

SEA CADET PROMOTION BOARD

PO2 Interview Playbook

How to walk in ready — and walk out promoted.

PREPARED FOR

PO3 Rhys Norman

CURRENT RATE

Petty Officer Third Class (PO3)

BOARD GOAL

Petty Officer Second Class (PO2)

GAME PLAN

Lead with your strength. Own your growth area. Keep it tight.

What the Board Is Actually Looking For

Know the game before you walk in the room.

A promotion board is now a standard part of moving up to PO2 and above across Sea Cadet units. It's not a trick, and it's not a test where they're hoping you fail — it's your chance to **advocate for yourself**: show what you know, show how you lead, and show you're ready for more responsibility.

HOW IT USUALLY RUNS

You'll report in using proper customs and courtesies, then sit or stand as instructed. One or a few adult officers (sometimes senior cadets too) will ask you questions for about 10–15 minutes on three things: **what you know** about the program and your record, **how you lead**, and **why you're ready** for the next rate.

Here's the part most cadets don't realize:

Boards don't score you higher for talking longer. They score you higher for answering **clearly and directly**, then being able to add one good detail if they ask for more. A short, confident answer almost always beats a long, wandering one — even if the long one technically had more information buried in it.

Scores Lower	Scores Higher
Answer is technically correct, but it took two minutes, wandered through three side stories, and the board had to wait for the point.	Answer is direct, lands the point in the first sentence, backs it up with one clear example, then stops.

That's exactly what the next two pages are built to fix for you — because it's the single biggest lever you have going into this board.

Fix #1: Taming the Ramble

You already know the answers. This just gets them out clean.

You're talkative and you like to explain things fully — that's actually a good sign, it means you think about stuff. The only adjustment is **delivery**. Use this every single time a question is asked.

The Point → Proof → Pause Method

- 1 POINT** — Answer the actual question in your very first sentence. Don't warm up, don't circle it — say the answer first.
- 2 PROOF** — Back it up with ONE specific example or detail. Not three. One good one beats three okay ones.
- 3 PAUSE** — Stop talking. Close your mouth. Let it go quiet. If they want more, they'll ask — and answering a follow-up question well makes you look sharper than volunteering everything at once.

Rambly Version	Point → Proof → Pause Version
"Um, well, so like, I've been in Sea Cadets for a while now and I think I'm ready because, well, one time we had this drill and there was a lot going on and I kind of just started helping out and then also there was this other time with a newer cadet and I helped them too, and I just think overall I've kind of shown that I can..."	"I'm ready for PO2 because I've already been doing PO2-level work as a PO3. Last drill, when our new cadets were struggling with their positions, I stepped in, walked them through it one-on-one, and got them squared away before formation. That's the kind of leadership PO2 is supposed to bring."

THE RESET PHRASE

If you notice yourself mid-ramble, you don't have to panic — just say: *"Let me give you the short version..."* and land it in one sentence. Catching yourself and resetting is a leadership move, not a weakness. Boards notice self-awareness.

HOME DRILL — THE 3-SENTENCE CHALLENGE

Have Dad ask you a practice question with a stopwatch. Answer in **3 sentences or fewer, in 30–45 seconds**. If you go over, stop, reset, and try again shorter. Do this with 5 different questions a night for the week before your board — it trains your mouth, not just your brain.

Fix #2: Confidence for the Shy Moment

Nerves are normal. Even CPOs get nervous walking into a board.

Being a little shy in the moment doesn't cancel out your leadership — the board already knows you can lead, or you wouldn't be sitting in front of them. You don't have to prove you're not nervous. You just have to answer honestly and clearly.

Before you walk in

- ☐ **Shoulders back, chin level.** This isn't just for show — posture actually changes how confident you feel, not just how you look.
- ☐ **One slow breath before you answer, every time.** Not after they finish talking — give yourself a full breath before your first word. It's not a delay, it's control.

During the board

- ☐ **Eyes on the person asking.** Doesn't need to be a stare-down — just don't answer to the floor or the table.
- ☐ **It's okay to pause and think.** A 2-second pause before a sharp answer beats an instant answer that rambles. Silence doesn't cost you points — rambling does.
- ☐ **Speak a little slower than feels natural.** Nerves speed everyone up. Slowing down on purpose fixes your pace *and* makes you sound more sure of yourself — two problems, one fix.

REFRAME IT

This board isn't a room full of strangers judging you cold. It's people who already saw enough in you to bring you in front of them. Your job today isn't to become a different, louder person — it's just to let them see clearly what's already true about you.

HOME DRILL — OUT LOUD, NOT IN YOUR HEAD

Practice answers **out loud**, in the mirror or with Dad — not silently in your head. Your brain might know the answer, but your mouth needs the reps too. Five minutes out loud beats twenty minutes of silent review.

Know Your Record Cold

Fill this out with Dad before the board — then don't look at it again until it's automatic.

Blanking on your own dates, your chain of command, or your CO's name is the #1 way cadets lose easy points on a board — not lack of leadership. This is the stuff you should never have to think hard about.

- ☐ Date I joined Sea Cadets: _____
- ☐ Date I made PO3: _____
- ☐ My unit / division name: _____
- ☐ My Commanding Officer's name: _____
- ☐ Who I report to directly (my chain of command up to CO): _____
- ☐ Advanced trainings I've completed: _____
- ☐ Awards / ribbons I've earned: _____
- ☐ Community service hours completed: _____
- ☐ PO2 coursework / exam status: _____
- ☐ My program's core values or creed, word for word: _____
- ☐ What changes about my job when I make PO2 (more responsibility, what specifically?): _____

QUICK JOG

If you're not 100% sure of your program's exact core values, check your handbook with Dad — most Sea Cadet programs build on values like honor, respect, courage, and commitment, but get your *exact* wording right before the board, not the general idea.

Your Leadership Stories

Leadership is your best card. Walk in with it already loaded — don't wing it.

The board **will** ask about leadership — it's the whole point of PO2. Have two real stories ready to go, so you're never scrambling to think of one live.

Use the Situation → Action → Result formula:

What was going on? What did YOU specifically do? What happened because of it? Keep each story to about 30–45 seconds spoken out loud.

Think through moments like:

- ☐ A time you led other cadets through a task
- ☐ A time you helped a newer or younger cadet who was struggling
- ☐ A time you had to correct someone or enforce a standard
- ☐ A time your team was about to mess up and you fixed it

Story 1

SITUATION — WHAT WAS GOING ON?

ACTION — WHAT DID YOU DO?

RESULT — WHAT HAPPENED AFTER?

Story 2

SITUATION — WHAT WAS GOING ON?

ACTION — WHAT DID YOU DO?

RESULT — WHAT HAPPENED AFTER?

The Fitness Question

Owning it well is stronger than pretending you have no weaknesses.

If the board asks what you're working to improve, fitness is your honest answer — and framed right, it's actually a **strong** answer, not a weak one.

WHY THIS WORKS IN YOUR FAVOR

Boards aren't looking for cadets with zero weaknesses — nobody believes that answer anyway. They're looking for cadets who are **honest** and have a **real plan**. Hiding a weakness or saying "I don't really have one" reads worse than owning one and showing you're already fixing it.

The 3-Part Formula: Name It → Working On It → Proof

- 1 NAME IT** — plainly, no over-explaining: *"Fitness is the area I'm working hardest on right now."*
- 2 WORKING ON IT** — one specific thing you're actually doing about it.
- 3 PROOF** — a real number or milestone that shows it's working, even a small one.

Build Your Real Answer

WHAT I'M DOING ABOUT IT (WORKOUTS, PT PREP, ETC.):

PROOF IT'S WORKING (A NUMBER, A TIME, A MILESTONE):

FULL ANSWER, IN MY OWN WORDS, 3 SENTENCES OR FEWER:

WHY THIS ACTUALLY MATTERS FOR PO2

A PO2 is expected to lead by example — including physical readiness. Showing you're actively closing that gap on your own, without being told to, is a leadership answer. Don't apologize for it — report it like a status update.

Practice Question Bank

Have Dad pick 5 at random each practice night — answer every one with Point → Proof → Pause.

About You & Your Record

1. Why do you want to be PO2?
2. Walk me through your time in Sea Cadets so far.
3. What have you done since making PO3 that shows you're ready for more responsibility?
4. Who is your Commanding Officer, and who's in your chain of command?

Leadership

1. Tell me about a time you led other cadets.
2. Describe a time a cadet under you wasn't following instructions. What did you do?
3. What's the difference between being liked and being respected as a leader?
4. How would your responsibilities be different as a PO2 compared to a PO3?

Program Knowledge

1. What are your program's core values or creed?
2. What's the chain of command from you up to your Commanding Officer?
3. What's different between PO2 and PO3 insignia and responsibilities?

Self-Advocacy & Growth

1. What's an area you're working to improve? (fitness — your prepped answer)
2. Why should this board promote you today?
3. What will you do differently as a PO2 that you can't do now?

Curveballs — Build the Reflex

1. What would you do if you disagreed with an order from someone senior to you?
2. Tell me about a time you made a mistake. What did you learn from it?
3. What's a goal you have for your next year in Sea Cadets?

Night Before & Day Of

Less to think about that day means more brainpower for the board itself.

Night Before

- ☐ Uniform laid out, inspected, pressed
- ☐ Record book / paperwork ready to go
- ☐ Read through this whole guide out loud, once
- ☐ Good night's sleep — no late cramming

Morning Of

- ☐ Eat something real before you go
- ☐ Arrive early — rushing in kills your calm
- ☐ Do the breathe-pause-answer trick once in the mirror or car
- ☐ Shoulders back walking in the door

FOR DAD — 5-MINUTE MOCK BOARD

Pick 5 questions from the bank at random. Ask them one at a time, no warning. Time each answer — flag anything over 45 seconds and have him reset it shorter on a second try. End every round with one leadership question and one fitness question, since those are the two he needs the most reps on.

QUICK-REFERENCE — KEEP THIS IN YOUR HEAD

1. Point → Proof → Pause

Answer first. One example. Then stop talking.

2. Breathe before you answer

Every time. Silence is free — rambling isn't.

3. "Let me give you the short version..."

Your reset phrase if you start rambling.

4. You already have the leadership.

Today's just about showing it clearly.

"Train for the present. Prepare for the future." — Good luck, Rhys. We're proud of you already.