COBRA Assessment

Introduction & Preparation Guide

Information | Strategies | Resources

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WELCOME!

Congratulations!

You are taking the first step to ensure your success on the Console Operator Basic Requirements Assessment (COBRA) and ultimately in your career at San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E). This test is designed to give you the opportunity to make the best use of your skills. This booklet will give you information about the procedures used to select employees who are qualified and likely to be successful in this job. These procedures indicate how successful you are likely to be in the job for which you will apply. This guide should also be used to help determine if the Distribution System Operator position is a good fit for you.

This booklet gives you some tips and resources when preparing for the test, as well as suggestions on how to do your best.

Good Luck!

HOW TO USE THIS TEST GUIDE

This manual is divided into several sections aimed at helping you become more successful when taking the test.

- Information regarding COBRA
- Distribution System Operator overview
- An assessment preparation guide
- General test taking strategies
- Further resources

If you are a *first-time* test taker, take time to read through this entire manual and familiarize yourself with the tests you will be taking. Also provided are resources to assist you when preparing for this test.

If you are *retaking* this test, pay attention to the general test taking strategies, avoid stressing out, relax, and take advantage of the resources described at the back of this manual.

Let's get started!

OVERVIEW

Accommodation

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), if you have a disability, you have the right to request an accommodation in the hiring and testing process. If you believe that your disability requires special arrangements to take the test(s), please contact sdgestaffingquestions@sdge.com prior to taking the test(s).

About COBRA

Within the past 20 years, over 100,000 applicants have been screened using the Console Operator Basic Requirements Assessment (COBRA), and companies (e.g., petroleum, chemical, pipeline, and utility industries) around the world have been using COBRA during their interview process for similar console operator positions. COBRA runs on a personal computer and simulates a simple distillation process. This includes a computer-based simulation that allows the user to learn and assess the appropriate methods on how and when to open and close valves, regulate temperatures in a column, cool overhead product, transport product, and switch run-down tracks.

COBRA was designed to assess several dynamic mental abilities including multi-tasking, concentration, and problem sensitivity (i.e., detecting at the earliest time possible when something is going wrong). Additionally, one's ability to stay calm despite unforeseen challenges, such as equipment failure, will also be assessed.

About Simulation Tests

Simulation testing allows for skills and abilities to be tested in real-world scenarios that are directly applicable to the job in which you are applying for. Simulation testing differs depending on the situation, but often involves computer-based technology and requires the tester to work through a curated work scenario. While the test itself may differ from the work of a Distribution Systems Operator, the knowledge, skills, and abilities being assessed are consistent with those that are required for success for this job.

DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM OPERATOR POSITION

Distributed System Operators (DSOs) work at SDG&E's Mission Control in San Diego. Employees maintain the electric distribution system to ensure continuity of service; prepare, check, and direct orders for electric distribution system switching operations and controls; operate electric supervisory control devices; perform substation switching; direct service restoration activities; maintain records and operating diagrams; document system operating map updates; and prepare reports.

Below are some visuals showcasing the SDG&E Control Center in which Distribution System Operators work.

COBRA PREPARATION GUIDE

This test will require applicants to participate and operate a computer-based simulation to demonstrate one's ability to monitor safety, production goals, product quality, environmental impact, and efficiency. Additionally, applicants will be provided the necessary equipment to listen and respond to audio content material including alerts and voice messages.

The assessment is comprised of multiple components and will take approximately 4 hours to complete in total.

- ***Training:*** All applicants will be provided with a 2-hour training. The training will provide all necessary instructions and information needed to operate the computer-based simulation assessment. This includes learning how to open and close valves, regulate temperatures in a column, cool overhead product, transport product, and switch run-down tracks.
- ***Practice:*** Following the training, applicants will be given eight practice scenarios that will last an hour in total. These scenarios were developed to allow candidates to practice what they learned during the training session. These practice scenarios are not scored and will not have any impact on the applicant.
- ***Testing:*** Finally, applicants will be given four test scenarios that will last an hour in total. These test scenarios are scored and will be very similar in nature to the practice scenarios previously worked through. The scoring is based on how well applicants run the operating system including achieving production goals, creating high quality products, and minimizing energy use.

GENERAL TEST TAKING STRATEGIES

The following section includes tips for taking a wide variety of tests and should be considered alongside the information provided for the COBRA test specifically.

When You Begin

- **Be positive!** This test is not designed to trick you or be unnecessarily difficult. Start with a positive attitude and don't give up! While this type of testing may be new to you, remember that there will be plenty of opportunities to practice before you complete the test scenarios.

- **Pay close attention to all test instructions!** Make sure to follow all directions provided.

- **Relax.** Ways to reduce feelings of stress include not talking with others who are stressed about the test immediately beforehand, making sure you understand the directions, and reviewing this guide. See the Additional Resources section for more suggestions on relieving test-related stress.

During the Test

- **Apply the practice skills.** Use the information you learned and skills you obtained during the COBRA overview and practice training scenarios. Apply these skills to the scored testing scenarios.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Below you will find some test taking strategies for various competencies or skills that may be particularly relevant to the job in which you are applying as well as for this assessment. These resources are listed to help you develop your current skills.

Please note that SDG&E is in no way affiliated with any of these resources, they are simply listed for your convenience.

General Test Taking Strategies

General test taking strategies to review that may be particularly useful and relevant to the COBRA simulation assessment include:

- Reducing test-related anxiety
- Attention to detail including multi-tasking, concentration, and problem sensitivity

Resources to help with these general test taking strategies:

- **Test Anxiety:** *10 Tips to Overcome Test Anxiety*: An article from University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences explaining the signs of test anxiety and suggestions on how to best manage it.
    - **Web address:** https://www.usa.edu/blog/how-to-overcome-test-anxiety/
- **Stress Tolerance:** *Best Ways to Manage Stress*: An article from Harvard Health Publishing, Harvard Medical School explaining the stress response, how to recognize it, and how to manage it.
    - **Web address**: https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/best-ways-to-manage-stress
- **Attention to Detail:** *6 Tips and 4 Exercises to Improve Your Attention to Details:* An article from New Health Advisor providing tips and methods to improve attention to detail.
    - **Web address**: https://www.newhealthadvisor.org/how-to-improve-attention-to-detail.html

Multi-Tasking

The ability to work on several tasks simultaneously is an important skill for success when taking the COBRA test as well as for success in the Distribution System Operator position.

Resources to help you further develop your multi-tasking skills:

- *15 Vital Tips to Improve Your Multitasking Skills*: An article by Heather Shanley for Career Addict

- **Web address**: https://www.careeraddict.com/multitasking-skills

Concentration

Concentration, also referred to as selective attention, is another important skill for success when taking the COBRA test and for succeeding in the Distribution System Operator position.

Resources to help you further develop your concentration skills:

- **Selective Attention:** *4 Simple Exercises to Strengthen Your Attention and Reduce Distractibility:* An article by Rebekah Barnett, 2018 for TED.
  - **Web address**: https://ideas.ted.com/4-simple-exercises-to-strengthen-your-attention-and-reduce-distractibility/
- **Concentration:** *12 Tips to Improve Your Concentration:* An article from Healthline.
  - **Web address**: https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/how-to-improve-concentration#takeaway

Problem Sensitivity

Problem sensitivity, or the ability to detect at the earliest time possible when something is going wrong, is another important skill for success when taking the COBRA test and for succeeding in the Distribution System Operator position.

- Pay attention to directions, notifications, and audio announcements.
- **Observation:** A case study from Massachusetts Institute of Technology showing the importance of observing our surroundings and explaining how observations occur in human brains. This case study includes videos, practice, and suggestions on how to improve your ability to make important observations.
  - **Web address:** https://ccmit.mit.edu/observation/