



A Guide to Becoming a Police Officer in Canada



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Introduction

You are either reading this book because you are considering a career as a police officer, or you have already made the decision that policing is the career for you, and it is now time to enter the challenging recruit selection (hiring) process. Whether you are applying to become a member of the RCMP, or a member of a municipal, provincial or regional police department, you have made the right choice to study this book. I have no doubt the information contained in this book, will prepare you for each stage of the selection process, and put you well ahead of the competition.

The information contained in this book is the result of years of research and first-hand experience. In addition to my own personal knowledge and experience as a former police recruiter in one of Canada's largest city police departments, I have partnered up with an RCMP sergeant who worked in the RCMP's recruiting section for eight years. Both of us have spent years researching the recruiting process across Canada, and have interviewed other police recruiters from coast to coast.

This book will take a deep look at each stage of the selection (hiring) process and prepare you to take each step of the process with knowledge and confidence. The night before each test or stage, I encourage you to re-read and study the chapter of this book that is relevant to the upcoming testing or stage.

In addition to preparing you for each stage of the selection (hiring) process, this book will discuss how to increase your competitive edge and ensure your success, even years before it is time to actually apply.

Chapter 1 – Pre-Application Preparation

At a certain time in the hiring process, the police recruiter will conduct a thorough look into your life; all the way back to the day you were born. They want to get a good idea of how you grew up and how you became the man or woman you are today. It is important to know that they are not seeking perfect people (there is no such thing, and if there were, they probably wouldn't make good cops). The recruiter will investigate your imperfections, past mistakes, and life trials, and look at how you worked through them, handled and matured from them, and identify what you learned from them. Of course some imperfections and mistakes are too much to overcome and may affect your suitability as a police applicant. It is impossible to make a list of what past activities or mistakes are too serious to overcome, as every situation is different, however I will list and discuss common areas and examples, where past choices have affected suitability, fit and/or competitiveness.

1. **Integrity** – For obvious reasons, police officers should have a high level of integrity. Police recruiters will look at your level of integrity, and determine if it is what they are looking for. As I mentioned before, they are not looking for perfect people, however they will dissect past choices you have made concerning integrity and conclude if the choices or mistakes are appropriate for a future officer. What they specifically are looking for concerning a past incident is the:
 - a) **severity of the offence,**
 - b) **how recent did the event take place,**
 - c) **what you have done to overcome or make amends, and**
 - d) **what you have learned from this past experience.**

2. **Education and Cheating** – Recruiters will look closely at the applicant's education, and each department will have their own minimum educational requirements, whether it is high school or a post secondary degree. Most Canadian police forces require at least high school and/or one to two years of post secondary education. Regardless of the minimum educational requirement, the more the education the better. That does not mean that an applicant with a university degree is better off than an applicant with a one year certificate or diploma. Recruiters will look closely at the applicant's grades and how they performed at school. The recruiter wants to know that the applicant can succeed at a high level of learning and education. I would be more impressed with an applicant who achieved a two year University diploma, who worked hard and earned A's and B's, as opposed to an applicant who received a university degree, barely squeaking by with C-'s and D's. Work hard at school, especially post secondary, and prove that you have the study habits, discipline and intelligence to do well. Regardless of which police academy you join, there will be a great deal of studying, memorization, essay writing, exams, etc.

No police department will take a chance on a recruit and send them to their police academy without some assurance they will succeed at the academic requirements.

When I was a police recruiter, I once had an interview where I asked the applicant when he had cheated in the past. He looked at me with a strange look on his face and started explaining different scenarios when he had cheated on past girlfriends. After chuckling to myself, I stopped him and explained that I was looking for examples of when he had cheated in school, starting in high school. Most people have engaged in a form of cheating in school, to some degree. Recruiters will want to know how frequently the cheating took place and at what academic level. Some cheating in grade school and high school although not good, can be overlooked. However if the applicant cheated his way through college or university, planning elaborate cheating methods on exams and continually plagiarizing essays, they may face a problem. Again, every situation is different and you will have the opportunity to explain yourself, but to be safe.....don't cheat!

3. **Drugs** – Illegal drug use is something each police recruiter will look at closely. A major responsibility of a police officer is to enforce drug laws, whether they be simple possession investigations, or elaborate drug trafficking operations linked to organized crime. Ideally, police officers will have minimal to no personal experience with drug use. Police recruiters know that everyone was young and stupid once and have experienced different things in life. The use of illegal drugs does not mean that you will immediately be rejected as a police officer. The recruiter will look at three main factors when investigating your past drug use:
 1. How often/how many times? – This will come down to a certain number. Did you use illegal drugs one time, two times, or a thousand times? What they are trying to determine is if your drug use was simple experimentation, succumbing to peer pressure, or if it is or was an addiction or habit you developed. There is no magic number to how many times is acceptable or not; each department may have their own acceptable number. I would say that a general number count of what may be acceptable (often depending on other factors) is anywhere from one to fifty times. Anything beyond this number, you will have a lot of explaining to do. Of course an applicant that has no drug use is that much better off.
 2. When was the last time you used an illegal drug? – Police recruiters will look at the time periods where you participated in the use of illegal drugs. They want to see that the experimental drug use was a poor choice made in the past, and was not repeated. The greater amount of time between your last drug use, and the present time; the better. Each department may have their acceptable “last use” time table, however it is fair to say that each department will want at least two or more years since your last drug use. Of course, they will look at every factor when determining the outcome. For example, I believe it would be better for an applicant who has used marijuana 50 times, ten years ago, when he was a teenager, than an applicant who used marijuana one time, the week before his

police interview, when he was 35 years old. The point is, they will look at every circumstance and take all factors into consideration.

3. What type of drugs did you use? – Quite simply, they will look at the type of drugs that you have experimented with. A small amount of experimentation with soft drugs (marijuana, hashish, mushrooms) can be overcome depending on the circumstances. Drug use, which involved hard drugs (cocaine, crack, heroine, etc.) is significantly more serious and will result in a considerably lower level of flexibility when considering your circumstances.

An important factor to discuss in relation to drug use, is that an applicant can find themselves being terminated from a selection process, even if the applicant himself has never personally used drugs. The use of illegal drugs is a serious offence, and no police officer should be involved in drug use in any way. If a police applicant comes to an interview bragging that they have never used an illegal drug, however it is determined that their closest friends are habitual drug users and the applicant is regularly in the company of people doing drugs, they will find their hopes of becoming a police officer in jeopardy. A common question during an interview is, “when was the last time you were at a place where drugs were being consumed?” A follow up question would be, “what did you do when you found yourself in that situation?”

It is important that a police applicant has cut all ties with friends or associates who use drugs, and if they find themselves in an environment (house party, friend’s house, hang out areas) where drugs are being used, they must remove themselves from that situation immediately. It is not good enough to simply “not partake” of the drugs themselves. An applicant should completely distance themselves from drug use in every way.

4. Alcohol Consumption/Drinking and Driving – Police recruiters will look closely into each applicant’s drinking habits. Unlike drugs, the consumption of alcohol is not in and of itself a problem, however, alcohol is a substance that can be easily abused and can negatively affect one’s personal and professional life. In most cases it is not so much the frequency that an applicant drinks, but how much they drink in one sitting, how often they drink to the point of intoxication, and if they can act responsibly once they reach levels of intoxication. A common question in a recruiting interview is, “How often do you get drunk?” followed by, “When was the last time you got drunk?” Drinking socially on special occasions or having the occasional beer at home is quite acceptable. Red flags will start to come up when the applicant gets drunk on a regular basis, reaches levels of intoxication when drinking alone, and/or when it starts to affect their personal or professional life.

Drinking and driving is another hot topic recruiters will look into. Needless to say, it is much better for an applicant if they are able to disclose that they have never driven while over the legal alcohol limit. Many times this is not the case, and applicants must divulge all details of when they got behind the wheel after drinking. The answer to the often asked question, “can I still be hired as a police officer if I have driven while intoxicated?” is yes.

That being said, an applicant cannot be hired if they have a criminal record. In other words, if an applicant has driven while intoxicated and never got caught or criminally charged and convicted, they can still be hired. If they were caught by the police, charged and convicted, they will have a criminal record and cannot be hired. Is this fair? Maybe, maybe not; but this is just the way it is. If an applicant has been involved in drinking and driving, the recruiter will closely look at the details surrounding the incident(s). The first detail they will look into is the amount of time since the last occurrence. Each department will have an acceptable time frame, but expect it to be around one to two years since the last occurrence. The recruiter will look into how many times this occurred. The more times the act was completed, the more explaining the applicant will have to do. If you have been involved in this behaviour in your past, make sure it is explained to the recruiter how you've matured, how serious of an incident you realize drinking and driving is, and how you've changed your lifestyle to ensure this behaviour will never be repeated.

5. **Money** – You may think to yourself, how does money come into play and why would it matter how much or how little money you have. Well, you are right. It doesn't really matter how much money you have, but rather what type of spending habits you may have, or what kind of money trouble are you currently facing or have faced in the past. In most police selection processes, you will have to disclose how much money you currently make, how much money you owe, and your current assets. An applicant, who has millions in assets and earns \$250,000 a year, does not have an advantage over a young applicant, who makes minimum wage and owes thousands in student loans. What the recruiter will closely look at is how responsible you are with money. Do you save your money? Do you pay your bills on time? Do you spend more than you earn; building up credit card debts? Do you gamble your money away? Do you rely completely on your parents to pay for everything? These are all examples of questions that will determine your responsibility with money. What a police recruiter is looking for is an applicant who acts responsibly with their income, who doesn't spend more than they earn, who is free from serious and unnecessary debt (mortgages, student loans, car loans, etc are appropriate), and who is currently not experiencing serious financial troubles or bankruptcy.
6. **Illegal Activity** – Some of this section is very black and white, and some is very grey. The black and white portion relates to criminal records. You must have a clean criminal record in order to be hired as a police officer. It doesn't matter if the offence took place years ago, and was for a very minor criminal offence. If it currently appears on a criminal record, you will not meet the minimum requirements of any Canadian police force or department. If the offence happened years ago, and the offence was very minor, you may look at getting a federal pardon for the offence; clearing it from your criminal record. If you received a pardon and with that pardon have a clean criminal record, you are eligible to apply. However, you will have to disclose the past conviction and pardon details.

When I speak of grey areas concerning illegal activity, it concerns any past activities you were involved in for which you were never caught. Every applicant has been involved in some past activity, ranging from serious armed robberies to minor non criminal offences, such as parking infractions or speeding. Whether you are squeaky clean or a hardened criminal, there will be lots to talk about. I of course, cannot produce a list of what illegal activities and where they fit on the range of acceptability, as that would be too subjective. It's not just the offence itself but the circumstances surrounding the offence. The two are equally important. Let's consider the difference between two situations involving the exact same offence. A first offender was caught speeding by the police as a result of drag racing on a busy street, placing the public at risk. A second offender was caught speeding by the police, driving his wife who was in labour to the hospital. The same speeding offence was committed by both, however it is obvious there is much more to consider about their situations than the offence itself.

When looking into your past illegal activities, the recruiter will investigate the seriousness of the offence, the time which has passed, how old you were, the circumstances surrounding the events, repetition of the office, and what you have learned since.

7. **Driving Record/Habits** – A thorough check on your driving record and driving habits will be conducted by your recruiter. Upon submitting your application to your chosen department, you may be required to submit your official driving record or abstract for the entire period of your driving history. Most official driving records consist of the previous five years, although most recruiters will ask you to divulge every driving violation you have ever received. Like most topics we have and will cover, there is no magic number to say, “this many tickets are too much”. It always depends on many additional factors such as the nature of the offence, how many times, how long ago, were the tickets paid, etc.

Almost everyone has received a speeding ticket or two, so don't be discouraged if you have had the occasional ticket. The recruiter will start to get concerned if you received tickets on a regular basis, thus reflecting poor driving habits. Remember, police officers enforce traffic laws, and must have relatively clean records themselves. If you have ever had a time in your life when your right foot was a bit too heavy on the pedal and you did receive a significant number of tickets, there is a way to overcome this obstacle. The first is simply, change your driving habits and give yourself time since your last ticket before submitting your application. You won't convince your recruiter by stating that you have completely changed your driving habits and getting tickets was a thing of the past, when your last ticket was a month ago. You need to actually change your driving habits and go 'ticket free' for a period of time; preferably a year or more.

Another way to overcome a bad driving record, in addition to changing your habits and having some time pass since your last ticket, is to take defensive driving courses. This will show the recruiter a great deal of pro-activeness and dedication to really putting your

poor driving habits in the past. This will also show how serious you are taking the matter, and how determined you are to right your wrongs.

8. **Maturity** – Don't mistake maturity with age. I have often sat across 20 year old applicants, who were more mature than applicants in their forties. An applicant's maturity is most apparent in the recent choices they have made; good or bad. It takes a mature applicant to make good life decisions, stay away from drugs and criminal activity, make responsible financial decisions, drink responsibly, and distance themselves from questionable or shady friends, acquaintances and environments. Maturity also reveals itself in the current lifestyle the applicant is living and the amount of responsibility they hold and can handle. Regardless of an applicant's age, the recruiter would like to see that they hold a good level of responsibility in their personal, educational and/or professional life. To best explain what police recruiters are looking for in relation to maturity and responsibility, I will paint a picture of what they do not want to see. Although this example may be extreme, you should get the point.

An applicant who:

- Lives at home
- does not pay rent or contribute in any way to household bills or chores
- does not work or go to school
- stays up late and sleeps in
- receives money from parents

To relieve some readers concerns, living at home, in and of itself, does not reflect poorly on the applicant if they contribute at home; whether it be financial or with household chores. Recruiters realize that it is difficult for young men and women to leave home and take care of rent or mortgage costs on their own when they are just starting out and are trying to save their money or pay for school. Living at home is perfectly acceptable (depending on the age of the applicant) if they are working hard and responsibly preparing for their independence as adults.

I want to stress again that police departments are not looking for *perfect* people to become their next police recruits. Police recruiters are professionals and have been in your shoes; often bringing to the table their own personal issues that needed to be discussed and investigated when they were police applicants trying to land their dream job. You might be surprised at what a police department can overlook when investigating your past. Who you are today is more important than who you were in the past. Of course there is a line, and this chapter has given you a good idea of what that line is and how it applies to you.

Now that we've discussed in length what police recruiters are looking for in an applicant and what specific areas of your life they will be focusing on, let us press forward into the selection process. This will help you through the recruiting selection

process, take you through each step and give you the right methods to prepare, and the tools and guidance to succeed.

END OF SAMPLE

Please purchase the book to continue reading!