

Oral Defense of Written Plan - Study Guide

After completing the written plan, each team member will be expected to demonstrate their understanding of the plan. It is important that each team member actively participates in preparing the written plan. Comprehensive knowledge of the written plan is necessary to successfully respond to judges questions about the team's plan.

Team members are called individually to an area, such as a picnic table or a room, with one or two judges where they are asked a series of questions to test the individual's knowledge of the team's plan.

Each team member may be asked to explain a certain part of the plan such as the background or the implementation; or they may be asked to further explain certain management practices recommended within the plan. They may be asked to explain the habitat needs of the focal species. Questions can cover anything related to the plan, the focal species and/or management practices recommended. When responding, assume judges have not read your team plan.

Sample questions and requests:

- Explain the wildlife management practices your team implemented for Eastern cottontail.
- Two of the four species in your plan had very different habitat requirements. Identify those species and explain the compromises you made to accommodate those species.
- The Eastern bluebird requires early successional vegetation. Explain the techniques your team chose to manage disturbance and why they were recommended.
- In assessing habitat on this site, what do you consider the most limiting factor for the grasshopper sparrow?
- Explain two methods you would use to determine the effectiveness of your team's plan.

Comprehensive knowledge of the written plan is necessary to successfully respond to judges' questions about the team's plan. Each team member must understand the habitat needs of each species considered and be able to discuss why any wildlife management practice should or should not be implemented.

Scoring Oral Defense of Written Plan

Each team member will be scored individually. Judges use a score sheet with specific criteria to evaluate responses. The contestants' oral reasons are judged based on their understanding of the subject matter (80%) and presentation skills (20%).

Subject matter (80%)

- Understanding of species biology and management
- Understanding of species habitat requirements

- Understanding of wildlife management practices and implementation
- Knowledge of concepts and terms

Contestant (20%)

- Logic, reasoning, and organization
- Poise, voice, and body language

When responding to questions, contestants should:

- remove headgear (e.g., hats)
- not chew gum
- identify themselves by first name and team number
- make eye contact with each judge, smile, and be enthusiastic
- stand or sit straight and not cross legs
- respond in terms of wildlife concepts, successional stages, and/or habitat requirements of the wildlife species of interest

Getting nervous is typical when participating in this event. Practice is usually the best antidote for reducing nervousness. Some nervousness may also help improve your responses. Keep in mind even professional actors, singers and athletes report being nervous before a performance. Consider mentally-rehearsing for your oral defense to focus more on the topic and less on your nerves prior to the event. A suggestion is when asked a question by the judges, rephrase the question as part of your response. This can help clarify the question in your mind and provide a more focused response to the judges. For example, if asked “explain the wildlife management practices your team implemented for Eastern cottontail,” a good response might be:

“The wildlife management practices that my team implemented for the Eastern cottontail were planting shrubs and clover, and building brushpiles every thirty feet along the field border. We will construct our brushpiles using some of the timber that we are thinning from the nearby woodland. We are going to place the larger trunks on the bottom in a criss-cross fashion to allow rabbits space underneath, then stack the brushpile with the smaller pieces. Between brushpiles, we plan to establish clover. We will plant shrubs across the field in strips at least 10 feet wide to give cottontails access to more field edges.”

Typically judges are requested to limit each presentation to five minutes. Answers should be concise yet detailed enough to demonstrate your knowledge.

Contestants should never respond, “I don’t know” and nothing more, as this provides no response for judges to score. Instead, tell judges what you do know about the topic. Judges may ask follow-up questions to assist contestants if responses are unclear, and help you find the answer.