Assessors cannot judge qualities they cannot see or hear.** Active participation is essential to successful performance. Even if a candidate clearly and eloquently presents a project and the rest of the group then agree to support that candidate’s project, lack of involvement in the discussion phase will have a negative impact on the evaluation of the candidate.

## **2. 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 the candidate’s application form, stated career track preference, and Statement of Interest. Candidates are expected to respond to questions based on their personal background, experience, and motivation.

*Assessors will not have read the personal narratives (PNs) candidates submitted as part of the earlier QEP process, so candidates should not hesitate to use experiences already described in their PNs if those experiences directly answer a question from the assessors.*

Candidates should be careful to respond to the questions that are asked, rather than give a response that highlights the candidate’s qualities or resume but does not reply to the specific question.

Candidates should expect assessors to remain neutral throughout the interview. They have been instructed to not provide any clues – including non-verbal ones – about how candidates are doing. This does not mean that assessors may not be impressed with something a candidate says or feel empathy when a candidate is struggling – they just will not express it.

During the Structured Interview, assessors may interrupt candidates, shuffle papers, or cut short candidates' answers. Candidates should not assume that this implies approval or disapproval. The assessors may believe that they have heard all they need to on a given subject and move on to ensure that you have ample time for all three components of the interview. 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, candidates should convey to the assessors a clear and precise picture of themselves, including personality traits, and their understanding of the Foreign Service. Candidates' motivation to join the Foreign Service, education and work experience as well as cross-cultural skills are considered.

Assessors evaluate candidates' potential to serve successfully as Foreign Service Officers, including in the selected career track, by discussing what they have done with the opportunities presented to this point in their lives. Candidates must be succinct and persuasive in responding to the examiner's questions. Candidates should have previously informed themselves about the Foreign Service in general, and about the work related to the career track they have selected.

Whenever possible and appropriate, candidates should go beyond just a "what" explanation, and give the "how" and "why." Candidates should remember that they need to do more than describe their experiences; they need to explain what they learned from them and why they are predictive of success in the Foreign Service. Candidates 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. (See sample in this Guide.)

Assessors will give the candidate a brief scenario to read that provides information about the country and the candidate's position in the embassy, setting the scene for the hypothetical situation.

**Dimensions scored during this exercise include:** Planning and Organizing, 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 Officers overseas. Candidates are advised, however, that, while the problems occur in a Foreign Service setting, *candidates are not expected to know how an Embassy operates or to be familiar with government rules and regulations.* Rather, candidates are asked to fashion a solution that employs good judgment and common sense. The hypothetical scenarios and questions will not necessarily be related to the candidate's career track.

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, candidates should:

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

Candidates should not:

- Respond by throwing the task into someone else's hands – the challenge is the candidate's to deal with, and he or she should use all the available resources. Candidates should recognize their level of authority and use it to the full extent, but not exceed it.

### C. Past Behavior Interview

In the final segment of the Structured Interview, the assessors ask candidates a series of targeted questions to elicit examples from the candidates' own experiences in specific areas. 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 Officer. 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 questions they wish to discuss for each dimension (one question for each dimension) and to prepare their responses. Candidates' examples should be concrete and drawn from their own experience.

During this portion of the Structured 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 highlights their command of the dimension being assessed.

**Dimensions scored during this exercise include:** Planning and Organizing, Working with Others, Cultural Adaptability, Initiative and Leadership, Objectivity and Integrity, Composure, and Oral Communication.

### **3. Case Management Exercise**

The third part of the Oral Assessment is the 90-minute Case Management Exercise. The purpose of this segment is to evaluate the candidate's management and writing skills.

#### **The dimensions scored during this exercise**

**include:** Working with Others, Judgment, Objectivity and Integrity, Information Integration and Analysis, Resourcefulness, Written Communication and Quantitative Skills. The candidate is expected to incorporate data and other numerical information in the analysis and recommended solutions.

The candidate is given a memo describing the tasks to complete, with information about the central issue, a summary of ongoing problems, an organizational chart, email messages from different employees giving their perspectives on the problems, pertinent regulations, and details about the past performance of the staff. A calculator is not needed in reviewing the quantitative data, but the analysis and recommendations must show a clear understanding of these data. Candidates should be able to do basic arithmetic longhand or in their heads.

The candidate may want to spend 30 minutes reading and analyzing the material, 45 minutes writing the required memo, and 15 minutes reviewing and revising.

#### **Evaluating the Three Exercises**

Assessors observe the candidate's performance closely, taking extensive notes during each testing module. At the end of each exercise, assessors individually enter their scores into a computer. The average of the exercises determines a candidate's overall score.

The Oral Assessment score needed to continue a candidacy is 5.25 out of a possible 7. The Group Exercise, Structured Interview, and Case Management Exercise each count for one-third of the total score. Overall scoring is on a scale from 1 to 7, with 1 representing poor performance and 7 representing an outstanding performance.

## Exit Interviews

After the assessors complete the integration of their scores, candidates are notified whether they have been successful in reaching the cut-off. Along with their final overall score, candidates receive an indication as to whether they reached or exceeded the cut off on any of the three major components of the assessment.

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 assessments. 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 to those who take the assessment 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 are given a briefing on the next steps in the Foreign Service Officer Selection Process, including information on the security background investigation, language bump-up point system, veteran's preference points, the medical examination, and suitability review. Candidates are also given the opportunity to ask questions about Foreign Service life. In the final step of the assessment day, successful candidates meet with a Diplomatic Security representative, who will initiate the security clearance process.

## Step 6: Obtain Security and Medical Clearances

Candidates who pass the Oral Assessment will receive a *conditional* offer of employment and instructions about obtaining medical and security clearances to continue their candidacy. There is no guarantee of employment at this stage.

The Department of State's Bureau of Medical Services determines a candidate's medical fitness and ability to serve overseas. Many Foreign Service posts are located in remote areas with extremely limited medical support. Each candidate, therefore, must meet rigorous medical

standards to qualify for the required worldwide medical clearance. A medical clearance determination is based on a thorough review of each candidate's medical history and a physical examination, including an individual assessment of their specific medical needs and the medical capabilities of Foreign Service posts to meet those needs.

Candidates who pass the Oral Assessment also must apply for the security clearance required for appointment to the Foreign Service. A comprehensive background investigation, conducted by the Department of State in cooperation with other federal, state, and local agencies, will provide the information necessary to determine a candidate's suitability for appointment to the Foreign Service and for a Top Secret security clearance. The process considers such factors as: failure to repay a U.S. Government-guaranteed loan or meet tax obligations; failure to register for the Selective Service; past problems with credit or bankruptcy; unsatisfactory employment records; a criminal record or other violations of the law; drug or alcohol abuse; and less than honorable discharge from the armed forces.

## Step 7: Pass the Suitability Review

Upon completion of the background investigation and medical examination, a Suitability Review Panel (SRP) will examine a candidate's file (minus any privileged medical information) to determine the candidate's suitability for employment with 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. The purpose of the suitability review is to determine, from the candidate's total record, whether the candidate is indeed suitable to represent the United States. The Suitability Review Panel has the authority to terminate a candidacy.

**In evaluating suitability, the Suitability Review Panel takes into consideration the following factors:**

- Misconduct or negligence in prior employment;
- Poor or marginal job performance;
- Criminal, dishonest, or disgraceful conduct;
- Financial irresponsibility, including a history of not meeting financial obligations or an inability to satisfy debts;
- An intentional and material false statement, deception, or fraud in the Foreign Service examination or appointment process;
- Abuse of alcohol or other intoxicants that could affect ones' ability to perform the duties and responsibilities of the position;
- Illegal use of narcotics, drugs, or other controlled substances;
- Conduct that gives rise to reasonable doubt as to a candidate's loyalty to the U.S. Government; and/or
- Conduct that clearly shows poor judgment or lack of discretion.

## **Step 8: Go On The Register**

Candidates, who pass the Foreign Service Officer Test; Qualifications Evaluation Panel; Oral Assessment; security and medical clearances; and a suitability review, are placed on a rank-ordered hiring register based on the career track chosen when registering for the FSOT and their Oral Assessment score, plus any additional credit for language ability or veterans' preference.

Placement on the Register does not guarantee an appointment as a Foreign Service Officer. Hiring depends on the needs of the Foreign Service.

The Register is dynamic based on scores rather than the length time on the Register. A candidate may stay on the Register for a maximum of 18 months. If there is no appointment offered and accepted within that period, the candidacy will automatically expire.

Candidates may restart the selection process one year after their FSOT date, in the same career track or a different career track.



## **FSOT Non-Disclosure Agreement**

Candidates taking the FSOT will be asked to agree to the following terms before beginning the test:

I am a bona fide applicant taking this test to pursue a Foreign Service career and I understand, acknowledge and agree to the requirements outlined below.

That disclosure of content of the Foreign Service Officer Test (FSOT) could result in cancellation of test results, or denial of employment. That I will maintain the confidentiality of the test content and not disclose, publish, distribute, reproduce and/or transmit any test material, in whole or in part, in any form or by any means (verbal, written, electronic, or mechanical, or otherwise) at any time or for any reason. That I will not participate in any attempt to recreate test material by memory following the test. That I will not obtain FSOT content (including questions and answers) from unauthorized sources. That the Department of State reserves the right to cancel or withhold test results and/or disqualify my application when, in its judgment, a testing irregularity occurs, including but not limited to candidate misconduct, plagiarism, and/or misrepresentation of material fact.

These provisions are consistent with and do not supersede, conflict with, or otherwise alter the employee obligations, rights, or liabilities created by existing statute or Executive Order relating to (1) classified information, (2) communications to Congress, (3) the reporting to an Inspector General of a violation of any law, rule, or regulation, or mismanagement, a gross waste of funds, an abuse of authority, or a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety, or (4) any other whistleblower protection. The definitions, requirements, obligations, rights, sanctions, and liabilities by controlling Executive Orders and statutory provisions are incorporated into this agreement and are controlling.

## **FSOA Non-Disclosure Agreement**

By signing below I agree to the following conditions:

- 1) I will hold confidential the content of the Foreign Service Oral Assessment.
- 2) I will not disclose, publish, reproduce or transmit any examination material or content by any means for any reason.
- 3) I will not participate in any systematic attempt to recreate the material by memory following the examination.

I understand that conduct that shows poor judgment and/or lack of discretion that may affect the State Department's ability to carry out its responsibility and mission is grounds to find me unsuitable for employment.

These provisions are consistent with and do not supersede, conflict with, or otherwise alter the employee obligations, rights, or liabilities created by existing statute or Executive order relating to (1) classified information, (2) communications to Congress, (3) the reporting to an Inspector General of a violation of any law, rule, or regulation, or mismanagement, a gross waste of funds, an abuse of authority, or a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety, or (4) any other whistleblower protection. The definitions, requirements, obligations, rights, sanctions, and liabilities created by controlling Executive orders and statutory provisions are incorporated into this agreement and are controlling.

# SAMPLE FSOT JOB KNOWLEDGE QUESTIONS

The Job Knowledge section of the FSOT consists of questions that cover several major content areas, such as the U.S. Government and Political System, U.S. and World History, Geography, Economics, and Math and Statistics. It consists of 60 questions administered in 40 minutes.

The knowledge and skill areas covered in the Job Knowledge section of the test were described previously in this *Guide*. (**NOTE:** English language skills are tested in the separate English Expression and Written Essay sections of the FSOT, not in the Job Knowledge section of the test.)

The Job Knowledge test consists of questions that represent the knowledge and skill areas that are equally important across all five career tracks. There are 10 sample items provided below.

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**DIRECTIONS:** This section will automatically time out if not completed within 40 minutes. Each question or incomplete statement below is followed by four possible responses. Select an answer by clicking on the circle to the left of the answer or by clicking on the answer text. You may change your answer by selecting another answer. Because no points are taken off for incorrect responses, you should try to answer every item.

- In 1964, the U.S. Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin resolution authorizing:
  - the partition of Vietnam.
  - an American invasion of North Vietnam.
  - an American military alliance with South Vietnam.
  - presidential discretion in defending U.S. forces in and around Vietnam.
- Iran's location allows it to exercise control over which strategic international maritime pathway?
  - Suez Canal
  - Strait of Hormuz
  - Gulf of Bahrain
  - Gulf of Aden
- A wide span of management control is most likely to result in:
  - overly tight supervision of employees.
  - isolation of top managers.
  - increased labor costs.
  - lack of control of employees.
- Which type of tax is an example of a progressive tax system in the United States?
  - Sales tax
  - Income tax
  - Capital gains tax
  - Social Security (FICA) payroll tax
- Which term relates to a Web site or online document that serves as a repository of information about a topic and allows knowledgeable contributors to edit or add to its content?
  - Webcast
  - Social network
  - Wiki
  - Vlog
- Which three countries exercise *de facto* administrative and military control over Kashmir?
  - India, China, and Pakistan
  - India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan
  - Pakistan, Afghanistan, and China
  - India, Nepal, and Pakistan
- Which public speaking technique would hold the audience's attention most effectively?
  - Distributing printed copies of the speech in advance of the presentation
  - Occasionally using pauses and silence at specific points during the speech
  - Using highly technical language to describe different activities and organizations
  - Using slang language to appear more in touch with current trends

8. Three employees earn \$8 per hour, \$9 per hour, and \$10 per hour, respectively. If the wages of all three employees are increased by \$1 per hour, the range will increase by:
- A. 0.
  - B. 1.
  - C. 2.
  - D. 3.
9. Congress is bound by Article I, Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution to exercise only those powers that are stated in the Constitution. What are these powers called?
- A. Enumerated powers
  - B. Manifest powers
  - C. Executive powers
  - D. Congressional powers
10. Which of the following rights or powers represents a check and balance on judicial power?
- A. The President's power to remove judges
  - B. The President's right to expand the number of federal courts, with the approval of the Senate
  - C. The Senate's power to confirm the President's judicial appointments
  - D. Congress' power to approve the President's judicial appointments

## Rationales for Sample Job Knowledge Questions

1. **Knowledge tested:** U.S. Government: Congress and its role in foreign affairs
    - A. Vietnam was effectively partitioned in 1954 as part of the Geneva Convention ending the First Indochina War. The Gulf of Tonkin resolution makes no mention of partitioning.
    - B. The Gulf of Tonkin resolution authorizes military force only for defensive purposes.
    - C. The Gulf of Tonkin resolution is brief and does not discuss any long-term military alliance between the United States and South Vietnam.
    - D. **Correct answer.** The Gulf of Tonkin resolution received congressional approval, authorizing President Johnson to use military force in Southeast Asia for defensive purposes. The text of the resolution states “That the Congress approves and supports the determination of the President, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.”
  2. **Knowledge tested:** World Geography: Location of countries and their physical features
    - A. The Suez Canal is an artificial waterway in Egypt that connects the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea. It is under Egyptian control.
    - B. **Correct answer.** The Strait of Hormuz is located between Oman and Iran and connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. In recent years, Iran has threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz, which would affect nearly 20% of oil traded worldwide.
    - C. The Gulf of Bahrain is an inlet of the Persian Gulf on the east coast of Saudi Arabia. It surrounds the islands of Bahrain.
    - D. Unofficially known as “Pirate Alley” due to acts of piracy, the Gulf of Aden is located in the Arabian Sea and is the southern entry point to the Suez Canal.
  3. **Knowledge tested:** Management Principles, Psychology, and Human Behavior: Knowledge of basic leadership principles, such as modeling
    - A. Overly tight supervision of employees is more likely to be a problem when managers have a narrow span of control.
    - B. A wide span of management control is more likely to lead to employees feeling ignored or isolated (rather than top managers feeling isolated), because the manager has more employees to supervise and limited time to give individual attention to employees.
    - C. Larger spans of control allow an organization to operate with fewer layers of middle management, which can reduce labor costs.
    - D. **Correct Answer.** Span of control relates to the number of employees who report to a manager. Narrow spans of control imply close supervision. Wider spans of control require more autonomy on the part of employees. The wider the span of control, the more likely a supervisor is to lose control over employees.
  4. **Knowledge tested:** U.S. economic issues
    - A. The sales tax is an indirect tax that a seller collects from a buyer and, in turn, pays the government. A sales tax is not related to how much a person earns; it is simply the percentage rate applied to the taxable sale price of a good or service. Since everyone pays the same sales tax for a good or service, regardless of income, it is not a progressive tax.
    - B. **Correct answer.** In the United States, a progressive tax is one by which the tax rate increases as the taxable base amount grows. It is typically applied in reference to personal income taxes. Progressive taxes attempt to determine the amount of taxes paid based on a person’s ability to pay. Persons with lower incomes would be taxed at a lower tax rate, and persons with higher incomes would be taxed at a higher tax rate.
    - C. The capital gains tax applies to the profit obtained by the sale of an asset, such as a stock, bought at a lower price.
    - D. Social Security payroll taxes are collected under the authority of the Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA). The FICA payroll tax paid by individuals and employers funds the federal Social Security program. Generally, the FICA Social Security payroll tax is imposed equally on employers and employees.
-

5. **Knowledge tested:** Computers and the Internet: Knowledge of basic computer functions, E-mail functions, and the Internet (World-Wide Web)
- A. A Webcast is a presentation streamed over the Internet for training purposes or to communicate a message to a group of participants. It does not allow different individuals viewing the presentation to edit the streaming message.
  - B. A social network describes a set of social interactions shared with different individuals through social media and Web-based sites. Examples of social networks include Twitter, which is an instant messaging system that allows users to send text messages to followers in their social network, and Facebook, which is a Web-based social networking site that allows users to create and share personal profiles with their friends and colleagues as designated by their privacy settings.
  - C. **Correct Answer.** Wiki is a Web site that serves as a repository of information about a stated topic and allows knowledgeable contributors to edit or add to its content.
  - D. A Vlog is a blog in a video chronicle format of a person's life, thoughts, opinions, and interests that are likely to be viewed on a site like YouTube.
6. **Knowledge tested:** World History and Geography: Geography-based national rivalries and alliances
- A. **Correct answer.** Kashmir is the site of territorial disputes with portions under the *de facto* administrative and military control of India (Jammu and Kashmir), China (Aksai Chin), and Pakistan (Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan, formerly known as the Northern Areas).
  - B. See A.
  - C. See A.
  - D. See A.
7. **Knowledge tested:** Communications: Public speaking techniques
- A. Giving audience members a chance to read the speech in advance might dilute the immediacy and effect of the speech, allowing the audience members' attention to wander due to their advance familiarity with the presentation.
  - B. **Correct answer.** Pauses and silence can be used to draw attention to different points made in the speech, have a dramatic effect, allow listeners to process what has been said, and build anticipation of what information is to come next.
  - C. Highly technical language is not really meant to be spoken. It is comprehensible only to a narrow audience of specialists.
  - D. The use of slang language might get attention, but it might attract the wrong kind of attention. There is the risk that slang could offend some audience members, which could undermine the primary intention of the speech.
8. **Knowledge tested:** Mathematics and Statistics: Basic knowledge of statistics (e.g., mean, mode, standard deviation, etc.)
- A. **Correct Answer.** The range is the highest value minus the lowest value. Before the increase in wage, the range was  $\$10 - \$8 = \$2$ . After the \$1 increase in wage, the wages became \$9, \$10, and \$11; so the range was  $\$11 - \$9 = \$2$ .  $\$2 - \$2 = 0$ . Thus, there was no increase in the range. Increasing each employee's wage by the same amount does not change the range.
  - B. See A.
  - C. See A.
  - D. See A.
9. **Knowledge tested:** U.S. Government: Specific aspects of the U.S. Constitution
- A. **Correct Answer.** Article I, section 8 of the U.S. Constitution lists the enumerated powers granted to the U.S. Congress, which include declaring war, minting money, regulating commerce, and collecting taxes.
  - B. While manifest powers may be similar to enumerated powers in that both refer to readily obvious characteristics, this term is not generally used to refer to congressional powers.
  - C. Executive powers refer to the authority granted to the President and associated Executive Branch offices and agencies.
  - D. Congressional powers include both the enumerated powers explicitly listed in Article I, section 8 of the U.S. Constitution, *as well as* "implied powers" authorized broadly under the "necessary and proper" clause at the end of Article I, section 8.
10. **Knowledge tested:** U.S. Government: Political system (e.g., separation of powers, etc.)
- A. The Legislative Branch, not the Executive Branch, has the power to remove judges through impeachment.
  - B. Article III of the U.S. Constitution gives Congress, as a whole, the power to establish new federal courts, but not the President acting in cooperation with the Senate.
  - C. **Correct Answer.** The Senate has sole power to confirm the President's judicial appointments.
  - D. See C. The U.S. House of Representatives does not have the power to confirm the President's judicial appointments.



# SAMPLE FSOT SITUATIONAL JUDGMENT TEST ITEMS

The Situational Judgment Test (SJT) is designed to assess an individual's ability to determine the most and least appropriate actions given a series of scenarios. The questions were written to assess precepts or competencies that are related to the job of a Foreign Service Officer, including Adaptability, Decision Making and Judgment, Operational Effectiveness, Professional Standards, Team Building, and Workplace Perceptiveness. (**NOTE:** Knowledge about the State Department's policies, procedures, or organizational culture is NOT required to answer these questions.)

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**DIRECTIONS:** The SJT presents 28 scenarios (i.e., descriptions of situations) that you might encounter on the job as a Foreign Service Officer. Each scenario is accompanied by possible responses to that scenario. For each scenario, select the BEST response and the WORST response. The SJT section of the test consists of 28 scenarios administered in 42 minutes.

1. Your supervisor edited a document you drafted that will be sent to your agency headquartered in Washington, DC. You think the document was much better without the edits. What should you do?
  - A. Accept all the edits and say nothing to your supervisor.
  - B. Ask to speak to your supervisor to understand the reasons for the edits.
  - C. Accept only the edits you agree with and send the document to Washington.
  - D. Ask your supervisor to explain how you can improve your writing skills.
  - E. Discuss the edits with your supervisor and suggest accepting only the most important edits.
2. You work with a peer to negotiate leases. You notice that your peer seems to give preferential treatment to certain landlords and states that it is because he/she trusts them. However, you review the contracts and notice they are not the lowest cost. What should you do?
  - A. Let your peer choose the landlords as long as everything stays within budget.
  - B. Tell your peer that this conduct appears biased and to consider reevaluating the contracts.
  - C. Tell your boss to look into your peer's behavior for possible ethics violations.
  - D. Ask your peer to explain the decisions given the higher costs.
3. You are speaking a foreign language to greet guests at an overseas affair. Guests are laughing at your pronunciation of many words, and you are getting very self-conscious. Also, you think the guests may misinterpret what you are saying. What should you do?
  - A. Try to minimize how much you have to speak so you do not make the problem worse.
  - B. Tell the guests you are still learning, and ask for their help in pronouncing words.
  - C. Do the best you can, while being as careful as you can to pronounce words correctly.
  - D. Take advantage of the guests' laughter to build rapport at your own expense.
4. You manage cultural programs for the embassy and normally conduct eight training programs per month. Your boss tells you that budget cuts mean you must limit your programs to six per month in the future. What should you do?
  - A. Prioritize the types of programs you conduct and cut those that are not as important.
  - B. Gather your staff and brainstorm ways to make counterarguments in favor of sustaining programs at current levels.
  - C. Encourage influential people to attend your programs and to put in a good word for you and your programs with your boss.
  - D. Work with your staff to identify potential areas to make cuts to minimize the impact on program priorities.
5. One of your colleagues routinely speaks in a very loud voice when interviewing visa applicants, making it difficult for you and others to hear and be heard by visa applicants you are interviewing. What should you do?
  - A. Speak more loudly when conducting your visa interviews to ensure the applicant can hear you.
  - B. Complain to your supervisor.
  - C. Speak to your colleagues about how to best address the issue.
  - D. Try to conduct your visa interviews far away from where your loud colleague is interviewing.
  - E. Explain to your colleague how conducting interviews with a loud voice interferes with the other interviews.

## Rationales for Sample Situational Judgment Test Questions

1. Best: b. Ask to speak to your supervisor to understand the reason for the edits.

You should speak to your supervisor to ensure that your original draft did not contain problems that you could avoid in the future. You should also verify that any changes he/she made were not due to a misunderstanding of your draft. Additionally, it is possible that talking to your supervisor could result in revisions to the edits and ultimately improve the document.

Worst c. Accept only the edits you agree with and send the document to Washington.

It is unclear whether your supervisor intended for you to send the document without further discussion. You also are not sure whether your supervisor has identified other issues he/she wanted to review with you before it was sent. Additionally, you have unilaterally ignored some of your supervisor's edits.

2. Best: d. Ask your peer to explain the decisions given the higher costs.

You should talk to your peer to learn whether he/she had additional reasons for the decisions beyond "trust" alone. Although you perceive what may be preferential treatment, you do not know for sure whether there are sound and justifiable reasons for your peer's choices.

Worst a. Let your peer choose the landlords as long as everything stays within budget.

You should not passively allow what could be an unreasonable or unethical action to take place without taking any measures to evaluate the situation first. Although you should not assume that your peer is acting unethically without investigating the issue first, you should not turn a blind eye towards what could potentially be unprofessional conduct.

3. Best: b. Tell the guests you are still learning, and ask for their help in pronouncing words.

Because you are struggling to speak a foreign language, you should try to ensure any misinterpretation of what you are saying does not lead to potential problems due to a misunderstanding or perceived insensitivity. Therefore, you should acknowledge that you are still learning the language and use the opportunity to ask for help in a professional manner.

Worst: a. Try to minimize how much you have to speak so you do not make the problem worse.

Even if you limit how much you speak, guests may still misinterpret what you say which could lead to potential conflicts. By not speaking, you also may inadvertently offend others who perceive you to be unfriendly or rude.

4. Best: d. Work with your staff to identify potential areas to make cuts to minimize the impact on program priorities.

When choosing which programs to cut, you should involve your staff because they may have relevant input that you may not have considered otherwise. In general, seeking additional perspectives from knowledgeable parties should help you make more informed decisions.

Worst: c. Encourage influential people to attend your programs and to put in a good word for you and your programs with your boss.

Your boss has told you that your programs must be reduced due to budgeting constraints. Given the potential choices, rejecting this instruction would be among the worst courses of action. Furthermore, encouraging others to advocate for you and your programs could be viewed as an underhanded way of defying your boss.

5. Best: e. Explain to your colleague how conducting interviews with a loud voice interferes with the other interviews.

You should talk to your colleague about the issue because he/she may be unaware of the problem. Your colleague may be able to easily adjust his/her speaking voice to avoid causing a disturbance.

Worst: a. Speak more loudly when conducting your visa interviews to ensure the applicant can hear you.

Although this is not the only option that fails to address the cause of the problem, speaking more loudly will likely result in making the problem worse.

# SAMPLE FSOT ENGLISH EXPRESSION QUESTIONS

The English Expression test section consists of 65 questions administered in 50 minutes.

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**DIRECTIONS:** In the passage that follows, certain words and phrases are underlined and preceded by a number in brackets. In the right-hand column, you will find alternatives for each underlined part. You are to choose the one that best expresses the idea, makes the statement appropriate for standard written English, or is worded most consistently with the style and tone of the passage as a whole. If you think the original version is best, choose option **A.**, which is the same as the original version.

You also may find questions about a section of the passage, or about the passage as a whole. These questions do not refer to an underlined portion of the passage, but rather are identified by a number or numbers in brackets and curly brackets {{[1]}.

For each question, choose the alternative you consider best and circle the letter of that choice. Read each passage through once before you begin to answer the questions that accompany it. You cannot determine most answers without reading several sentences beyond the question. Be sure that you have read far enough ahead each time you choose an alternative. In some cases, the sentences in a paragraph are numbered with **red** superscript and the corresponding questions reference those numbers.

## Passage 1

¶1

In July 1956, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser seized control of the Suez [1] Canal, and nationalized the British- and French-owned company [2] who managed them, threatening both British and French stock holdings and Europe's access to Middle Eastern oil. The [3] ensuing crisis had important consequences for U.S. relations with its European allies and the Middle East.

1. A. Canal, and nationalized  
B. Canal and nationalized  
C. Canal, but he nationalized  
D. Canal, the result was the nationalization
2. A. who managed them,  
B. which they managed,  
C. managing them  
D. that managed it,
3. Which of the following would best replace the underlined word without changing the meaning of the sentence?  
A. subsequent  
B. activating  
C. issuing  
D. apparent

¶2

[4] Was the crisis anticipated? Previously, the United States and Britain had agreed to

4. Which sentence provides the best transition from Paragraph ¶1 and the best introduction to the information in Paragraph ¶2?  
A. Was the crisis anticipated?  
B. Unfortunately, such crises do happen.  
C. The crisis did not occur in a vacuum.  
D. Not surprisingly, a crisis transpired.

finance Egypt's Aswan Dam, [5] which was to be both a symbol of modernization or a source of electricity. [6] Accordingly, after Nasser made several moves that appeared friendly to the Communist bloc, the United States and Britain reneged on the agreement and withdrew financing. [7]

¶3

<sup>1</sup> The United States regarded Nasser's nationalization of the Canal as a problem and pursued a diplomatic solution. <sup>2</sup> Britain and France, however, viewed [8] it as a threat to its national interests. <sup>3</sup> They secretly contacted the Israeli [9] government and proposed that Israel invade the Sinai Peninsula, and march toward the Suez Canal zone. <sup>4</sup> Then Britain and France would warn both Egypt and Israel to stay away from the Suez Canal and land paratroopers [10] in the zone on the pretext of protecting it. <sup>5</sup> In

5.
  - A. which was to be both a symbol of modernization or
  - B. both a symbol of modernization or
  - C. which were a symbol of modernization and
  - D. which was to be both a symbol of modernization and
6.
  - A. Accordingly,
  - B. As a consequence,
  - C. However,
  - D. In other words,
7. Which of the following sentences best concludes Paragraph ¶2 by providing a reason for Nasser's actions, as they are presented in Paragraph ¶1?
  - A. To subsidize the Aswan Dam, Nasser needed the revenue generated from tolls collected from ships using the Suez Canal.
  - B. Because oil from the Middle East moved through the Suez Canal, Nasser had the power to threaten Europe's oil supply.
  - C. Prior to July 1956, Nasser had accepted that the company that managed the Suez Canal was owned by the British and French.
  - D. Consequently, Nasser realized that the building of the Aswan Dam was important to Egypt's future.
8.
  - A. it as a threat to its
  - B. them as a threat to its
  - C. it as a threat to their
  - D. them as a threat to
9.
  - A. government and proposed that Israel invade the Sinai Peninsula, and march
  - B. government and proposed that Israel invade the Sinai Peninsula and march
  - C. government and proposed that Israel invade the Sinai Peninsula and marched
  - D. government, and proposed that Israel invade the Sinai Peninsula marching
10.
  - A. in the zone on the pretext
  - B. within the zone at the pretext
  - C. into the zone at the pretense
  - D. within the zone for the pretense

October 1956, Israeli forces crossed the border to defeat the Egyptian army in the Sinai. <sup>6</sup> Britain and France then issued their [11] warning, which they landed troops as planned. <sup>7</sup> Both the United States and the USSR responded [12] by demanding a cease-fire to these events. <sup>8</sup> In addition, the United States also called for the evacuation of Israeli, French, and British troops under the supervision of a special UN force. {[13]} <sup>9</sup> This force arrived in mid-November, [14] and by the end of the year, the last British and French troops had withdrawn. {[15]}

11.
  - A. warning, which they
  - B. warning and
  - C. warning and then they
  - D. warning that
  
12. The best placement for the underlined portion would be:
  - A. where it is now.
  - B. before the word *Both* to begin the sentence.
  - C. after the word *USSR*.
  - D. after the word *events* to end the sentence.
  
13. Which change, if any, should be made to Sentence 8?
  - A. Make no change.
  - B. Delete the phrase *In addition* and begin the sentence with the words *The United States*.
  - C. Replace the word *evacuation* with the word *abandonment*.
  - D. Insert the word *administered* before the word *supervision*.
  
14. The writer most likely included the underlined portion to:
  - A. explain why the UN special force arrived by mid-November.
  - B. show that the U.S. demand for an evacuation had been partially met.
  - C. suggest that the British and French no longer supported the Israelis.
  - D. indicate that the United Nations had highly trained forces in 1956.
  
15. The writer plans to divide Paragraph ¶3 into two paragraphs. The new paragraph should begin with Sentence:
  - A. 3.
  - B. 4.
  - C. 5.
  - D. 6.



[16] Although the Suez conflict was a military defeat for Egypt, but Nasser's status as the defender of Arab nationalism grew in the Arab world. The United States had improved its relations with [17] Egypt, but fundamental disputes, between Israel and its neighbors, remained unresolved. {[18]}

16. A. Although the Suez conflict was  
 B. There is likely no doubt about the Suez conflict being  
 C. Even if the Suez conflict had been  
 D. The Suez conflict was
17. A. Egypt, but fundamental disputes between Israel and its neighbors,  
 B. Egypt, fundamental disputes, however, between Israel and its neighbors  
 C. Egypt but fundamental disputes between Israel, and its neighbors,  
 D. Egypt, but fundamental disputes between Israel and its neighbors
18. The writer wants to conclude the article with a statement that foreshadows future events in the Middle East. Which of the following true sentences best meets the writer's goal?
- A. When these disagreements resurfaced, the United States would again be drawn into conflict.  
 B. Israel withdrew from Egyptian territory gained in the fighting but regained access to the Straits of Tiran.  
 C. Relations between the United States and its British and French allies temporarily deteriorated in the months following the war.  
 D. Britain and France lost influence in the region after the withdrawal of their troops from the Suez Canal zone.

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**Sentence Selection:** Select the one sentence (of the four options) that best meets the requirements of standard written English.

19.

- a. The United States owes much of its national character due to having a large and varied population.  
 b. The United States owes much of its national character resulting from having a large, varied population.  
 c. The United States owes much of its national character to its population that is large and varied.  
 d. The United States owes much of its national character to its large and varied population.

20.

- a. Two-thirds of Americans staffing overseas missions are not State Department employees, they're from Defense, Agriculture, Health and Human Services, and numerous law enforcement agencies.  
 b. Two-thirds of Americans staffing overseas missions are not State Department employees; it's from Defense, Agriculture, Health and Human Services, and numerous law enforcement agencies.  
 c. Two-thirds of Americans staffing overseas missions are not State Department employees; they're from Defense, Agriculture, Health and Human Services, and numerous law enforcement agencies.  
 d. Two-thirds of Americans staffing overseas missions are not State Department employees, it's from Defense, Agriculture, Health and Human Services, and numerous law enforcement agencies.

**Sentence Correction:** For each item in this section, select the one underlined word or phrase that needs to be changed to make the sentence correct, or indicate that none of the underlined parts are in error.

21. Travelers to India a country with strong border controls, should be careful about what they carry into or out of the country.

- a. NO ERRORS
- b. India, a country with
- c. about what they
- d. into or out of

22. Australia, who's markets for grain and dairy products may be undercut by the U.S.'s agricultural subsidies, continues to review its free trade agreement with the U.S.

- a. NO ERRORS
- b. who's
- c. U.S.'s
- d. its

**Sentence Correction:** For each item in this section, select the one word or phrase that needs to be used in place of the underlined text to make the sentence correct, or indicate that the underlined text is not in error.

23. Dr. Ellen Ochoa, the first Hispanic woman to travel in space, says she was surprised when her application to NASA would be accepted.

- a. NO ERROR
- b. was accepted.
- c. has been accepted.
- d. had been accepted.

24. The working group will review as many proposals as they can.

- a. NO ERROR
- b. they could
- c. it can
- d. it could

**Paragraph Organization:** For each item in this section, select the ordering of sentences that results in the clearest, most well organized paragraph.

25. Sentence 1: China is still politically repressive today, but economically it is moving steadily away from centralized control.

Sentence 2: Four decades have passed since President Nixon's historic visit to China.

Sentence 3: To encourage this trend, the Clinton administration asked Congress to approve Permanent Normal Trade Relations with China.

Sentence 4: He encountered there an isolated and totalitarian regime.

- a. 1, 2, 3, 4
- b. 1, 2, 4, 3
- c. 2, 4, 1, 3
- d. 2, 4, 3, 1

26. Sentence 1: The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs fosters mutual understanding between the United States and other countries.

Sentence 2: This fostering is accomplished through international educational and training programs.

Sentence 3: In addition, the Bureau presents U.S. history, society, art, and culture in all of its diversity to overseas audiences.

Sentence 4: The training attempts to promote personal, professional, and institutional ties between private citizens and organization in the United States and abroad.

- a. 1, 2, 3, 4
- b. 1, 2, 4, 3
- c. 1, 4, 3, 2
- d. 1, 3, 2, 4

**Paragraph Revision:** This section consists of several paragraphs. Read each paragraph carefully, and then answer the questions that follow it.

Sentence 1: In a mixed economy, the government intervenes in the market to provide public goods such as infrastructure and national defense.

Sentence 2: The federal government also intervenes in the economy by transferring wealth among our citizens for social, cultural, or political purposes.

Sentence 3: Another common reason for government intervention is the presence of externalities, which exist when the social costs of an activity differ from its private costs.

Sentence 4: Transfers of wealth include commodity support to agricultural producers and income maintenance and health-care provisions for low-income families.

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27. The writer discovers that the following sentence has been left out of the paragraph, "For example, car owners bear only a portion of the cost of their emissions." If the writer were to add the previous sentence, it would most logically be placed after which sentence?

- a. Sentence 1
- b. Sentence 2
- c. Sentence 3
- d. Sentence 4

28. Choose the best alternative for the underlined text in Sentence 2. If you think the current version is best, choose Option A.

- a. its
  - b. it's
  - c. their
  - d. the
-

## Rationales for Sample English Expression Questions

Main sources used: *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk, Jr., and E. B. White; *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 16<sup>th</sup> edition.

1. **Concept tested:** Avoid unnecessary punctuation.
  - A. The verbs *seized* and *nationalized* have the same grammatical subject and should not be separated with a comma.
  - B. **This is the best answer.** No comma is necessary before the coordinating conjunction *and*. Also, the intended meaning is conveyed.
  - C. The coordinating conjunction *but* suggests a contrast, whereas seizing the canal prepares for nationalizing it, so there is no contrast.
  - D. A semicolon (not a comma) should join two independent clauses. Use of a comma instead of a semicolon creates a comma splice.
2. **Concept tested:** Assure grammatical agreement (pronoun with antecedent).
  - A. The plural pronoun (*them*) does not refer back to a plural antecedent.
  - B. The plural pronoun (*they*) does not refer back to a plural antecedent.
  - C. See A.
  - D. **This is the best answer.** The singular pronoun (*it*) correctly refers back to the singular antecedent (*Canal*).
3. **Concept tested:** Choose words to fit meaning and function (use words precisely and fluently).
  - A. **This is the best answer.** *Subsequent* has the same meaning as *ensuing* (i.e., “coming after”).
  - B. This choice suggests a cause rather than a consequence.
  - C. *Issuing* sounds similar to *ensuing*, but it does not have the same meaning.
  - D. This choice changes the meaning of the sentence, which is about a real crisis, not an apparent one. Also, *apparent* does not fit the intended meaning of *ensuing*.
4. **Concept tested:** Make decisions about cohesion devices (openings, transitions, and closings—select an effective statement relative to specific paragraphs).
  - A. This choice does not fit the rest of Paragraph 2, which refers to prior events that contributed to the crisis, not if the crisis was foreseen.
  - B. This choice does not fit the rest of Paragraph 2, which describes prior events that contributed to the Suez crisis in particular.
  - C. **This is the best answer.** This answer refers back to the crisis mentioned in Paragraph 1 and introduces the prior events described in the rest of Paragraph 2.
  - D. This choice merely repeats information already provided in the previous sentence.
5. **Concept tested:** Assure grammatical agreement (adjectives and adverbs with their corresponding nouns and verbs).
  - A. *Both* does not agree logically or grammatically with *or*.
  - B. See A.
  - C. The plural verb (*were*) lacks grammatical agreement with the singular subject (*Dam*) in the clause.
  - D. **This is the best answer.** This answer assures grammatical agreement, preserves the logical *both...and* construction, and correctly uses the singular verb (*was*) to refer back to the singular subject (*Dam*) of the clause.
6. **Concept tested:** Establish logical order (choose the appropriate transition word or phrase).
  - A. *Accordingly* suggests that the events described in this sentence logically follow from those in the previous sentence, but they are not in accordance with one another.
  - B. See A.
  - C. **This is the best answer.** *However* logically points to the contrast between the information in this sentence and the preceding sentence.
  - D. *In other words* suggests that this sentence restates the information from the previous sentence, but the two sentences do not convey similar meanings.
7. **Concept tested:** Make decisions about cohesion devices (openings, transitions, and closings—select an effective statement relative to specific paragraphs).
  - A. **This is the best answer.** This answer develops the ideas in Paragraph 2 by relating them to Paragraph 1, connecting the nationalization of the Suez Canal to Nasser’s need to pay for the Aswan Dam.
  - B. This choice does not relate to the rest of Paragraph 2 and would be a poor conclusion for it.
  - C. See B.
  - D. This choice says nothing about financing for the Aswan Dam (the subject of Paragraph 2) and fails to relate the dam to the Suez Canal.

8. **Concept tested:** Assure grammatical agreement (pronoun with antecedent).
- A. The singular pronoun *its* does not agree with the plural antecedent (*Britain and France*).
  - B. See A. The plural pronoun *them* does not agree with the singular antecedent (*nationalization*).
  - C. **This is the best answer.** The singular pronoun *it* agrees with the singular antecedent (*nationalization*), and the plural pronoun *their* correctly agrees with the plural antecedent (*Britain and France*).
  - D. The plural pronoun *them* does not agree with the singular antecedent (*nationalization*). *National interests* requires a plural possessive pronoun to indicate whose national interests are in question.
9. **Concept tested:** Avoid unnecessary punctuation.
- A. A comma should not separate *invade* and *march*, because both verbs refer to the same grammatical subject (*Israel*).
  - B. **This is the best answer.** This answer uses the correct verb forms to convey the intended meaning, without unnecessary punctuation.
  - C. This choice suggests that Britain and France *proposed...and marched*, but the context makes clear that only Israel does the marching.
  - D. The verbs *contacted* and *proposed* have the same grammatical subject (*They*) and should not be separated by a comma. *Marching* in this context incorrectly conveys that *Peninsula* is doing the marching.
10. **Concept tested:** Choose words to fit meaning and function (avoid silly comparisons and expressions).
- A. **This is the best answer.** The prepositions *in* and *on* convey the intended meaning, which is that the paratroopers would land in the zone and that the main goal of Britain and France was not to protect the Suez Canal.
  - B. The prepositions *within* and *at* do not convey the intended meaning: one does not land within the zone at the pretext.
  - C. The word choices *into*, *at*, and *pretense* do not convey the intended meaning: one does not land into the zone at the pretense.
  - D. The word choices *within*, *for*, and *pretense* do not convey the intended meaning: one does not land within the zone for the pretense.
11. **Concept tested:** Relate clauses (avoid faulty subordination and coordination).
- A. The relative pronoun *which* should not be used to join two independent clauses.
  - B. **This is the best answer.** This answer uses no unnecessary words and preserves the parallel construction *issued...and landed*.
  - C. The second use of *then* in this sentence is redundant, and *they* is unnecessary.
  - D. This choice incorrectly makes *warning* the grammatical subject of *landed*, but the subject should be *Britain and France*.
12. **Concept tested:** Manage sentence elements effectively (use rhetorically effective subordination and combination).
- A. The adverbial phrase *to these events* should modify the verb *responded*, rather than *cease-fire*. Also, the phrase *by demanding a cease-fire* should be placed at the end of the sentence.
  - B. The phrase *by demanding a cease-fire* is misplaced and ungrammatically separates the combined elements of the subject (*Both* and the *United States and the USSR*).
  - C. The underlined phrase is misplaced and ungrammatically separates the subject from its predicate.
  - D. **This is the best answer.** This answer correctly places the adverbial phrase *to these events* immediately after the verb it modifies (i.e., *responded*), and the phrase *by demanding a cease-fire* ends the sentence.
13. **Concept tested:** Edit and revise effectively (avoid redundancy).
- A. This choice does not revise the sentence to eliminate the redundancy of *in addition* with *also*.
  - B. **This is the best answer.** The redundant use of *in addition* with *also* has been eliminated.
  - C. See A. The proposed change also fails to convey the intended meaning, since *evacuation* means removing the troops and *abandonment* involves leaving them in place.
  - D. See A. The proposed change is extraneous, adding nothing significant to the meaning.
14. **Concept tested:** Clearly state a purpose.
- A. The underlined portion gives no information about the arrival of the UN special force.
  - B. **This is the best answer.** British and French troops had withdrawn, but it can be inferred that Israeli troops remained in Egypt even though the United States had called for them to leave as well.
  - C. This choice makes too broad a generalization based on very limited information about British and French relations with the Israelis. Nothing in the passage necessarily indicates that relations had cooled.
  - D. The underlined portion provides no information about the role of the UN troops in the withdrawal.



15. **Concept tested:** Establish logical order (order paragraphs in a logical sequence).
- A. Sentences 2 and 3 are closely connected, describing how Britain and France responded to nationalization of the Suez Canal, so to add a paragraph break here would disrupt the narrative.
  - B. Sentences 4 and 5 are closely connected, describing the planned invasion, so to add a paragraph break here would disrupt the narrative.
  - C. **This is the best answer.** This answer divides Paragraph 3 in a logical way because earlier sentences describe the planning of the invasion, and Sentence 5 begins the account of the invasion itself.
  - D. Sentences 5 and 6 are closely connected, describing fulfillment of the plan, so to add a paragraph break here would disrupt the narrative.
16. **Concept tested:** Relate clauses (avoid faulty subordination and coordination).
- A. *Although* makes the first clause dependent, but it is joined to the rest of the sentence as an independent clause.
  - B. This choice is wordy.
  - C. *Even if* makes the first clause dependent, but it is joined to the rest of the sentence as an independent clause.
  - D. **This is the best answer.** This answer avoids wordiness and opens the sentence with the independent clause it needs.
17. **Concept tested:** Avoid unnecessary punctuation.
- A. There should not be a comma after *neighbors*, which separates the subject (*disputes*) from the predicate of the clause (*remained unresolved*).
  - B. Removing the coordinating conjunction (*but*) creates a comma splice.
  - C. The wording *and its neighbors* is not parenthetical and should not be set off by a pair of commas.
  - D. **This is the best answer.** This answer properly joins the two independent clauses with a comma before the coordinating conjunction (*but*), without adding unnecessary punctuation.
18. **Concept tested:** Make decisions about cohesion devices (openings, transitions, and closings—select an effective statement relative to essay as a whole).
- A. **This is the best answer.** This answer hints at future events without revealing them.
  - B. This choice concerns the situation at the end of the crisis, not future events.
  - C. This choice says nothing about future events in the Middle East.
  - D. This choice states something that happened after the crisis but does not hint at future events.

**19. Key: D**

**Rationale:** The sentence in Option D conveys the point of the sentence most concisely without losing important information.

**20. Key: C**

**Rationale:** The sentence in Option C includes correct pronoun antecedent agreement. The use of the singular pronoun “it’s” in Option B and Option D is incorrect because the pronoun replaces the plural noun “Americans.” Option C also avoids a comma splice by appropriately punctuating the relationship between two independent clauses with a semi-colon rather than a comma.

**21. Key: B**

**Rationale:** The appositive phrase “a country with strong border controls” should be set off with a comma after “India.”

**22. Key: B**

**Rationale:** The underlined word “who’s” is a contraction of the words “who is” or “who has.” The word “who’s” should be replaced with the possessive “whose.”

**23. Key: B**

**Rationale:** The underlined portion of the sentence includes the conditional phrase “would be” that refers to a possible condition or result. This does not agree with the preceding verb “was” suggesting that the events described in the sentence occurred in the past. Option A is correct because it includes the correct form of the past-tense verb. Option C is incorrect because the present-perfect continuous verb “has been” suggests the acceptance of Dr. Ochoa’s application began in the past and persists in the present. Option D is incorrect because the past-perfect verb “had been” suggests the acceptance of Dr. Ochoa’s application began in the past, then ended.

**24. Key: C**

**Rationale:** The underlined portion of the sentence includes a pronoun that does not agree with the antecedent. The plural pronoun “they” should not modify the singular noun “group” and should be replaced with the singular pronoun “it.” Option D is incorrect because the verb “could” is past-tense and does not agree with the future-tense “will.”

**25. Key: C**

**Rationale:** Sentence 4 must follow Sentence 2 because it uses the pronoun “he” to refer to the antecedent “President Nixon,” and Sentence 4 elaborates on President Nixon’s experience in China. Sentence 1 must follow Sentence 4 because it conveys that the conditions described in Sentence 4 persist. Sentence 3 must follow Sentence 1 because it refers to a trend introduced in Sentence 1.

**26. Key: B**

**Rationale:** Sentence 1 introduces the topic of the paragraph. Sentence 2 must follow Sentence 1 because it elaborates on the fostering introduced in Sentence 1. Sentence 4 must follow Sentence 1 because it describes the training introduced in Sentence 1. Sentence 3 begins with a phrase of addition and would not coherently begin the paragraph. It would also create confusion if it preceded Sentence 2 or Sentence 4.

**27. Key: C**

**Rationale:** Option C is correct because the writer wants to add a sentence that provides an example of an externality introduced in Sentence 3.

**28. Key: A**

**Rationale:** Option A is correct because the word “its” is a singular pronoun that modifies the singular noun “government.” Option B is incorrect because the word “it’s” is a contraction for the words “it is.” Option C is incorrect because the word “their” is a plural pronoun and should not modify the singular noun “government.” Option D is incorrect because use of the word “the” creates ambiguity that can be avoided by using the word “its.”

# SAMPLE FSOT WRITTEN ESSAY TOPICS

**DIRECTIONS:** You have 7 minutes to read this screen and select one of the three topics (note that two topics are shown below). If you do not choose within 7 minutes, then a topic will be automatically chosen for you. You will have 25 minutes to write your essay, so read each topic carefully and plan what you want to write before you begin.

The essay item consists of your taking a position on a topic and developing a rationale for it. Your writing will be evaluated on your ability to analyze a topic and on the quality of the writing, not the opinions expressed. The Department's writing style is professional rather than literary. That means that a well-written essay will be concise and well-organized. It will make a clear and effective argument that is easily read and quickly understood. Other important elements include word choice, spelling, grammar, syntax, and punctuation. Remember, after 25 minutes, this section will be timed out. You have 2,800 characters to develop your topic.

1. Many goods imported into the U.S. are produced in countries that permit child labor, do not ensure basic health and safety precautions for workers, and/or have environmental regulations that are lax by U.S. standards. Should the U.S. limit or prohibit trade with these countries? Why or why not?
2. Government agencies consider competing interests when determining public policy. How can the government balance the protection of natural resources to ensure we have them in the future with the need to support current human consumption? Explain your rationale.

## Practice Test

Candidates who wish to take a practice FSOT should visit  
<https://careers.state.gov/survey/FSOT-Careers/>.

Candidates can also download the Department's mobile app at  
<https://careers.state.gov/apps/> for additional practice FSOT questions.

# SAMPLE FSOA GROUP EXERCISE

## GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS TO THE CANDIDATE

### Group Exercise - Kuman

In this exercise candidates are asked to serve on a working group to decide on which special projects the Embassy will support. Candidates are tasked with:

1. Preparing an oral presentation of the special project proposal described in the materials provided;
2. Making an oral presentation of up to five minutes to the working group composed of him/herself and other candidates;
3. Listening critically to other candidates' presentations; and
4. During the discussion/decision-making phase, reaching consensus with working group colleagues on which proposals will be recommended.

In the initial review/preparation phase, candidates will have 20 minutes to review materials and prepare their individual presentation.

In the next phase, the examiners will enter the room and instruct the group to begin individual presentations. For practice purposes, candidates should begin their presentations as soon as the 20 minutes of preparation is over and time each presentation so it does not exceed the five-minute limit.

After all the individual presentations are finished, the examiners will give further instructions for the third and final phase of this exercise: the discussion and decision-making phase. This is the time for advocacy and for comparison and evaluation of competing projects. For practice purposes, for the discussion phase candidates should allow no more than five minutes multiplied by the number of participants.

**Candidates will be assessed in this exercise on the following dimensions:** Composure, Information Integration and Analysis, Initiative and Leadership, Judgment, Objectivity and Integrity, Oral Communications, Planning and Organizing, and Working with Others.

#### A Note on Using this Material:

The group exercise in this study guide includes:

- 1) Memo from the U.S. Ambassador in Kuman directing the working group to make a recommendation on which proposals to fund (one page);
- 2) Background material on Kuman and U.S. objectives in the country (five pages); and
- 3) Memos describing and commenting on the proposal candidates are to present (16 pages).

To conduct a practice session of the group exercise consisting of, for example, four candidates:

- Each candidate should receive one (1) 2-page proposal to prepare, along with the full five pages of the background material.
- Group members should spend 20 minutes reading their materials, taking notes, and organizing their thoughts.
- After the preparation time is over, the Ambassador's memo should be read aloud. The individual organizing the exercise should decide beforehand on the funding available, and note that in the memo – the group members should not have to spend time determining, for example, what 50% of \$750,000.00 is. This means the individual needs to conduct preparatory work by selecting the specific proposals before the exercise starts, adding up the dollar amounts being requested from the U.S. embassy in each, and noting the specific dollar value of the total funding available from the U.S. Embassy. (During an actual group exercise, the amount of funding will already have been determined for the candidates.)
- Each candidate should give a five-minute presentation on his or her proposal.
- Candidates should then begin the discussion phase and come to agreement on which projects to fund.
- After the exercise is over, candidates might want to review the dimensions that are assessed during group exercises and – using the definitions of the dimensions given in this study guide – critique the performance of group members, discussing where the dimensions were shown and where there could be improvements.



The Embassy of the United States of America

Asima, Kuman

**MEMORANDUM**

TO: The Working Group

FROM: The Ambassador

SUBJECT: Special Projects

I will allocate the available Embassy resources based on the proposals and recommendations of your Working Group.

The Working Group should consider proposals now before it and prepare a memorandum to me listing only those projects it recommends. The funding available is only \_\_\_\_.

(Note: Candidate who is organizing this exercise should fill in a sum equal to 50% of the total cost of the projects the group is reviewing prior to the beginning of the exercise).

Please list below the names of the projects that the Working Group recommends, and the dollar value of each.

## UNITED STATES COUNTRY PLAN FOR KUMAN

Our principal goals are to support Kuman's nascent democratic movement and its transition to a free-market economy. We strongly support the protection of human rights for all Kumani citizens, including ethnic minorities and women. Our public diplomacy strategy aims to increase Kumani understanding of and cooperation with U.S. diplomatic objectives in the region and to stress U.S. support for the country's democratic and economic reforms.

In the past, our bilateral relations with the Marxist Government of Kuman (GOK) were distant. However, without continued Soviet support, the GOK was forced to reassess both its political course and its need for Western capital, expertise and markets. Beginning in the mid-1990s, the government of President (Major) Abdul Karim al-Kurbi took the first steps toward a transition to democracy and a free-market economy. The GOK has instituted new investment and tax laws and lowered barriers to trade that have created a more hospitable climate for foreign investors and companies hoping to break into the once closed Kumani market.

President al-Kurbi's first tour of the U.S. three years ago to seek foreign investors for Kuman's lagging petroleum sector and a growing number of visits to Kuman by U.S. Congressional and business leaders symbolize the steady improvement in U.S.-Kuman relations. We are the country's second largest goods supplier and foreign investor, and its third largest market for oil. Last year, the U.S. imported \$600 million worth of Kumani oil, plus a small amount of handicrafts, and exported to Kuman almost \$2 billion in such products as oil and gas industry technology, refined oil products, telecommunications, manufactured foods and seeds, and heavy port-loading equipment.

Nonetheless, problems in our bilateral relationship continue. While the Kumani Government is making an effort to comply with UN Security Council Resolutions on combating terrorist financing, we remain concerned that terrorists or terrorist supporters could be using Kuman's unofficial banking system and its Januban charities to support their activities. The low level of U.S. aid to Kuman also remains a sore point in the bilateral relationship. Our aid has been limited to rural development projects, humanitarian assistance and minor initiatives to promote democratic institutions.

**UNITED STATES OBJECTIVES IN KUMAN** (NOT in priority order)

1. Encourage growth of democratic institutions, including free and fair elections.
2. Seek Kumani support on key U.S. foreign policy issues, bilaterally and in international organizations.
3. Strengthen Kuman's commitment to economic reform and a free market economy.
4. Promote U.S. exports and encourage and protect U.S. investments in Kuman.
5. Encourage Kuman to adopt policies to protect the environment.
6. Assist the Government of Kuman in improving the health and welfare of its people.
7. Foster dialogue between a variety of elements in U.S. and Kumani societies.
8. Maintain and strengthen U.S. influence in Kuman and the region.
9. Enhance opportunities for women.
10. Encourage Kuman to play a leading humanitarian role in the region.
11. Work with Kumani decision-makers to combat religious intolerance.

## Country Background Notes

### KUMAN

1. Geography: Kuman is a largely arid mountainous country on the Moccan Peninsula. The Northern Province is Kuman's economic center; the Western Desert is the major oil-producing region; and the humid southern coast remains relatively under-populated.
2. Population: Kuman has the highest population density on the Moccan Peninsula, with half of its 20 million residents living in the Northern Province. The overcrowded port of Asima is the nation's capital and terminus of Kuman's oil pipeline network. The dominant ethnic group is Kumani, with Janubans constituting the largest minority. Kumani is the official language, but the educated and commercial classes speak English.
3. Education and Health: The new Kumani constitution provides for universal education as a national objective, but 90% of the population remains illiterate. The national school system is under-funded, over-crowded and under-staffed. Most Kumani youth have no opportunity to attend either high school or university. Entry standards are stringent for the small National University in Asima, but its facilities are decrepit and most of the faculty either are products of discredited Soviet training or have anti-American, fundamentalist Januban sympathies. Health services are also poor. Government-run hospitals in urban areas are poorly run and ill-equipped to handle the country's rampant TB, HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases. Life expectancy is low (58 years urban, 48 rural), and infant mortality rates are high (250 per 1000 births).
4. Politics: A former British protectorate, Kuman was ruled by a figurehead prince until the 1985 military coup led by the USSR-supported Major Abdul Karim al-Kurbi. As head of the secular Kuman Motherland Movement (KMM), al-Kurbi was named President-for-Life and established a powerless legislature, the People's Parliament, of regional representatives handpicked from the KMM faithful by al-Kurbi and his Consultative Council of cronies.

The wily al-Kurbi was quick to see the writing on the wall as the Soviets began to disengage from other Third World clients in the late 1980s. In the 1990s, he called a formal end to single-party rule and announced a fifteen-year transition to democracy and a free-market economy. Having had himself "elected" by the Parliament for a first seven-year term as President to kick off this transition, al-Kurbi defeated two other KMM candidates six years ago for another seven-year term as President. Al-Kurbi's true democratic resolve will be tested by next year's free elections.

Under Kuman's new constitution, the executive remains strong, but more diffuse, with the power to dismiss a sitting Parliament to call for new elections. Although still under KMM control, the existing Parliament is already engaged in the political process. Under al-Kurbi's watchful eye, it has passed new voting rules and begun to liberalize tax, trade and foreign investment regimes; end state censorship; and curb police abuses.

Kuman's recent emergence from a combination of feudalism and socialism and its widespread poverty and illiteracy provide a weak foundation for representative government. However, the country is united in its support for democratic reform. Over a dozen political parties have formed (mostly along ethnic lines). More than 20 independent newspapers, many just xeroxed broadsides, now represent every shade of the political spectrum, but their audience is small. As up to 90% of Kumanis are illiterate, newly independent radio and TV stations are the main sources for news.

Religion is a rising political force. Traditional local tribunals, known as Yurtbars, are heavily influenced by Januban religious extremists. The newly formed, albeit disorganized, All Januba Party (AJP) is now the second largest political party. Fundamentalist extremism, combined with lingering Marxist-era anti-Americanism, increasingly influences university and secondary school populations. Lack of material prospects has also led many to reject Western values of which they have little understanding.

5. Economy: Years of Marxist mismanagement left the country's infrastructure in shambles. Budgetary woes forced the GOK to allow agricultural, refinery and once-thriving port facilities to deteriorate.

The government sector continues to dominate Kuman's economy, accounting for 55% of the country's annual GDP and crowding out investment in the small private sector. Oil is the Government's largest revenue source, but oil production is still not growing fast enough to slow the growth in the budget deficit (an estimated \$1.1 billion this year). With the blessing of President al-Kurbi, Parliament enacted a new investment law to encourage more private-sector and foreign investment in the hope of alleviating both Kuman's budgetary woes and its severe unemployment problem (estimated at 40% of the urban labor force, perhaps double that in rural areas). Except for the oil and gas sector, however, private investment continues to lag, and the country has had to depend increasingly on international lending institutions.



KUMAN

KEY PERSONNEL

American Embassy Asima

Ambassador	Christopher T. Underwood
Counselor for Political Affairs	R. Hedwig Bigg
Counselor for Economic Affairs	Boswell West
Counselor for Commercial Affairs (FCS)	Darcy Colbert
Consul General	Patience Strong
Counselor for Management	Stanley Gibbons
Public Affairs Officer	Art Pressman
Director, USAID	Myra Saxgelt
Agricultural Attaché	Brad Field
Energy Attaché	Ernest Watts
Science and Technology Officer	Janice Springer
Labor Attaché	Robert Fairlough
Peace Corps Director	Gudrun DeSouliers

Kumani Government Officials

President	Abdul Karim al-Kurbi
Minister of Agriculture	Rifat Ziradda
Minister of Education	Ibrahim Kittab
Minister of Oil	Mohammed Samarrai
Minister of Transportation	Abdallah Nakeel
Minister of Trade and Industry	Dr. Amr al-Jubair
Adviser to the President for Nomadic Affairs	Dr. Fawaz al-Otaibi

## The Embassy of the United States of America

Asima, Kuman

### MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Working Group on Special Projects

From: Bob Fairclough - Labor Attache

Subject: Oil Industry Safety Project

I regret that I cannot be present at our discussion of potential Embassy funding for various projects; I just found out that I must accompany the Ambassador to an urgent meeting today. This memo, however, provides essential information on an important project I believe is fully worthy of our support.

As you know, the Kumani Government depends heavily on oil revenues to pay for rising costs of hospitals, schools and critical infrastructure development. Thus, the Government is especially interested in making improvements to the Government-owned and -operated oil industry that will make it more productive and will increase revenue on a more reliable basis.

To this end, Kumani Oil Minister Mohammad Samarraï has advised the Embassy that the Government plans to spend \$120,000 to modernize an oil loading facility at the northern port of Mina'al-Bahr to make it into a fire-fighting and safety station for offshore oil operations. The American Petroleum Institute (API), representing major U.S. oil firms, has agreed to spend \$55,000 to send a specialist to Kuman for four months to advise the Oil Ministry on revision of the industry's safety codes. The Paris-based International Energy Agency (IEA) will fund (at a cost of \$27,000) an expert to come to Kuman for three weeks to train a new corps of Kumani oil industry occupational and safety inspectors. The Minister has asked the Embassy to contribute \$185,000: \$100,000 to refurbish one fire-fighting tug boat; \$50,000 for protective clothing and gear for oil workers and firefighters; and \$35,000 to purchase an initial stock of fire-fighting chemicals. The total cost of the project is \$387,000, including the Embassy's contribution.

This project represents a key step toward improving the safety of thousands of workers in the oil industry, an issue largely neglected by the Government to date due to budget constraints and overall mismanagement. The provision of a fire-fighting tug is especially welcome in light of last year's rig fire, which killed 27 and seriously injured another 109 workers.

Energy Officer Ernie Watts also supports this project, noting that our own oil imports from Kuman have suffered disruptions because of periodic shutdowns of production facilities due to error or accident. Much of Kuman's oil production is exported to the U.S., so helping Kuman become a more reliable long-term supplier of oil is clearly in our interest as well as Kuman's. Ernie also points out that this, in turn, could help stabilize volatile oil prices.

Some of our colleagues see potential downsides to our participation. Citing poor food safety standards as an example, Consul General Patience Strong suggests that Kumani's traditional disregard for obeying or enforcing rules of any kind makes effective implementation of the project doubtful. Patience is also concerned that the tugboat we are being asked to refurbish is 15 years old and that spare parts could, in coming years, become expensive and harder to find. She cautions against investing a relatively large amount of money in a piece of equipment that may have a limited useful life.

Public Affairs Officer Art Pressman is worried that the project is loaded with public relations risks. Given the Government's spotty follow-through record on regulation enforcement, Art foresees future accidents and even more gruesome pictures in the media of maimed oil workers. With the local and regional media's already negative portrayal of U.S. foreign and environmental policies, public blame for future oil safety lapses would be directed against the U.S because we helped fund this project.

I have given serious consideration to the points made by Patience and Art, but for the sake of Kuman's oil workers, improved reliability of oil supply to the U.S. market, and enhanced revenue badly needed by the Government of Kuman for its development initiatives, I recommend that we go forward with this project and provide the full amount sought by the Oil Minister.

## The Embassy of the United States of America

Asima, Kuman

### MEMORANDUM

From: Brad Field - Agriculture Attaché  
To: Special Projects Working Group  
Subject: Revitalization of the Cotton Industry Project

I regret that a last minute scheduling conflict prevents me from joining you at today's meeting. As the project I wanted to present to you is so important, I have pulled the essential elements together in this memo for your consideration.

The Kumani cotton industry has suffered serious reverses in recent years.

Many Kumani cotton fields have disappeared or degenerated, and the quality of the native cotton is now so poor that it is appropriate only for local use. However, Agriculture Minister Rifat Ziradda thinks conditions are ripe to revitalize this traditional industry given the growing international demand for natural fibers. By taking advantage of advances in American biotech research into genetically modified organism (GMO) cotton, particularly at Iowa A&M University, Ziradda believes that a revitalized cotton industry could eventually employ 5,000 rural families, stem rural migration to over-burdened cities, and generate over \$22 million from annual cotton exports.

The Minister wants to establish an agricultural extension service office in Malik and three distribution centers in the Wadi Ibrahim area to promote biotech cotton. The total cost of the project is \$495,000, including an \$180,000 contribution from us. The U.S. Embassy would pay for the construction of the extension office (\$90,000) and the distribution centers (total \$90,000, each \$30,000). The Cotton Council of America and Iowa A&M University will pay the salary and living expenses of an Iowa A&M technical expert sent to Kuman (\$175,000). The Kuman Government will contribute \$140,000 to: Cover the salaries of six local staff members (\$60,000) and import high-quality seeds and environmentally friendly herbicides from the American firm Sanmonto (\$80,000). The Foreign Agricultural Service will provide an in-kind contribution to the new extension office of used computers for record keeping and marketing and excess materials on cotton production from USDA's vast agricultural library.

Commercial Counselor Darcy Colbert sees this project as a great opportunity for American seed and chemical products. Kumani use of Sanmonto's exclusive, patented "Square-Up" cotton production system (seeds plus herbicide) will establish a potentially huge future market for Sanmonto in the region. GMO cotton crops produce sterile seeds so that fertile seeds must be purchased annually. Science and Technology Officer Janice Springer likes the project's environmental and health benefits. Kumani farmers have long overused toxic herbicides and pesticides. Sanmonto's all-purpose herbicide requires only one application to control weeds and pests for an entire season, which clearly will have a positive environmental impact. As use of protective clothing while applying herbicides is unknown here, the health benefits of reduced chemical use are also obvious.

Economic Counselor Boswell West, however, worries that the Kumani Economic Ministry might institute a governmental central marketing board for cotton (as it has for other agricultural products) that would pay the farmers a low set price while charging whatever the market allows when it exports the cotton. This would act against the interests of the farmers whose standard of living we are trying to improve. Boswell also is concerned about the propaganda campaign recently mounted by a European NGO, A Greener World, against Sanmonto and its cotton cultivation system. The NGO has generated sensationalistic headlines about “Frankenfood” and potential negative environmental consequences from its cultivation. Cotton is not food, but cottonseed oil is, plus there is always a small chance that pollen from GMO cotton could drift to nearby food crops.

Political Counselor Hedwig Bigg is also wary about our image and credibility should we suffer accusations of the U.S. genetically polluting Kuman’s food supply. The project’s use of sole-source Sanmonto products could also draw criticism over the USG “colluding” with “greedy” Sanmonto to dominate Kumani farmers, turning them into serfs of global monopolists.

If this pilot program succeeds, however, I see many possible downstream benefits, e.g., trucking to move cotton bales to ports, development of a local cotton processing industry, etc. Thus, I strongly urge you to recommend to the Ambassador that this project be fully funded.



## The Embassy of the United States of America

Asima, Kuman

### MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of the Working Group on Special Projects

FROM: Science and Technology Office Manager – Todd Kowalski

SUBJECT: Improved Wood Stove Project

Science and Technology Officer Janice Springer just phoned to say she was on her way to the U.S. for a family emergency and will be unable to attend your meeting today. She has asked me to give you this outline of the essential elements of an improved wood stove proposal and offers social and ecological reasons for fully funding the project.

Partners from the Middle East, Europe, and the United States have collaborated on this project to encourage widespread use of locally produced improved wood stoves that will reduce timber cutting, boost local employment, and preserve Kuman's unique varieties of drought-resistant trees. The total cost of this one-year (or less) project is \$375,000. The German NGO International Save the Forest Foundation (ISFF) will contribute \$120,000 to cover two experts' salaries and expenses – one to teach stove building to local blacksmiths and the other to teach how to make metal flue liners and stove grates for this efficient stove. The Arab Fund for Local Initiatives will provide two project vehicles, including spare parts and maintenance (\$60,000). The Peace Corps has committed two volunteers to help implement the project. ISFF has asked the Embassy for \$195,000: (1) \$80,000 for an office and training facilities; (2) \$70,000 for tools and materials for training and an initial supply of metal for the blacksmiths; and (3) \$45,000 for training aids, such as portable demonstration stoves.

Ms. Springer strongly supports the project because it will relieve the heavy burden that maintaining daily cooking fires places on rural Kumani women. On average, a woman spends over three hours a day just trying to collect wood for cooking. That time only lengthens as nearby wood sources are used up. After finding the wood, the women then have to undertake the laborious process of turning wood into charcoal. The inefficiency of the traditional open fires forces the women to forage almost every day, since even a back-breaking load of wood will only produce enough charcoal for a day or two, and no woman can afford to spend all day building up a supply of wood with all the other duties expected of her. The new stoves would use much less wood and eliminate the need to go through the laborious step of making charcoal.

The Peace Corps notes that the project will benefit those who most need our help: one of Kuman's poorest ethnic groups, the Haddadis. They are Kuman's traditional blacksmiths and have the basic skills needed to produce the metal parts of the new stoves. National Science Foundation Regional Director Linda Luonto also wrote the Ambassador to stress the ecological and scientific benefits of the project. Since the stoves use less than half the wood needed for open cooking fires, their widespread use would reduce timber harvesting. Thus, the project could preserve several species of semi-arid tropical trees found only in Kuman and which could be used for plant breeding and research. Such trees could be of great commercial value to the U.S. Southwest, for example.

On the other side of the issue, AID Director Myra Saxgelt warns that the ISFF Director in Kuman is reportedly difficult to work with, insists on total project control, and tries to take all the public credit for project success. Myra has also discovered that the Minister of Environment, President al-Kurbi's uncle, is a

major shareholder in a joint venture with an Asian firm to produce solar cookers. These would compete directly with the new wood stoves. The Minister, therefore, could oppose the project given his personal financial interests in solar cookers.

The Counselor for Political Affairs, R. Hedwig Bigg, will also vote against funding this project as it does nothing to benefit Kuman's political movers and shakers. Mr. Bigg believes that our most important goal in Kuman is to nurture the country's fragile progress toward democracy and that the Embassy should fund only assistance projects that help re-elect President al-Kurbi and his pro-democracy party in next year's elections.

Janice has weighed the pros and the cons of this project and firmly believes that it can do so much good for so many people that it is well worth any potential downsides. She urges the Working Group to fund this project fully.

## The Embassy of the United States of America

### Asima, Kuman

#### MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of the Working Group on Special Projects

FROM: Office of the Agricultural Attaché – Susan Prescott, Office Manager

SUBJECT: Refugee Feeding Project

Brad Field had an unexpected medical problem this morning and will be unable to make today's Working Group meeting. He just phoned to give me an outline of the points of a refugee feeding proposal for your consideration and urges the Working Group to fund fully this important project.

The New York-based non-governmental organization (NGO), Food for the World, has warned Brad that the Government of Kuman is facing a major crisis as it tries to respond to the urgent food needs of the burgeoning refugee population in and around the northern town of Bur Hassan. The recent crackdown by the ruling conservative Januban clergy in Didda against all Diddan citizens supporting religious tolerance and a secular state has led a growing number of ethnic Janubans from Didda to seek refuge in Kuman. Given the Kumani Government's severe budgetary problems, the Kumani authorities have difficulty providing even the most basic needs for the refugees and have called upon the international community for urgent help.

Food for the World estimates that the entire cost of feeding the refugees would be \$420,000. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has agreed to provide for the refugees' basic food needs, primarily from U.S. surplus grain supplies. The UN's international food assistance organization, the World Food Program, will contribute \$90,000 to build a warehouse near the largest Bur Hassan refugee camp. The Government will furnish security personnel to guard the food warehouse, at a cost of \$40,000. Food for the World will pay \$100,000 for the salaries of its five experts who will go to Kuman to oversee the food distribution operation. The NGO is asking for the remaining \$190,000 from the U.S. Embassy to meet anticipated expenses for transportation and distribution of food: \$100,000 to purchase five trucks to deliver food from the warehouse to the refugee camps; and \$90,000 for shipment costs of surplus food from the U.S. to Kuman.

Brad points out that the project is not only of great humanitarian appeal but would help reduce U.S. stocks of surplus grain, which is expensive to store. We cannot sell this excess grain without depressing market prices and harming our own farmers. Political Counselor Hedwig Bigg says this project also offers a unique opportunity to demonstrate U.S. support of religious freedom, especially important in a region where fundamentalism and religious intolerance are on the rise. As more secular, modernizing Januban refugees settle permanently in Kuman, they could move Kuman's Januban community away from extremism and toward a more tolerant view of the U.S.

There are those in the Embassy who do not support this project. Public Affairs Officer Art Pressman is concerned about the quality of our surplus food sent to the refugees. This food includes old stocks, and he fears a public relations disaster if the press accuses us of dumping spoiled old grain on the refugees. The local media would have a field day with video coverage of U.S.-provided spoiled food and sickened refugees.

USAID Director Myra Saxgelt notes that Janubans are nomadic and cross the border between Didda and Kuman often. Janubans do not carry identity cards, and members of extended families live on both sides of the border. The Food for the World staff have never worked in this region, making it unlikely that they will be able to determine if an ethnic Januban is Diddan or Kumani. Thus, all ethnic Janubans in the area would ask for the

free food. Myra worries that we would end up feeding as many Kumani Janubans, who do not need assistance, as legitimate Januban refugees from Didda, who do.

Peace Corps Director Gudrun DeSouliers has concluded that cultural norms here will make it difficult for Food for the World to distribute food directly to women as refugee men will insist on handling family food supplies. These men may well sell part of their families' food rations to buy addictive wongo leaves, a mild narcotic used widely among Januban men as a major form of social interaction with other men. She believes that our best efforts at refugee feeding will still leave those most in need, women and children, vulnerable to malnutrition and even starvation.

Brad is aware of the downside risks but believes that the benefits of this project far outweigh them. He urges the Working Group to support full funding for this worthy effort.

## The Embassy of the United States of America

Asima, Kuman

### MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of the Working Group on Special Projects

FROM: USAID Office Manager – Todd Kowalski

SUBJECT: Micro-Credit Project (K8)

Unfortunately, USAID Director Myra Saxgelt will not be able to attend your meeting today due to a family emergency. She asked me to pass on to you information on a project proposed by Dr. Fawaz al-Otaibi, President al-Kurbi's adviser on nomadic affairs. Myra considers this proposal important for economic and social development throughout Kuman and, thus, worthy of full funding.

Using the model of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, Dr. al-Otaibi has developed a plan to establish a micro-credit institution in Kuman to provide would-be entrepreneurs with small loans (limited to \$500 per client but usually much less) and with essential training in how to run small businesses. The most likely borrowers would establish small-scale trading or agricultural ventures, but there is potential for the service sector. Dr. al-Otaibi believes that a micro-credit institution will provide economic opportunities for a significant number of low income Kumani, including nomads who have limited or no access to loans from existing credit institutions. Once free to cross national borders with their caravans and herds of camels and goats, Kuman's nomads are now a marginalized group beset by poverty, ill health, and lack of education. (Please note that President al-Kurbi's grandfather was a nomad.)

The total cost of the project is \$355,000. The Government will provide \$100,000 to cover all initial loans made, plus \$60,000 for renovation of offices operated by the new credit facility in Asima and the four other Kumani cities and towns of any size. Kuman's leading economic development NGO, Dar al-Khalil, has no money to contribute but will advise the credit institution on which entrepreneurial projects to finance and will help train the loan recipients. The Government is asking us to provide the remaining \$195,000: (1) \$70,000 for the salary and living expenses of a Grameen Bank micro-credit expert to remain in Kuman for one year to help establish the new facility and train its staff; (2) \$50,000 to cover travel and expenses for 10 members of the facility's staff to participate in internships at the Grameen Bank; (3) \$45,000 for computers and specialized software for the new institution to track loans; and (4) \$30,000 to train the Kumani staff on the new tracking system.

Economic Counselor Boswell West supports the project as it would create large numbers of small businesses. This, in turn, fosters the emergence of a grassroots constituency for the Government's economic reform program and will encourage the Government to stay the course, despite competing demands. It would also demonstrate that the U.S. is concerned with the plight of the average Kumani. In a region where the U.S. is frequently portrayed as insensitive and domineering, our effort to empower Kumani by helping them start independent businesses will go a long way to burnish our humanitarian image.

Commercial Counselor Darcy Colbert warns, however, that it is difficult for micro-credit institutions to become self-sustaining as the administrative costs of small loans are practically as high as for large ones. Moreover, the small ventures that such a micro-credit institution would fund are risky. Many might fail unless the Kumani economy improves significantly and soon. If they fail, their owners will not repay their loans, eroding the capitalization of the micro-credit facility and severely limiting new lending. All of these possibilities could



threaten the viability of the new credit institution and could result in future requests by the Government for additional funds from participating donors like the Embassy.

Peace Corps Director Gudrun DeSouliers, who would normally support a micro-credit project given the Peace Corps' positive experience with them in other countries, also has reservations. She notes that Kumani women will not be able to take advantage of the credit facility as they are restricted by tradition from dealing face-to-face with men who are not close relatives. She does not believe that women from lower income families would go against social norms and seek a loan to engage in commerce. She is even more certain that no woman from a nomadic tribe would do so, given the strict conservatism of the nomads.

Myra, nonetheless, believes that the project achieves important U.S. objectives in Kuman and urges the Working Group on Special Projects to fund it fully.

## The Embassy of the United States of America

Asima, Kuman

### MEMORANDUM

From: Jane Jones - Economic Section Office Manager  
To: Special Projects Working Group  
Subject: Trade Facilitation Project (K9)

Due to a family medical emergency Economic Counselor Boswell West is unable to participate in your meeting today but has asked me to summarize the essential elements of a project he wanted to present to you for full funding consideration. Proposed by Kuman's Minister of Trade and Industry, Dr. Amr Al-Jubair, the project would revitalize the private sector and enhance Kuman's ability to engage competitively in international trade. It would do so by strengthening the newly formed National Chamber of Commerce (NCOC), providing technical assistance to local businesses, and establishing high-speed Internet connectivity for their use.

The total cost of the project is \$520,000. Dr. al-Jubair already has received funding commitments from two reputable U.S.-based NGOs. The Corporate Council of the Gulf, representing U.S. businesses with interests in the Gulf, will provide \$150,000 to hire fulltime staff, rent office space, and purchase office equipment for the NCOC. The International Executive Service Corps, focused on business development, will offer technical assistance to Kumani firms on how to set up and run businesses (worth \$85,000). The Government of Kuman will pay \$100,000 for a broadband, fiber-optic link between the Kuman Telephone Company (KTC) and NCOC facilities.

The Minister has asked the U.S. Embassy to provide \$185,000. The first \$100,000 would finance the establishment of a high-speed Internet gateway, entailing purchase and installation of computers in NCOC's new Asima headquarters and four branch offices to be established around the country. The remaining \$85,000 would go to hire a consultant to train NCOC officials and business owners to use the Internet to facilitate business and identify trade opportunities.

Mr. West asserts that this project would expand economic growth, provide economic opportunities throughout Kuman, and help diversify the economy away from an over-dependence on the oil-dominated public sector and volatile world oil prices. The project would also promote U.S. interests in the World Trade Organization (WTO) by strengthening the Kumani Government's support for U.S. free trade initiatives in that organization.

Peace Corps Director Gudrun DeSouliers enthusiastically notes the project's potential for opening business opportunities for women by permitting them to engage in commercial transactions over the Internet, without face-to-face contact with men discouraged by local cultural norms. Women control a surprising amount of money in Kuman; they own property and retain control of their dowry rights. Many are well-educated and understand business, coming as they do from merchant families with generations of commercial experience.

Management Counselor Stanley Gibbons, however, deems the Kumani phone system to be too slow and too unreliable to give the private sector the high-speed Internet access this project envisions. The equipment and wiring of Government monopoly KTC are obsolete. The alternative of a satellite link is illegal in Kuman without a special exemption, such as we have at the Embassy.

Political Counselor Hedwig Bigg is convinced that if Kuman takes a more active role in the WTO, it would side with other developing countries rather than support U.S. objectives (e.g., opening telecom services markets). Furthermore, Mr. Bigg refutes Ms. DeSouliers' arguments by stressing that regardless of gender, it is the wealthy, literate urban Kumanis who will benefit most from the project. It would do little for the poor and illiterate majority of the population we need most to reach if the current pro-democracy Government is to win next year's elections.

Taking into account his colleagues' points of view, Mr. West remains committed to this project and strongly recommends it for full Embassy funding. This project will result in a stronger, more dynamic private sector which will expand economic growth and opportunities. Greater economic security will result in a more stable country and ally. We certainly need many more such allies in this region.

## The Embassy of the United States of America

Asima, Kuman

### MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of the Working Group

FROM: Economic Section Office Manager – Rebecca Mayer

SUBJECT: Transportation Improvement Project (K11)

Economic Counselor Boswell West asked me to notify you that he has had to deliver an urgent message to the Minister of Trade and Industry and will be unable to attend your meeting today. He gave me this outline of the major points of an important infrastructure proposal and urges the Working Group to fund the project fully.

Mr. West's project involves support for upgrading the road from Malik, the agricultural center of the fertile Wadi Ibrahim valley, to Asima in the north and to the rapidly growing port Ras Safira to the south. The road is the only connection between Kuman's farmers and its consumers and export markets. Currently, the road is in a deplorable state, making the trip long and dangerous even in good weather. It is often impassable in the rainy season.

An all-weather road would bring more and cheaper food to the populous Northern Province, reducing the country's need for expensive food imports and increasing its export potential in the Gulf region. Furthermore, Ras Safira is rapidly becoming the major Kumani port for non-oil exports destined for Western markets. The project could also help Kuman diversify the economy and overcome chronic trade deficits.

If work starts in the next month, the road could be finished by year's end, just in time for the winter harvest. Improving the road would require only \$290,000. Transportation Minister Abdallah Nakeel will provide \$95,000 of this to pay for local construction materials and labor. The Minister has asked the Embassy for \$195,000 for: (1) a survey to produce mapping and technical requirements for the road, executed by a Kumani survey team overseen by a U.S. surveyor (\$30,000); (2) improvement of the road surface, involving leveling and covering the roadbed with gravel from local quarries (\$103,000); and (3) construction of a concrete bridge over a deep ravine where no bridge exists (\$62,000). The only way trucks can now get around the ravine involves a lengthy detour over dangerous mountain roads that are impassable in bad weather. The road would require some regular maintenance, but the Government could do this at minimal cost.

In addition to boosting agricultural production, income and exports, the road would stimulate other sectors as well. Flocks of sheep and goats in the area could be substantially increased if their mutton and wool could be transported to major markets. Textile, clothing, and rug-making industries could also thrive. The growth of commercial agriculture could provide opportunities for other entrepreneurs such as wholesale and retail merchants, food processors, and truckers. A passable road could also promote tourism in the scenic and historically significant Wadi Ibrahim area, bringing much needed income and employment to this neglected rural region.

On the other hand, Agricultural Attaché Brad Field fears that building the road would harm lucrative U.S. wheat and flour sales to the less affluent Kumani majority, although our higher quality product would still be popular with wealthy urbanites. If the Kumani decide to subsidize wheat production to take advantage of new markets, furthermore, it could lead to a bilateral trade dispute.

Science and Technology Officer Janice Springer notes that road-building in developing countries often leads to deforestation. If we build this road, we may lose Kuman's last stand of a drought-resistant tree unique to the Wadi Ibrahim area. These trees could be useful in breeding drought-resistant plants for areas like the U.S. Southwest but will end up as nothing more than charcoal if we build this road.

Public Affairs Officer Art Pressman worries about how Kumani voters will view the fact that the brother-in-law of the Minister of Transportation owns the largest trucking company in Kuman and, therefore, would benefit substantially from a U.S.-supported road. The All Januba Party already decries the current level of U.S. "interference" in Kuman's economy. This "coincidence" of the road favoring the Minister's family could cause public criticism of the Government and the U.S. to become even more widespread. What we do not want to see is the fundamentalist opposition winning a large number of parliamentary seats next year and a renewed wave of demands for re-nationalization of key enterprises. U.S. companies and investors would be the focus of such calls, which could even morph into new security concerns for U.S. citizens and interests in Kuman.

Mr. West has weighed the pros and cons of this project but believes that it could do so much good for so many people that it is well worth the risks. He urges the Working Group to fund this project fully.

## The Embassy of the United States of America

Asima, Kuman

### MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of the Working Group on Special Projects

FROM: Peace Corps Office Manager – Todd Kowalski

SUBJECT: Public School Reform (K12)

Peace Corps Director Gudrun DeSouliers had planned to attend your meeting today but has been unavoidably detained. She asked me to pass on the following information on a public school reform project proposed by Minister of Education Ibrahim Kittab and urges you to fund this worthy project fully.

Widespread illiteracy is one of Kuman's most difficult development challenges and a poor basis for its emerging representative government. About 90% of Kumans are illiterate. Existing schools are underfunded, overcrowded and inadequately staffed. Urban schools must rely on grossly outdated textbooks and poorly prepared teachers. Rural schools are controlled by Januban fundamentalists.

The Minister plans to establish 50 new rural primary schools and 12 regional high schools in the next year. High schools will draw the best students from the primary schools. Old textbooks will be replaced with apolitical textbooks developed by Western-educated Kumans, with help from two Peace Corps experts. The Government will give full scholarships for the top 10 percent of high-school graduates to attend Asima's National University or universities abroad, in return for teaching in public schools for two years after graduation. The Peace Corps will also provide volunteer English teachers, while the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs will provide its information and educational programs for use in the new public schools

The total cost of the project is \$495,000. The World Bank and the United Kingdom are contributing \$205,000 and \$100,000, respectively, to train and hire new teachers. We have been asked to provide \$190,000: \$115,000 for the purchase of building materials for school construction (local villagers will provide the labor) and another \$75,000 for the publication of new textbooks.

Political Counselor Hedwig Bigg says that Kuman's democratic experiment might fail unless the current Government meets rising public demands, across the political spectrum, for education reform. In particular, the fundamentalist extremists' growing appeal among the educated young is due to frustration with an educational system that does not prepare them for careers in a free-market economy or the bureaucracy of new democratic institutions. An educated electorate would not only provide a better basis for democracy but could lessen support for religious extremism, particularly in rural areas, by giving all Kumans, for the first time, a chance at higher education and economic advancement.

Public Affairs Officer Art Pressman adds that our public diplomacy efforts have been severely limited by Kuman's poor school system, the population's limited contact with the outside world, and still lingering anti-Western Marxist leanings or, increasingly, fundamentalist Januban sympathies. He says such distrust can be corrected gradually by secular education and that the new apolitical textbooks will help eliminate misperceptions of the U.S.



Conversely, Economic Counselor Boswell West argues that without broad economic reform, school reform cannot guarantee sufficient jobs for new graduates. Minister Kittab's plan merely delays unemployment for two years, while scholarship recipients complete their public service commitment. This could cause more voter discontent in the future. In addition, he believes that the cash-strapped Government may not be able to sustain long-term funding for teachers' salaries. Without sufficient numbers of teachers, our investment will be wasted.

Energy Attaché Ernest Watts thinks the project could increase Januban mistrust of the U.S. and the West if we help fund school reform that will serve, in effect, to end historic Januban traditionalist control of the countryside and rural schools. This could harm our long-term relations with the traditionalists who might one day control Kuman's government and threaten future oil supplies and regional stability.

Despite these criticisms, Gudrun thinks that this is a very important project that will lay the best long-term foundation for Kuman's democratic and economic transformation. She urges the Working Group to fund the project fully.

# SAMPLE FSOA STRUCTURED INTERVIEW HYPOTHETICAL SCENARIOS

You are working in a small embassy in a developing tropical island country. Relations with the United States have been strained for some time, although the island is visited by increasing numbers of American tourists lured by its beautiful beaches, national parks and wildlife, and interesting archaeological sites. The island has experienced numerous tremors recently and ten years ago suffered a major earthquake, which destroyed the port and much of the capital city.

You have been at this embassy for almost two years and are looking forward to moving on to your next post.

When you first arrived at post, you worked in the Consular Section, which is responsible for assisting American citizens in distress and for issuing visas to host country nationals wishing to visit the United States. You then rotated for a stint in the Management Section, responsible for maintenance and upkeep of staff housing. You supervised the Locally Employed Staff (LE Staff) charged with maintaining the embassy buildings and grounds. This past six months you have been working as the ambassador's aide, which required you to move to an apartment three blocks from the embassy.

Question 1: On a Saturday afternoon the communications officer has called you in to the embassy for an urgent incoming telegram that needs immediate action. As you enter the embassy gate, you see two LE Staff enter the building. Walking toward the building, you feel a sudden jolt and immediately realize you are in the middle of an earthquake. You have difficulty standing, and see windows in the embassy shatter. Then the earthquake ends. What do you do?

Question 2: The earthquake has knocked out electricity all over the city. Due to your in-country experience, the ambassador has asked you to lead the embassy's crisis response center. The city's only hospital requests fuel oil for its emergency generators, which will run out in a day. The embassy stocks emergency fuel oil to keep all embassy functions, including communications with the State Department, going continually for three days. What do you do?

Question 3: The earthquake hit residential areas hard, and many embassy officers and LE Staff lack shelter. Building materials are scarce and the airport is temporarily closed. A local nightclub owner, known for his flashy life-style, offers building materials and labor to the embassy. The security office's head LE Staff reports that the businessman is rumored to be engaged in drug smuggling and strongly urges you to decline this offer. What do you do?

# SAMPLE FSOA CASE MANAGEMENT EXERCISE

## Instructions to Candidate

In completing this practice Case Management exercise, the candidate should take **60 minutes** to read this introduction and to complete his or her memo. The exercise involves reading a variety of background documents describing performance problems in the Consular Section and writing a memo that both summarizes the situation, and presents a proposed action plan for addressing the performance issues.

**This exercise is designed to assess the following dimensions:** Working with Others, Judgment, Objectivity and Integrity, Information Integration and Analysis, Resourcefulness, Written Communication, and Quantitative Skills. Candidates should make sure their ideas are clear, and that they use correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

## Background Information

You will assume the role of Chris Johnson, newly assigned to replace Consular Officer Patience Strong in the U.S. Embassy in the country of Kuman. In this new role, you supervise two units: an American Citizens Services unit staffed by two Kumani nationals and a Visa Services unit staffed by three Kumani nationals and an American family member. Your predecessor, Patience Strong, left Kuman two months ago to move to her next assignment. In the interim, the Economic Counselor, Boswell West, has been running the Consular Section. You work for Steven Sinclair, the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM).

This is the first day in your new job. Steven is out of the office visiting a self-help project funded by the Embassy, and is not able to see you today. He has left you a memo describing the tasks you should complete. All the information you need to complete this exercise will be contained in Steven's memo and the supporting documents you have been provided.

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## M E M O R A N D U M

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**DATE:** August 30, 2007  
**TO:** Chris Johnson  
**FROM:** Steven Sinclair  
**RE:** Performance Issues in the Consular Section

I am sorry I am not able to see you when you arrive, but my visit to the Micro-credit and Entrepreneurial Training Project proved impossible to reschedule. However, I would like you to attend to an important issue. We have a rather difficult problem that has been rumbling along for some time that you need to resolve as soon as possible. The Consular Section is not performing as it should. Because you are new to the office, I feel that you will have a fresh perspective on the situation. I have been gathering information, but have not had the chance to analyze it in great detail. I have attached some materials that I have collected that will give you the needed background information about the situation.

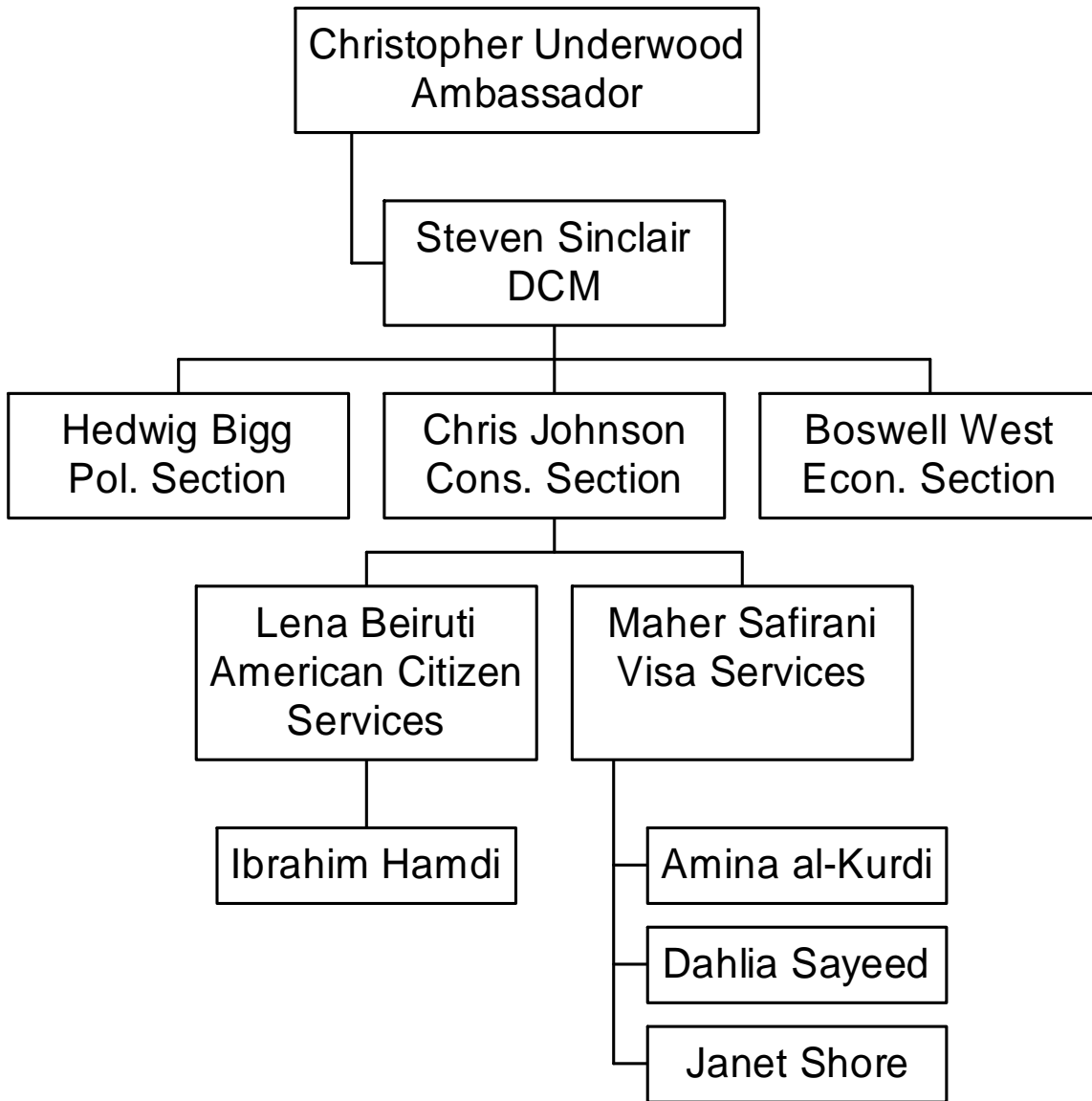
To briefly introduce the heads of the two units, Lena Beiruti manages the American Citizens Services unit and has been at the Embassy for almost 20 years. In addition, she is the senior Foreign Service National of the Section. Maher Safirani is in charge of the Visa Services unit and is relatively new to the Embassy, having joined only five years ago after working for Air France. However, in that time he has worked his way up from the junior to the senior position, displaying an excellent grasp of U.S. immigration law and customer service skills.

I know there will be questions in your mind after you have read the attached material, but please write a memo detailing your initial analysis of the situation, including your views on the reasons for the poor performance and how you would recommend solving this problem. In particular, your memo should be sure to cover the following points:

- Briefly summarize the situation.
- Outline your recommendations and the specific steps you would take to solve the problem.
- Incorporate the data and other statistical information that has been provided in your analysis and solution.
- Explain the reasoning for your proposed course of action

Given the pressures on my time, however, please keep the memo under two single-spaced pages in length.

**Partial Organization Chart**  
**American Embassy Asima, Kuman**



DATE: AUGUST 17, 2007

FROM: STATE DEPARTMENT WASHINGTON DC

TO: ALL DIPLOMATIC AND CONSULAR POSTS

SUBJECT: MID-YEAR REVIEW OF FUNDING ALLOTMENTS

1. THIS IS AN ACTION ITEM FOR THE CHIEF OF THE CONSULAR SECTION IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT OFFICER. RESPONSES ARE DUE ASAP.
2. THE BUREAU OF CONSULAR AFFAIRS BUDGET OFFICE (CA/EX) IS REVIEWING ALL FUNDING ALLOTMENTS SENT TO POSTS IN SUPPORT OF CONSULAR OPERATIONS.
3. AT THIS POINT IN THE FISCAL YEAR, ALL POSTS SHOULD HAVE RECEIVED FUNDING FOR THE FULL YEAR. WE NOW ASK THAT YOU REVIEW YOUR FUNDING AVAILABILITY TO DETERMINE ANY PROGRAM SURPLUSES OR SHORTFALLS AND ADVISE US OF THE STATUS OF YOUR FUNDS.
4. MANY POSTS HAVE SUBMITTED CABLES AND E-MAILS TO CA/EX SEEKING ADDITIONAL FUNDS TO COVER SHORTFALLS. PLEASE INCLUDE A BRIEF RECAP OF SUCH REQUESTS IN YOUR RESPONSE CABLE. THIS WILL PROVIDE US WITH A COMPREHENSIVE VIEW OF ALL YOUR RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE YEAR.
5. RECOGNIZING THAT NEW LEGAL REQUIREMENTS RECENTLY INTRODUCED MAY PLACE AN EXTRA BURDEN ON VISA SECTIONS OF SOME POSTS, CA IS PREPARED TO FUND ADDITIONAL PERSONNEL, EITHER ON A SHORT OR LONG TERM BASIS. CA WILL ALSO FUND OTHER ADDITIONAL RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS ON A CASE BY CASE BASIS, IF POSTS SUPPLY SUFFICIENT JUSTIFICATION.

SECRETARY OF STATE



## Johnson, Chris

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**From:** Ibrahim Hamdi [hamdi\_ibrahim@state.gov]  
**Sent:** Monday, August 29, 2007 10:20 AM  
**To:** Chris Johnson [johnson\_chris@state.gov]  
**Subject:** Updating the American Citizen Register

Welcome!

I would like to explain why we have not finished the updating of the American Citizen Registrations as directed by Ms. Strong before her departure. While it may be true, as she contended, that some of the people on the Register have left Kuman, the number of American Citizen prisoners has doubled! This has to be the top priority. All other things must wait!

The Visa Section has problems because they deal with everyone on “first-come, first-serve.” We have a better system: we take care of the important people first. Therefore we don’t get complaints!

Ms. Beiruti has taught me well. When we were busy, we expected people to tell the truth. Now, we have time to investigate possible fraud. American Services has always been the best Section. I know you have been told this. No changes needed here!

Again, welcome!

**Sinclair, Steven**

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**From:** Patience Strong [strong\_patience@state.gov]  
**Sent:** Monday, June 13, 2007 3:03 PM  
**To:** Steven Sinclair [sinclair\_steven@state.gov]  
**Subject:** Customer service survey results

Steve,

The results of our customer satisfaction survey are back and I'm not sure what to make of them. As you'll recall, we made surveys available for all individuals who came into the Embassy and used our services between March 15<sup>th</sup> and May 30<sup>th</sup>. We asked five questions (see below), and then left space for additional comments (I will get you a summary of these comments shortly).

According to the firm who compiled the data, they typically see ratings of between 75% and 80% in the kind of customer service work we do. Based on my experience, anything below 50% is likely to raise eyebrows in Washington. Let me know what you think.

Patience

Survey Item	% Rating "Very Good" or "Excellent"	
	American Citizens Services	Visa Services
1. Overall quality of service provided	75%	65%
2. Speed of service provided	93%	42%
3. Friendliness and helpfulness of service	55%	70%
4. Knowledge of Embassy worker	82%	74%
5. Respectfulness of treatment	47%	69%

## Sinclair, Steven

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**From:** Janet Shore [shore\_janet@state.gov]  
**Sent:** Thursday, July 28, 2007 6:35 PM  
**To:** Steven Sinclair [sinclair\_steven@state.gov]  
**Subject:** Difficulties

Mr. Sinclair:

Just a quick note to let you know that it's getting increasingly difficult for me to work in the Consular Section, where the poor relations between Lena in American Citizen Services and Maher in Visas affect us all.

It seems to me that the four of us in the Visa Unit are overwhelmed by the volume of work, while the two employees who staff American Citizens Services seem calm in comparison. Our volume of work has increased dramatically, but our approach to handling it has not changed; maybe we need to look at new ways of managing the workload. And everybody is so busy working that I've had to learn "on-the-job" by just following people around.

I don't want to sound culturally insensitive, but I also think that part of the interpersonal problem is that Lena is very territorial and imperious. Although Patience transferred me to the Visa Unit because of a legitimate increase in workload, Lena fought it tooth and nail. I think she felt that she was losing "face" and power. Quite frankly, I am glad to be in the Visa Section because it was either Lena's way or the highway. I think that Ibrahim has adopted this attitude as well. I know that my knowledge of the local language needs work, but even I have occasionally overheard her say that Maher should "stay in Visas where he belongs" in an impolite tone of voice. Also, Lena and Maher come from opposite ends of the country, and she makes fun of his Southern accent.

I still do not feel comfortable in the new job. At least in the American Citizen Services I had the feeling of being effective – most of our clients spoke English and I could help them. In the Visa Unit, much of the time I need someone's help to translate. I'd be happy to sit down with you and/or Bill, or with the new Consular Officer to discuss how I can work most effectively.

Janet Shore

## West, Boswell

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**From:** Maher Safirani [safirani\_maher@state.gov]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, August 9, 2007 9:48 AM  
**To:** Boswell West [west\_boswell@state.gov]  
**Subject:** Office concerns

Mr. West,

I'm sorry to bother you, but I feel I must let you know of some problems here in the office. As you know, there is no end to the number of visa cases, and, as the economic situation here in Kuman deteriorates, there are ever more applicants for U.S. visas who are not qualified. In addition, we are required to examine each case far more carefully than previously because of terrorism considerations; student visas have become a real headache. As you know, we work under the "first come, first served" model that has worked so well in the past, but we keep getting further and further behind.

Although one additional position, filled by Amina, was added following the riots last January, we are unable to keep up with the workload. We were also promised the assistance of the Family Member Employee, Janet Shore, who had initially been hired to help out with the evacuation, but unfortunately with her limited knowledge of the local language, she has difficulty conducting fraud investigations and frequently disrupts us with requests for translations.

I have repeatedly asked my colleagues in the American Services unit, Ms. Beiruti and Mr. Hamdi, for assistance, but they have refused to help, although their own workload has decreased since the coup and the departure of American citizens. I know they performed heroically during those troubled times, and received an award for their service, but that was some time ago.

Ms. Beiruti and I have not gotten along well since I started working here. Although I have sought advice from her at times, since she is the most senior employee, she is not up-to-date on the changes to visa and immigration law since she works exclusively on American Citizen Service issues. She still seems to think I should show deference to her out of seniority. I'm not sure whether she dislikes my youth, the fact that I am from the South, or because I am a man -- or maybe all three.

Maher

## Johnson, Chris

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**From:** Lena Beiruti [beiruti\_lena@state.gov]  
**Sent:** Monday, August 29, 2007 11:31 AM  
**To:** Chris Johnson [Johnson\_chris@state.gov]  
**Subject:** Welcome and observations

Welcome to Kuman! We are honored by your presence in our country. I'd just like to share with you a few observations based on my many years of experience in the Consular Section.

I know Visa Services has taken on a great deal more work over the past couple of years, compared to what it previously had to do, but they've also gained the services of an additional Visa Assistant and the American Family Employee. If they can't cope with the workload, I would submit it's not the resources that are the problem, but rather Maher's management skills.

Although Maher is energetic and bright, he does demonstrate greater aptitude for whining than for leadership. As a result, there is no logical division of labor among the four staff in his unit, and they spend much of the day tripping over one another, rather than getting the work accomplished. In desperation, they look to Ibrahim and me for help, when we are fully occupied dealing with assisting American citizens through the increasingly difficult circumstances here in Kuman. In fact, we are even beginning to see signs of fraud in some of our birth registration applications.

If you like, I could recommend some strategies for streamlining the work in Visa Services (I have given this issue much thought), but even if they were adopted I am not sure Maher would be either amenable to or capable of carrying them out. I would be willing to supervise the streamlining process, however, if you wish.

Lena Beiruti

**West, Boswell**

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From: Steven Sinclair[Sinclair\_steven@state.gov]  
Sent: Wednesday, August 11, 2007 9:35 AM  
To: Boswell West [west\_boswell@state.gov]  
Subject: Ambassador's Letter

Boss, Attached is a copy of a letter the Ambassador recently received. As you might imagine, he doesn't like getting letters like this. I know that this probably happened during Patience's tenure, but it is still unacceptable. Let me know ASAP how we're going to prevent things like this in the future.



# United States Senate

Rayburn Office Building  
Washington, D.C.

August 2, 2007

Ambassador Christopher Underwood  
U.S. Embassy Kuman

Dear Mr. Ambassador:

I am writing on behalf of my constituent, Arthur Dent, who contacted me regarding his efforts to obtain a student visa for his wife's cousin, Abdul Falafa, a citizen of Kuman. According to a letter written by Mr. Falafa, he was accepted for study by the Apex School of Engineering of the University of Canton, Ohio, and applied for a student visa at the U.S. Embassy in Asima. He finally got in for his visa interview three weeks after he contacted the Embassy and only one week prior to the day he was scheduled to begin classes in Canton. Mr. Falafa spent an entire day waiting in a crowded room before he was interviewed by a consular officer. He was told that his documents would need additional checking and administrative processing but was not told how long that would take. He further intimated that he had been treated with disrespect.

Mr. Dent, who was prepared to finance Mr. Falafa's engineering studies, called the consular section repeatedly during the following week but was unable to talk to an American who could tell him what was going on. Ultimately, no visa was issued in time for Mr. Falafa to begin his studies at the American university. Mr. Falafa chose to pursue his studies in England. I would greatly appreciate information I can pass to my constituent regarding why the Embassy failed to complete student visa processing for this genuine student.

Sincerely,

F.P. Lehigh  
United States Senate

## Sinclair, Steven

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**From:** Hedwig Bigg [bigg\_hedwig@state.gov]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, July 20, 2007 1:03 PM  
**To:** Steven Sinclair [sinclair\_steven@state.gov]  
**Subject:** Some Observations on the Consular Section

Steve, I know the Consular Section has been under a lot of pressure for the past several months to perform up to snuff, especially in the absence of a full time consular officer. Bos West has been doing his best to cover the section, but I guess he has his hands full with his own Econ work and the problems the Visa Section is facing. Since Patience's replacement is due in any day now, I thought I would mention the following incident to you. The situation is a bit delicate, so I would appreciate your keeping the information under wraps.

As you know, my wife Sue teaches part time at the American school. One of her co-workers is a former Peace Corps volunteer who married a Kumani more than ten years ago and stayed in the country. After years of trying to have a child, Karen was delighted to give birth a couple of months ago to a baby boy. By all accounts, the kid is a spitting image of his father.

Therein lies the rub. It seems that someone in the American Services Section gave Karen quite a hard time when she came in to get the baby's American passport. According to Karen, she was all but accused of presenting someone else's baby as her own. In fact, she was asked some pretty personal questions, which were asked in a way that Karen found very offensive.

Now I realize that fraud in all shapes and forms is pretty common here, and that country women are willing to give up their own babies for a price to women unable to deliver their own children. But as far as I can tell from Karen's story, this problem was not handled with any delicacy or sensitivity. Karen was in tears when she first told Sue about her visit to the Consular Section, almost in a state of shock that a Kumani should have been asking her such probing, personal questions.

Maybe you could raise this – leaving out the names, of course – with the new consular officer. I'd really appreciate it.

Hed

**Sinclair, Steven**

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**From:** Ibrahim Hamdi [hamdi\_ibrahim@state.gov]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, July 13, 2007 1:03 PM  
**To:** Steven Sinclair [sinclair\_steven@state.gov]  
**Subject:** American Citizen Services Workload

Mr. Sinclair:

Here is the report Ms. Beirut asked me to complete for you. Based on data for this year (through June), 10% more passports have been issued (compared to the same time period last year) and there have been 361 births. There are currently 5 American Citizens in jail and only 4 deaths. We are still awaiting the data on the American Citizens registry, and tourism appears to be bouncing back from the 2005 lows, although the summer tourist lull is upon us because of the heat. I am not sure how we will be able to continue to provide our typically high levels of service given this increase in work.

If I can be of further assistance, please let me know.

Mr. Ibrahim Hamdi

**American Citizen Services Workload, 2002-2006**

	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>
Passports issued	1,490	1,525	1,576	1,069	1,187
Reports of birth issued	806	864	919	375	401
American citizens in jail	2	3	2	2	4
American citizen deaths	12	15	13	18	14
American citizens registered	8,493	8,698	9,004	6,065	6,819
American tourists (est.)	5,200	6,000	6,500	1,000	2,500

**Sinclair, Steven**

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**From:** Dahlia Sayeed [sayeed\_dahlia@state.gov]  
**Sent:** Thursday, July 21, 2007 6:07 PM  
**To:** Steven Sinclair [sinclair\_steven@state.gov]  
**Subject:** Visa Services Workload

Mr. Sinclair:

Here is the report Mr. Safirani asked me to forward to you. I am sorry it has taken so long for me to compile this information; we have been swamped with work these past months. It always seems like something new keeps coming up that we have to attend to right away. We have not been able to compile the year-to-date data because we have been so busy. I will ask Amina to make some estimates (she is in the best position to make these judgments) and get in touch with you.

Respectfully,

Dahlia Sayeed

**Visa Services Workload, 2002-2006**

	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>
Non-immigrant visas issued	12,368	13,907	14,764	14,321	15,877
Non-immigrant visas refused	2,218	2,945	3,814	7,341	8,417
Immigrant visas issued	2,539	2,809	3,672	4,209	4,986
Immigrant visas refused	151	197	272	301	349
Fraud investigations	25	64	209	384	514

## Sinclair, Steven

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**From:** Amina al-Kurdi [alkurdi\_amina@state.gov]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, July 27, 2007 5:57 PM  
**To:** Steven Sinclair [sinclair\_steven@state.gov]  
**Subject:** Updated Visa Services Data

Mr. Sinclair:

Last week Dahlia asked me to give you an update as to the workload we have been experiencing in the first half of 2007. I apologize for not replying sooner, but I was out taking a presentation skills training course most of last week.

We have issued approximately 10% more non-immigrant visas but rejected 25% more non-immigrant visas than in the first six months of last year. The number of immigrant visas issued and refused has also increased, but only by 5% and 10%, respectively. The number of fraud investigations has increased dramatically. We have conducted 350 already this year. One thing that is not well represented in these numbers is the fact that amount of time spent on each visa application has gone up, so our workload has doubly increased. We keep falling further and further behind.

Amina al-Kurdi

**Sinclair, Steven**

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**From:** Patience Strong [strong\_patience@state.gov]  
**Sent:** Thursday, June 15, 2007 7:25 PM  
**To:** Steven Sinclair [sinclair\_steven@state.gov]  
**Subject:** Visa Services Workload

Steve:

Help! We are desperately in need of more people, especially in Visa Services! As you can see from the staffing pattern I have included below, our staffing levels have remained fairly constant over the past five years while our workload has dramatically increased (particularly in Visa Services). I know Washington prefers that we run lean, but I am very concerned about the level of service we are providing to both U.S. and Kumani nationals. I'll be leaving soon, but we should do something before Chris comes on board.

Patience

**Consular Section Staffing, 2003-2007**

	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>
Consular Officers	1	1	1	1	1
Local National Employees: American Citizen Services	2	2	2	2	2
Local National Employees: Visa Services	2	2	2	2*	3
American Family Members	0	0	0	1	1

\*additional position authorized, but not filled this year



## **American Beverages**

### **Kuman Office**

July 27, 2007

Mr. Steven Sinclair  
Deputy Chief of Mission  
American Embassy  
Asima

Dear Steve:

I'm sorry to bother you with this, but I think you should be aware of a customer service problem involving your Consular Section. As you know, I have been running a bottling company for over twenty years in Kuman. We regularly seek visitor visas for our local managers to go to the home office in New Jersey for training. These visas used to be issued the same day.

In recent months the delays have varied from two days to two weeks. I recognize that terrorism concerns have heightened the need for security in doing background checks for visas, but we have already had several instances where employees missed their training courses because of the unpredictable level of service. I have found it difficult to justify these circumstances to management.

I understand that Patience Strong left several months ago, and has still not been replaced. I hope that, in the absence of a full-time Consular Officer, you can find some way of providing greater consistency in the Visa Unit. Lena and Ibrahim are just as helpful as ever in American Citizen Services; I had a couple of notarial services completed yesterday in record time.

Sincerely,

Robert W. Thornton  
President

**Sinclair, Steven**

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**From:** Lilly Mithweight [LillyMith23@hotmail.com]  
**Sent:** Monday, August 8, 2007 10:43 AM  
**To:** Steven Sinclair [sinclair\_steven@state.gov]  
**Subject:** Thought you should know

Steve,

It was great seeing you again last week at the reception. I hope Becky is well.

I wanted to let you know about something that recently happened when Constance (my youngest) and I went to get her passport renewed. We had forgotten some documentation and the person helping us (I believe her name was Lena) was very curt and condescending toward us. I understand that she probably has to answer the same questions a hundred times a day, but there is no need to be rude about it!

I just thought you would like to know. Give my regards to Becky.

Lilly

# SUGGESTED REFERENCE MATERIALS

The Foreign Service Officer Test (FSOT) measures broad knowledge in world and national affairs, usually gathered over an extended period of time through education, reading, and life experiences. The best preparation is a good education, ideally one that includes courses in U.S. and world history, U.S. government and politics, international relations, political science, international economics and trade, geography, literature, English, management, and public administration. Familiarity with American society and culture is important.

Because the test covers such a broad range of topics, it is difficult to provide a formal, comprehensive reading list that will prepare someone to pass the test. Below, we suggest an *illustrative* list of the types of books and other readings that could prove useful.

## Current Affairs

*The Economist, Newsweek, The Atlantic, The National Review*

A major daily newspaper such as *The Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times*  
Journals such as *Foreign Affairs* and *Foreign Policy*

## English Language Usage

Strunk, W., Jr. and White, E.B. *The Elements of Style*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1999. ISBN 020530902X.

*Chicago Manual of Style: The Essential Guide for Writers, Editors, and Publishers*, 16<sup>th</sup> ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010. ISBN 0226104206.

## United States (culture, foreign policy, history, politics)

Davidson, J.W., et al. *Nation of Nations: A Narrative History of the American Republic*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2007. ISBN 0073406848.

Feagin, J.R. and Feagin, C.B. *Racial and Ethnic Relations*. 9<sup>th</sup> ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2011. ISBN 9780205024995.

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