



# IRS Special Agent

Candidate Preparation Guide

April 2, 2021

## Introduction

Congratulations on taking your first step in the IRS Criminal Investigation entry-level Special Agent (SA) selection process! The selection process begins with the application in Phase 1. Phases 2 and 3 include several different assessments, both proctored and non-proctored. A proctored assessment involves having an individual (i.e., a proctor) monitor or supervise test-takers during the test, while a non-proctored assessment is unsupervised. Phase 2 is non-proctored, while Phase 3 is proctored, and both are described in more detail below.

The purpose of this guide is to provide you with information about the assessments, what you can expect throughout the process, and general information about how to prepare.

## Overview of Phase 2 and 3 Assessments

The Special Agent assessments are presented in two phases: Phase 2, which includes two non-proctored assessments and Phase 3, which includes two proctored assessments. The proctored assessments are administered in-person at a *PAN/PSI* testing center. The Phase 2 and Phase 3 assessments are designed to assess an applicant's potential to successfully perform the duties of an entry-level IRS Special Agent in the Criminal Investigation division.

### Phase 2: Non-proctored Assessments

Phase 2 begins with a Special Agent Realistic Job Preview (RJP). You will watch this 11-minute RJP and then answer a few questions about your willingness to perform certain tasks on the job. If you are eligible or willing to continue based on your responses to the RJP, you will complete the second assessment, which is the Non-proctored Job Simulation.

The Non-proctored Job Simulation is a combination of 38 judgement items and six (6) multiple-choice items, for which you will select a response from a list of options. Job simulation items are presented in a variety of formats including text, audio, and computer-animated vignettes. The judgement items will present a work-related situation and ask you to indicate your most likely response to the situation and your least likely response to the situation. Multiple choice items may involve text and/or audio and will ask you to select a response to answer the item. The items contain between three (3) and four (4) responses each and are presented in text format.

The questions in the job simulation are loosely organized into a period of several days in the life of an IRS Special Agent. Although a Special Agent is unlikely to encounter all of the scenarios presented in such a short period, Special Agents should be able to demonstrate competence in handling these scenarios should they arise on the job.

### Administration Information

If you are eligible for Phase 2, you will receive an email notifying you of your eligibility to complete the Phase 2 assessments. This invitation email will contain a link to the assessments and will instruct you to complete the assessments within a certain time frame.

The Phase 2 assessments are administered through a web-based platform that you will be able to access through any computer that has internet connectivity. The RJP is about 11 minutes



long and the follow-up questionnaire is estimated to last up to ten (10) minutes. You will have a timed period of one (1) hour and 25 minutes to complete the Non-proctored Job Simulation. You can start, stop, and return to the assessment as many times as needed, but the total time period that you are in the assessment cannot exceed the set time limit. To stop the timer, you will need to close the browser window. To return to the assessment, you can use the link in the invitation email.

You will continue through all sections of the assessment until you have completed the test or until the allotted testing time is met, whichever comes first. The assessment will provide a warning when you are ten (10) minutes from the end of the testing period. Once the testing window closes, assessment scores will be reviewed. If you receive a qualifying score and remain eligible, you will be eligible to continue to Phase 3.

### Phase 3: Proctored Assessments

Phase 3 consists of the Special Agent Knowledge and Skills Examination (SA KaSE) and the Special Agent Writing Sample.

The SA KaSE is a proctored assessment that is designed to assess knowledge and skills in Arithmetic, Accounting Principles, and Reasoning. The SA KaSE is comprised of 49 multiple-choice items and two (2) fill-in-the-blank items. Items are presented in text-based format and some may be paired with graphic stimuli (e.g., tables). Multiple-choice items contain between three (3) and five (5) response options.

The second assessment in the third phase is the Writing Sample, which is designed to measure your ability to communicate in writing. This assessment is divided into two (2) writing exercises. The time limit of each exercise is one (1) hour, so the total combined Writing Sample time limit is two (2) hours.

### Administration Information

If you are eligible for Phase 3, you will receive an email notifying you of your eligibility to complete the Phase 3 assessments. The Phase 3 assessments are administered through a web-based platform at a *PSI* proctored testing center. The invitation email will contain a link to the *PSI* platform where you can schedule your proctored test session within the testing window stated in the invitation email. You will be able to schedule your test appointment at a testing center that is most convenient for you, but you must schedule it before the testing window provided expires. You will need to schedule your test appointment at least 24 hours in advance so plan accordingly.

Once you arrive at the testing center, you will be checked in, which includes providing your photo identification for admittance. You will be provided with testing materials and an assessment access code, you will be assigned to a testing station, and you will be logged into the assessments. The test proctor will read the pre-test instructions, and then you will begin the assessment. The SA KaSE is administered first, followed by the Writing Sample.

The proctored test session is four (4) hours, which includes time for check-in, instructions, breaks, and check-out. As noted above, you will have one (1) hour and 30 minutes to complete the SA KaSE, and then two (2) hours to complete the Writing Sample. You will continue through



all sections of the SA KaSE until you have completed the assessment or until the allotted testing time is met, whichever comes first. You will then continue through both exercises of the Writing Sample until you have completed the assessment or until the allotted testing time is met, whichever comes first. You will receive notices of time remaining when you are nearing the end of each assessment. At the end of the entire test session, the proctor will ensure all testing materials have been gathered, information has been stored, and access to the proctored assessments is closed.

Testing materials that will be provided to you include:

- Multiple pieces of scratch paper
- Multiple pencils
- Calculator

Test proctors for the Phase 3 assessments are *PSI* personnel. They are trained to prepare the testing room prior to test administration, check candidate IDs, record attendance, enforce rules regarding the testing, deal with problems that may arise during the assessment, and secure assessment materials.

Once you have completed the proctored test session, your assessment scores will be reviewed. If you receive a qualifying score and remain eligible, you may be asked to participate in an interview with IRS management.

## General Test Preparations

### Basic Strategies to Reduce Test Anxiety

- Review or practice taking tests or assessment exercises that contain content on arithmetic, accounting, and writing, which are skills assessed in the Phase 3 assessments.
- Get a good night's sleep the night before the test.
- Have breakfast and drink plenty of water the morning of the test.
- Arrive early to the testing site (during Phase 3) and take time to relax prior to the test. Being in the right frame of mind can boost your confidence and performance.
- Trust yourself during the exam. Nerves can be overbearing during an assessment, so trust your own preparation and abilities.

### Test-taking Tips

- Read the instructions on the page and/or listen carefully to any instructions by the proctor (if applicable). The instructions often contain relevant information about the assessment, the items, or what you can expect during the test.
- Consider any time limits and plan how you will use the allotted time. Many candidates who run out of time on the test spend more time on earlier items than they should. You may even consider planning to finish early to have time to review or revisit certain items.



- Carefully read the question before you look at the response options. Re-read the question a second time if you do not fully comprehend what is being asked of you.
- Work out the answer on your own before looking at the possible response options. Then, rule out response options which are in obvious contrast to what you know the correct or best answer to be.
- Pay close attention to the question that is asked and read all the response options before choosing your answer.
- Avoid changing your answer repeatedly. Typically, the first answer a candidate selects is correct unless the candidate misreads the initial question.
- Avoid spending too much time on one question – you can always skip a question and come back to it after you have had a chance to go through all the questions once.
- Answer all the questions. Using the process of elimination or making an educated guess is better than randomly guessing.

## Computer-Based Test-taking Tips

- Practice answering test questions online to enhance your familiarity with taking assessments on computers and reading questions on computer screens.
- Be sure you understand the test guidelines, such as where to take it, the recommended browser (if applicable), the time limit, and any other relevant guidelines.
- If you are taking an assessment on your own computer, then verify that it is fully functional to take the assessment. Be sure you will be at a location with adequate internet and have a quiet, uninterrupted space.

## Reasonable Accommodations

Candidates who need to request reasonable accommodations will complete their requests prior to taking each assessment in Phase 2 and before scheduling the proctored test session in Phase 3.

- Due to the different time limits for the two (2) assessments in Phase 2, you will be asked to request reasonable accommodations (and wait for your request to be approved or denied), before EACH.
- Once submitted, you will NOT be able to change the wording/nature of your request **other than to withdraw it**.
- After you submit your request, you will see a screen that says your request is being **reviewed**.
- At this point, unless you wish to withdraw your request for reasonable accommodation(s), you must **CLOSE the browser window and EXIT the test system**. Do NOT click on the button that withdraws your request (unless you have changed your mind and wish to withdraw it).
- You will receive an email confirming that your accommodations request has been received.
- Please note that each review can take a few days and you will be notified via email that your request(s) has been approved or denied.
- Once you receive an email that your request was approved or denied, **click the link in the approval email to complete or schedule the assessment, or return to the link in**

**your original invitation email, if you wish to complete or schedule the assessment without an accommodation.**

- To ensure you have enough time to complete the assessments before the testing window ends, it is in your best interest to submit your request for reasonable accommodations and complete or schedule the assessments as soon as possible once your request is approved or denied.

## Contact Information

If you have any questions regarding the examination administration not answered in this booklet, please contact IRS Employment Operations at [HCO.assessments@irs.gov](mailto:HCO.assessments@irs.gov). It is important to note that the examination administrator cannot divulge specific information about the content of the examination.

