

Standards & Training DIRECTOR Magazine



SEVENTEEN INCHES:

**Ethical Leadership,
Accountability, and the
Courage Not to Widen
the Plate**



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What POST Standards Should Require from an Interview Training Course

By Joseph Auriemma, Jr.



Two police officers from two different states sit across from the same witness in the same kind of interview. One has completed a structured block of investigative interviewing instruction. The other has not, because his state's POST standards never required it. Same uniform. Same authority. Same statutory duty to gather accurate information for the courts. Two completely different conversations.

This is not hypothetical. It is the current state of the profession.

There is no consistent national floor for what a law enforcement interview training course must contain. Some states require an investigative interviewing block in basic training. Many do not. Some require continuing instruction after the academy. Most do not. And among those that do require something, what gets taught varies so widely that the phrase "interview training," by itself, tells a POST director very little about what an officer actually learned.

We have detailed national consensus on firearms qualification, vehicle operations, defensive tactics and use-of-force decision-making. We have accreditation models for academies and credentialing programs for instructors. What we do not yet have, in any standardized form, is a national baseline for what an interview training program must include before a POST director can confidently recognize or certify it.

That gap shows up in cases. It appears in suppression hearings, civil litigation, agency consent decrees, DOJ pattern-and-practice investigations, and false-confession reversals that continue to damage public confidence in the profession.

It is time to address it.

The credibility of an interview is established long before the recorder turns on. It begins with the training that shaped the officer's approach to the conversation.

Why Standards Matter Here

Standards exist for high-risk, high-consequence skills. We do not debate whether firearms training should be standardized because the stakes are obvious. The stakes of poor interview training are equally serious, even if the consequences often unfold more slowly: contaminated witness statements, unreliable admissions, false confessions, suppressed evidence, civil liability and erosion of community trust.

A large percentage of police work involves verbal interaction. Officers speak with victims, witnesses, complainants, suspects, family members, school officials, medical providers, bystanders and other officers. They gather the information that becomes the foundation for investigative decisions, charging decisions, search warrant applications, disciplinary proceedings and trial testimony.

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If we are willing to standardize the skills officers use in rare moments of physical force, we should be equally willing to standardize the skills they use on nearly every call: the professional interview.

What follows is a model. It identifies eight elements that a modern interview training course should contain before it satisfies a POST-level standard. These elements are not aspirational enhancements. They are baseline competencies. Each is supported by published research, nationally recognized frameworks, or accepted professional practice. None of this is novel. The question is whether POST directors and academy leaders will require it.

The standard should require a methodology grounded in information gathering, rapport, voluntariness and accuracy. Courses built primarily around confrontation-first methods should not satisfy a modern interview-training requirement unless they also meet that evidence-based standard.

The goal is not to make interviews passive. The goal is to make them defensible. Officers must still ask difficult questions, challenge inconsistencies, confront deception and seek admissions when appropriate. But they should be trained to do so in a way that preserves reliability, protects voluntariness and withstands legal scrutiny.

EIGHT ELEMENTS <i>of Interview Training that</i> POST STANDARDS SHOULD REQUIRE			
1 EVIDENCE-BASED, NON-COERCIVE METHODOLOGY	2 RAPPORT-BUILDING AS A CORE MODULE, NOT A MENTION	3 THE COGNITIVE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	4 STRATEGIC USE OF EVIDENCE
5 TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE	6 PROCEDURAL JUSTICE INTEGRATION	7 SCENARIO-BASED PRACTICAL INSTRUCTION WITH COMMUNICATION-CENTERED DEBRIEFS	8 INSTRUCTOR QUALIFICATIONS

Eight Elements POST Standards Should Require

1. Evidence-Based, Non-Coercive Methodology

A modern interview training standard should require an evidence-based, non-coercive methodology. The research base has repeatedly raised concerns about accusatory, confrontation-based interrogation practices and their relationship to false confessions, unreliable statements and litigation risk. By contrast, information-gathering models emphasize rapport, open-ended questioning, careful listening, disclosure strategy and the collection of accurate, testable information.

A POST-approved course in 2026 should not rely on techniques whose published research base shows an elevated risk of producing unreliable evidence.

2. Rapport-Building as a Core Module, not a Mention

Rapport is not a soft skill. It is one of the most important operational mechanisms through which reliable information is obtained.

A standard-compliant course must treat rapport as a substantive instructional block, not as a passing reference. Officers should be taught what rapport is, why it matters, how to build it, how to preserve it under stress, and how to recover when it breaks down during a difficult conversation.

That instruction should include measurable behaviors: how the officer introduces himself or herself, how the purpose of the conversation is explained, how common ground is established, how psychological safety is signaled, how active listening is demonstrated, and how the officer responds when the person being interviewed becomes guarded, angry, ashamed, afraid or resistant.

Rapport does not mean agreement. It does not mean friendliness for its own sake. It means creating the conditions under which a person is more likely to provide accurate, complete and legally reliable information.

3. The Cognitive Interview Protocol

The Cognitive Interview, developed by *Fisher* and *Geiselman*, remains one of the most validated

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methods for improving witness recall. A POST-level interview training standard should require instruction in the Cognitive Interview because witness memory is essential to police investigations, and officers routinely interview people whose recollections may be incomplete, fragmented or affected by stress.

A qualifying course should teach the core components of the protocol, including context reinstatement, report-everything instructions, varied retrieval, open-ended prompting and appropriate follow-up questioning. Officers should understand why these techniques work and when they are appropriate.

The standard should also require practice. It is not enough for an officer to define the Cognitive Interview on a written exam. Officers should demonstrate the ability to use memory-enhancing techniques in scenario-based exercises, receive feedback and show that they can avoid common errors such as interruption, leading questions, premature narrowing and confirmation-driven questioning.

4. Strategic Use of Evidence

Modern interview training should include the Strategic Use of Evidence. Officers frequently enter interviews with some evidence already in hand: surveillance footage, phone records, forensic results, witness statements, location data, financial records or physical evidence. How and when that evidence is disclosed can significantly affect the quality of the interview.

A standard-compliant course should teach delayed disclosure, evidence sequencing, the importance of allowing a subject to commit to a version of events before confrontation, and the tactical and legal risks of revealing too much too early. Officers should learn the difference between using evidence to test an account and using evidence simply to pressure a person into agreement.

The standard should require officers to demonstrate this skill in role-play conditions. It is one thing to say that evidence should be introduced

strategically. It is another to sit across from a person, listen carefully, recognize the moment when disclosure is appropriate, and introduce the evidence in a way that advances the truth-seeking function of the interview.

5. Trauma-Informed Practice

Officers interview trauma-exposed people every day: sexual assault survivors, child abuse witnesses, domestic violence victims, witnesses to homicides, victims of serious assaults and family members dealing with sudden loss. Trauma-informed interviewing is not a niche skill reserved for specialized units. It is a baseline competency.

A POST-approved course should include instruction on how trauma may affect attention, memory, sequencing effect, demeanor and disclosure. Officers should understand that a fragmented or delayed account is not automatically a sign of deception. They should also understand that poor questioning can damage the quality of the statement and the willingness of the person to continue cooperating.

Training should include environmental setup, pacing, language choices, grounding techniques, recognizing dysregulation, avoiding unnecessary shame or blame, and knowing when to pause or postpone an interview. This content should be taught in the basic academy and continuing education, not only in specialized sex crimes, domestic violence or child advocacy training.

6. Procedural Justice Integration

The four pillars of procedural justice — *voice, neutrality, respect and trustworthy intent* — are often discussed as community-relations principles. They are also interviewing principles.

Every interview carries procedural-justice markers. The officer's tone, word choice, sequencing, explanation of purpose, willingness to listen, and response to disagreement all communicate something about fairness. Those markers affect cooperation, legitimacy, resistance and the perceived reliability of the process.

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A standard-compliant course should teach officers to recognize the procedural-justice signals embedded in their language. Officers should learn how to give people voice without surrendering control of the interview, how to demonstrate neutrality while still pursuing investigative objectives, how to show respect during difficult questioning, and how to communicate trustworthy intent without making promises that cannot be kept.

Procedural justice should not sit outside interview training. It should be built into it.

7. Scenario-Based Practical Instruction with Communication-Centered Debriefs

Lecture-only training does not produce interview competency. Officers do not become effective interviewers by watching a slideshow. They improve by practicing under realistic conditions and receiving structured feedback on their performance.

A POST-level standard should require a meaningful percentage of practical instruction. That means scenarios, trained role players or structured peer role-play, real-time coaching and communication-centered debriefs. The debrief should evaluate more than the final outcome. It should examine the officer's opening, question structure, listening, sequencing, tone, transitions, evidence disclosure, rapport maintenance, and ability to adapt when the conversation changes.

Academies and agencies should also consider carrying communication rubrics into field training. Daily Observation Reports and field training evaluations often assess officer safety, report writing, driving, radio use and tactical decision-making. They should also assess communication skills. If interviewing is a core police function, then interview behavior should be observed, coached and evaluated beyond the classroom.

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8. Instructor Qualifications

A course is only as strong as the instructor delivering it. POST standards should require that an instructor teaching investigative interviewing have documented field experience conducting interviews and meet a recognized instructor credential.

Field experience matters because officers are appropriately skeptical. They want to know that the instructor understands what happens when a witness shuts down, when a suspect lies convincingly, when an interview goes sideways, when a victim cannot sequence events, or when a detective has one chance to ask the right question. Interview training requires credibility in both research and practice.

A defensible standard should require documented investigative or interview experience, formal instructor development, and continuing professional education in interviewing, communication, legal updates, and research-supported methods. IADLEST's Nationally Certified Instructor credential

provides one recognized model for instructor qualification, but the broader principle is straightforward: The person teaching the skill should be qualified to teach it and experienced enough to make it operationally credible.

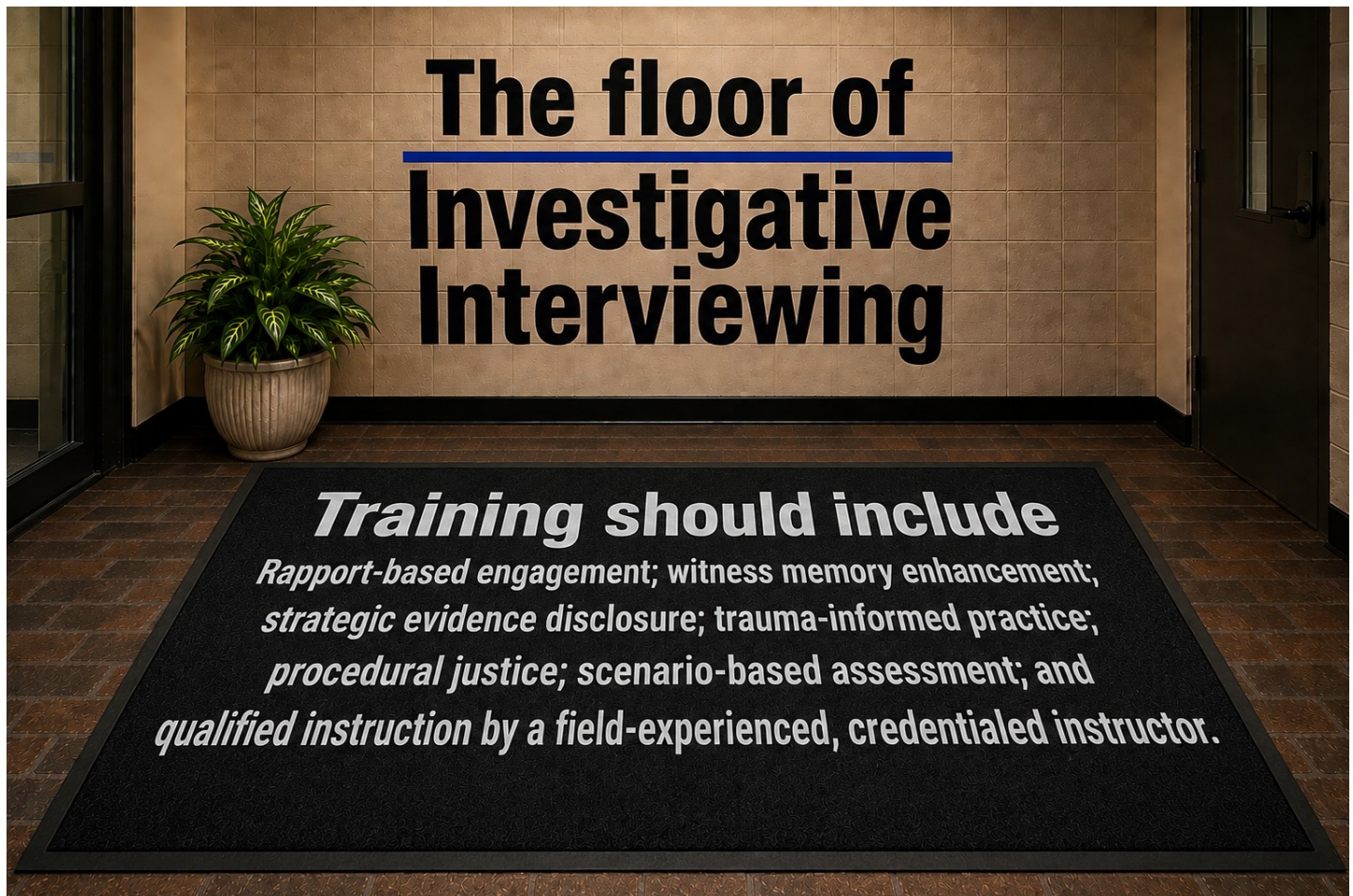
What the Standard Should Say

A POST-approved investigative interviewing course should require evidence-based, non-coercive methodology; rapport-based engagement; witness memory enhancement; strategic evidence disclosure; trauma-informed practice; procedural justice; scenario-based assessment; and qualified instruction by a field-experienced, credentialed instructor.

**That sentence is not a complete curriculum.
It is a floor.**

States could build beyond it. Agencies could add specialized modules for homicide, child abuse, sexual assault, domestic violence, human trafficking, internal affairs, school-based threats or terrorism

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investigations. But every officer should receive training that satisfies the baseline. Without that floor, the profession will continue to produce wide variation in the quality, reliability and defensibility of interview practices.

Why Integration Matters More Than Inventory

Eight elements on a list will not produce competent interviewers if those elements are taught as separate blocks. That is one of the most common failures in interview curriculum design.

Rapport gets a block. The Cognitive Interview gets a block. Strategic Use of Evidence gets a block. Trauma-informed practice gets a block. Procedural justice gets a block. Officers pass the written exam because they can describe each concept correctly. Then they sit across from a real person in a real interview and freeze because they have no framework for deciding which tool applies in the moment.



That distinction matters. A script tells an officer what to say next. A strategy helps the officer understand what the conversation requires next. Scripts break down when the person across the table does something unexpected. Strategy gives the interviewer a way to adapt.

Officers need a navigational strategy that helps them recognize what the conversation is asking for and then choose the right move from the available techniques. The techniques are the directions. Recognition is the navigation.

Several integrated frameworks already exist. The Police Executive Research Forum's *ICAT* model combines communications, assessment and tactics into a decision-making structure for critical incidents. The international *Méndez Principles* provide a science-based, rights-based, rapport-centered framework for effective interviewing and information gathering.

My own *Adaptive Strategies Compass*™ and *Teach to Talk*® methodology were developed to operate at the level where the interview actually unfolds inside the changing movement of the conversation. They give officers a practical way to move fluidly among rapport, behavioral assessment, memory enhancement, evidence introduction, motive understanding, resistance and alignment as the interview develops in real time.

That is where interview training often fails. It teaches officers the parts, but not the movement. It gives them techniques, but not a strategy for deciding when to use them, when to leave them, and when to return to them. A competent interviewer does not move through an interview in a straight line. The interviewer listens, assesses, adjusts, returns, reframes and advances.

That is what an integrated model should teach.

POST standards should not require only a checklist of content areas. They should require a framework that helps officers apply those content areas under pressure, in motion, and in response to the person sitting across from them.

That is the difference that standards should be designed to produce.

A Word About State Variation

All 50 states now operate a POST-equivalent body. The names vary, including POST, MPTC, PTC, MPOETC, LESB, DCJS and others. The scope of authority and depth of standards-setting also vary widely from state to state. That variation is the point.

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State POST commissions have legitimate authority to set their own requirements. A national model does not need to function as a mandate. But the cost of inaction is borne by the profession as a whole.

False confessions do not remain a local problem. Contaminated witness statements are challenged in state and federal courts. Officers move between agencies and across state lines, carrying whatever training they received with them. Prosecutors, judges, defense attorneys, civil litigators and communities all inherit the consequences of inconsistent training.

A baseline that every state can adopt, while adapting it to local statutory and operational realities, would reduce variance without forcing rigid uniformity.

The research is published. The frameworks exist. The instructor credentialing models exist. What is missing is a standards conversation at the POST level.

What This Means for Accreditation

If POST directors adopt a model standard built around these eight elements, the accreditation review process should be straightforward.

Course providers would submit curricula mapped against each required element. Reviewers would verify research-aligned content, instructor qualifications, practical exercises, assessment methods and the presence of an integrated framework. Programs that meet the standard would be certified or recognized. Programs that do not would receive a clear list of gaps to address.

IADLEST's National Certification Program already provides a model for rigorous course review across many training areas. Extending that same review discipline to interview training, and encouraging POST agencies to recognize programs that meet the standard, would move the profession forward immediately.

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The research is published. The frameworks exist.



This would also benefit course providers. A clear standard tells instructors what must be built into the curriculum. It gives agencies a defensible basis for selecting training. It gives POST directors a review structure. Most importantly, it gives officers a better chance of learning a skill they will use throughout their careers.

What You Can Do Right Now

POST directors, academy directors and state training officials do not need to wait for national consensus. They can begin the process now.

Audit the current standard. Compare what your state requires against the eight elements above. Some states will have partial coverage. Others will have significant gaps. Some may have no specific interview-training requirement at all. Knowing the baseline is the first step.

Tighten instructor requirements. Require field-experienced and credentialed instructors for investigative interviewing. Instructor credibility matters, and the standard should reflect that.

Require scenario-based practical instruction. Pure lecture should not satisfy the standard. Officers need practice, coaching and structured feedback.

Mandate trauma-informed and procedural-justice content. These are not specialized add-ons. They are baseline competencies in modern law enforcement communication.

Require an integrated framework. Do not accept a course that simply lists techniques. Require a structure that teaches officers how to select and apply those techniques in real time.

Build a review pipeline. Whether through a state mechanism, IADLEST NCP recognition or another defensible process, create a way to evaluate interview training against the standard. Document the review. Track which programs meet the requirement and which do not.

Standards become real when they are written, reviewed and enforced.

Conclusion

Standards are how a profession says, in writing, what it expects of itself.

Law enforcement has done that work for tactics, vehicles, force, ethics and many other high-consequence areas. It has not done the same work, in a consistent national way, for one of the most frequently used and consequential skills in policing: the interview.

Every call involves communication. Every investigation depends on information. Every statement that reaches a courtroom carries the imprint of the officer's training.

The research is there. The frameworks are there. The instructor credentialing models exist. What is missing is the floor.

You do not need a script. You need a strategy. And in this case, the strategy is to define what a modern interview training course must contain, require an integrated framework that organizes those elements, and hold the profession to that standard.

That work is overdue. It is also worth doing.

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