Transportation Security Administration

Computer-Based Test Guide

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About the Test

The Study Guide

TSA's hiring process involves six steps:

1. Computer-based exam
2. TSA color vision exam
3. Interview
4. Drug screen
5. Medical evaluation
6. Extensive background investigation

This study guide aims to prepare you for the TSA Computer-Based Test. In this guide you will find a thorough explanation regarding the X-Ray Object Recognition test as well as an introduction to the English section. Moreover, this guide includes helpful tips for the assessment day.

Inside our pack, you will find a diagnostic test to help you study in an effective way, practice drills for the X-Ray and English Sections, and also materials that will prepare you for the interview. Make sure to read the guide and then solve the drills.

Getting Ready

X-Ray Section

About the Exam

The X-ray exam is not a typical aptitude test. It is unique and based on alertness and decision-making skills. You will be asked to identify items in X-ray images of luggage which have been shown briefly before the test. Your main task will be to determine if the required items appear in the pictures or not. Our test is comprised of a set of pictures, one picture at a time. You will have a few seconds to press a certain key that indicates whether the requested item appears in the image or not. The pictures will be changed automatically after a few seconds.

X-Ray Images

Example of an X-Ray Image

X-Ray machines present images that are colored based on the **density** of the scanned items. **The denser the material, the darker it will appear**. When preparing for the X-Ray section, practice helps a great deal since it allows you to become familiar with the characteristics of targeted items. However, keep in mind that different machines may have different color settings, and although most items will appear in the same way in different bags, they might appear differently in other bags.

Blue represents dense materials, such as metal, hard (dense) plastics and different parts of weaponry. When the material is very dense, the blue may get darker to the point of black. For example, a metal box or wires will show up as blue or black and, often, as a mix of both colors.

Green represents less dense materials such as plastics and alloys (less dense metals). Green is shown when a product includes a material with lighter density than dense metals, but denser than organic objects. Stones, ceramics, plastic, and toys may be colored green.

Orange represents the least dense material, which is mostly biological material. All organic objects such as wood, food, plants, animals, powders, rubber products and leather will show up as orange. Sometimes plastic bottles are seen as orange.

Remember: Although most guns, knives and grenades are made of metal, they might come in different densities, thus appearing in the X-Rays as green or even orange!
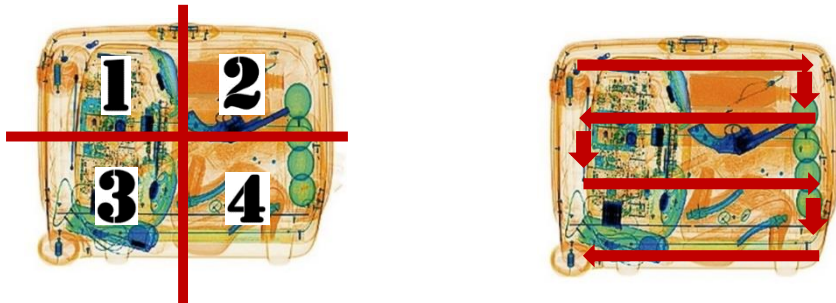
Our Drills

The purpose of our drills is to prepare you for this X-Ray Section. Each drill will begin with a small timed (45-70 second) introduction and a description of the task. The introduction will present a certain item, which you will have to look for, and examples of it. When the time is up, the introduction will automatically change to the drill, and a set of images will be shown, one at a time, for 15 seconds. Press '1' if that certain item appears, or '3' if it does not. Each drill has its own theme (guns, knives and even ordinary objects), and will include 10-20 images per set.

Tips for Practicing Bags Scanning

Your object-recognition skills will improve if you practice using these tips. TSA may use different colors or items, therefore having solid methods for object-recognition can prevent you from being surprised.

- Search the items using a method to make sure you don't miss anything. Try scanning the bags in snake-like movements or dividing the suitcase into four parts and searching each one separately (as shown in the pictures below). Don't forget to examine the outlines of the suitcase/bag for items that might be hidden there.

- Look at the general outline of the objects when looking for a specific item.
- Some objects are comprised of more than one material and therefore we should integrate the colors into one shape.
- When the required item is not found and the time is about to end, assume that the item does not appear in the image and press '3' instead of leaving it blank. This type of question requires experience and familiarity with the scanned objects. Under time constraints, it is common to mistake ordinary objects for targeted objects. Therefore, you should only mark '1' if you actually see the targeted object.
- When the pictures of the items are presented in the introduction, please do not search for the exact same item in the images that follow. The introduction is just an example; for instance, if a high-heeled shoe is presented, the following images might contain a man's shoe since they both belong to the same category. Also, the angles in which the item is positioned in the picture may change, so visualize suspicious items in different angles.
- In some X-Ray images, the outline of the required items might be difficult to recognize. Therefore, try to focus on the possible colors of the required item.
- Do not press "next" to move to the next question; keep your fingers on the '1' and '3' keys in order to avoid any confusion.
- Be focused. The images change rapidly, so being alert will help you succeed in the test.

Recognizing different items

Guns –

Guns come in different sizes, types and colors. Most of the types share the same distinctive features which can allow you to identify them on an X-Ray scan:

Handgun

1. Slide
2. Trigger
3. Grip (with a magazine inserted)

1. Slide - This is the top part of the gun which houses the firing pin and the extractor. It is usually the densest part of the gun, and therefore it usually has the darkest color.
2. Trigger - The trigger is the mechanism which actuates the firing sequence of the gun. It may be hidden in some angles, while in other X-Ray scans it may become a distinctive feature which is crucial to identifying the gun.
3. Grip – This is the part which is used to hold the gun. It includes a space designated for a magazine. In the given picture you can see a magazine is inserted. Notice the spring, which is a part of every magazine. In the picture above you can see a zigzagged line inside the grip. This is the magazine's spring.
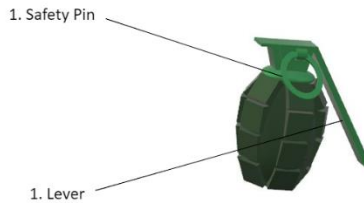
Like other objects, guns may appear in various angles, making them hard to identify. You can see some of the angles in the picture below:

Grenades –

The grenade includes two prominent features; the Lever and the Safety Pin (as shown in the picture below):

Parts of a Grenade
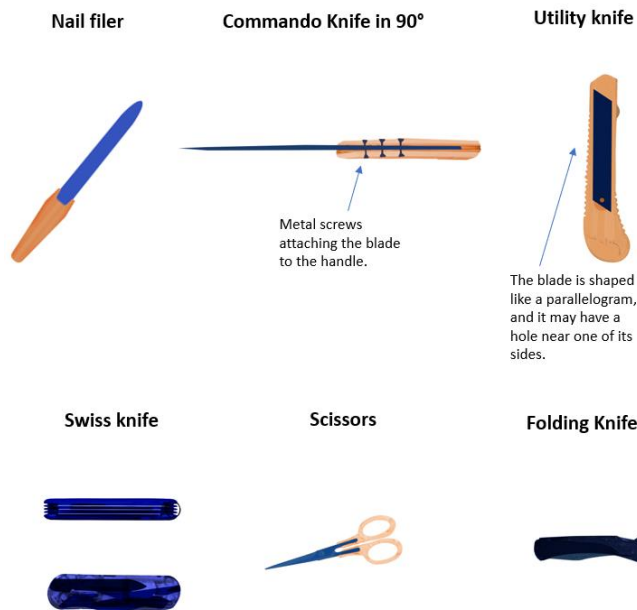

1. Safety Pin

1. Lever

The body of the grenade appears mostly in green or blue. However, it is better to learn to identify its parts rather than relying on the colors, as they may appear different in other X-Ray machines. Here are some examples of different colors and angles you can find grenades in X-Ray Scans:

Knives –

The TSA test asks you to identify different kinds of knives, from big knives to utility knives, sharp nail filers, and even scissors:

Nail filer	Commando Knife in 90°	Utility knife

Metal screws attaching the blade to the handle.

The blade is shaped like a parallelogram, and it may have a hole near one of its sides.

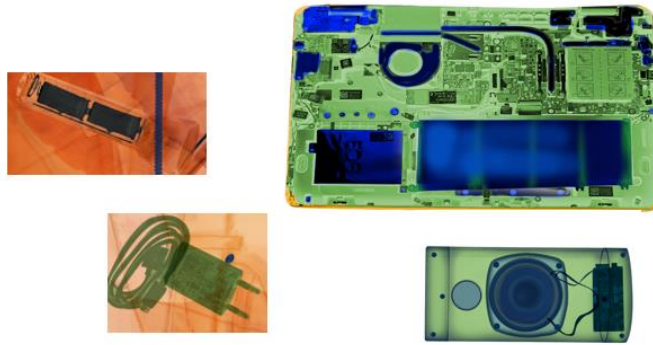| Swiss knife	Scissors	Folding Knife

Electronics –

Electronic items can appear in an X-Ray image. Each has its own unique traits, although most electronic items share the following traits:

1. A plug – The plug indicates the item is electronic. The following example is a standard European plug, but there may be different kinds.

An example of a plug

2. Colors – Many electronic items have a plastic wrap and inside of it are metal parts – for example cellphones, laptops and blow-dryers. The density of the metal parts shows as green or blue, thus you can notice the chips, batteries, wires and other metallic components inside the electronic item.

Examples of electronic items

Other Items –

In some states the TSA may include other items in the X-Ray sections, such as pens, flashlights, smartphones, dolls, tools and more.

This should not alarm you. Scanning an X-Ray image is a skill, and practicing is the way to master it. Every item given in the exam will be shown in a preview, prior to the questions. Learn the item's traits and use them to locate it in each question, as you practiced.

Examples of different items

The English Section
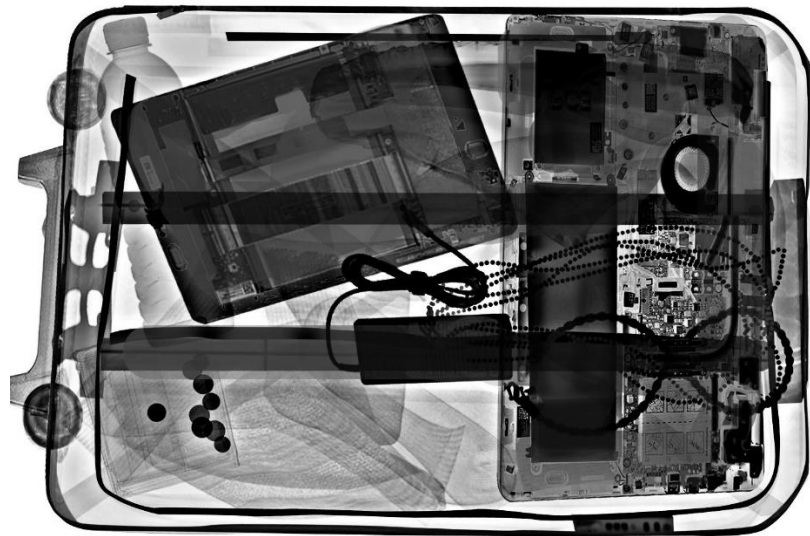
The pack contains questions from three main topics:

1. **Reading Comprehension –** You will be provided with written passages, each of which will be followed by multiple-choice questions. Questions may be given on a basic, intermediate, and/or advanced level.
2. **Vocabulary –** This part of the TSA assessment evaluates your vocabulary knowledge, spelling capabilities when recognizing words that are spelled incorrectly and correctly, aptitude when finding two words with opposite meanings (antonyms), and ability to identify two words with the same meaning (synonyms).
3. **Written Communication –** This part measures your ability to choose the sentence that presents the provided information in the best way, as well as how well you organize sentences into paragraphs and make restatement choices. You will also be scored based on how efficiently you organize ideas in a logical manner, and how you can recognize correct and incorrect punctuation and capitalization. Additionally, you will be assessed based on your English grammar, sentence completion, and proper use of syntax skills.

Practice makes perfect! There are a lot of drills for the English sections inside the pack. To study effectively, make sure you work on the topics you find more difficult. In addition, inside the pack you will find instructive videos and study guides for specific subjects.

Tips

Below are tips that will prevent you from being surprised on assessment day:

- **Identifying objects in X-Ray images that are different from those that appear on the pack:**
  Keep your cool! Remember that before each question you will be given a short period of time to view an object. Take a close look at it, try to understand what it is made of, so you will know what density to expect and visualize it in different angles. Make sure you scan the images as you practiced. Some states may have items appearing in the X-Ray object recognition section that are different from those in the pack.

- **The X-Ray Images have different colors or appear in black and white:**

Again, do not panic! The principles of X-Ray image scanning stay the same: Scan the bag as you practiced and search for the distinctive features of the items you are looking for.
In black & white images denser materials (metal) will appear in darker colors, while organic (less dense) material will appear brighter.

In images with different sets of colors it is important to pay attention to the introduction. It will present to you how the colors indicate the density of the material. Do not forget to scan the images using the methods you practiced. Most states use the colors that appear in this pack. However, some states may use X-Ray images with different colors or black and white colors.

Good Luck!

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