



911 Dispatcher

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Practice Questions

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1. According to widely adopted 911 standards (NENA/NFPA 1225), what percentage of 911 calls should be answered within 15 seconds?

- A. 90%
- B. 50%
- C. 75%
- D. 100%

2. When a caller gives an address, what is the BEST first step to ensure accurate data entry into the CAD system?

- A. Repeat the address back to the caller for confirmation
- B. Enter it immediately and dispatch units
- C. Ask the caller to spell their name first
- D. Assume the ALI display is always correct

3. When two calls ring in at the same time and only one dispatcher is available, which factor should drive which call is handled first?

- A. The immediate threat to life
- B. The caller who sounds the angriest
- C. The call that came from a landline
- D. Whichever call is shorter

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4. On a standard map with no rotation indicated, which direction is at the top?

- A. North
- B. South
- C. East
- D. West



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5. According to classic cognitive research, the average adult working memory can hold roughly how many discrete chunks of information at once?

- A. About 7, plus or minus 2
- B. About 20
- C. Exactly 3
- D. Unlimited

6. Why is 'multitasking' considered a core competency tested on most 911 dispatch exams?

- A. Because dispatchers rarely handle more than one call per shift
- B. Because it eliminates the need for call prioritization
- C. Because it replaces the need for protocol cards
- D. Because the job routinely requires managing multiple calls, radio traffic, and data entry at once

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7. According to widely accepted 911 answering standards (NENA), what percentage of 911 calls should be answered within 10 seconds during the busy hour?

- A. 90 percent within 10 seconds
- B. 50 percent within 30 seconds
- C. 100 percent within 60 seconds
- D. 75 percent within 20 seconds

8. Passage: 'Fire dispatch requires the address, the type of structure, and whether anyone is trapped inside.' Which fact is NOT listed as required for a fire dispatch?

- A. The address
- B. The type of structure
- C. The owner's insurance company
- D. Whether anyone is trapped

9. What is the single most important first action a call taker performs when answering a 911 line?

- A. Ask for the caller's name
- B. Identify the agency and ask the nature of the emergency
- C. Transfer the call to a supervisor
- D. Begin typing a narrative



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10. In the standard phonetic alphabet used by most public-safety agencies, which word represents the letter 'B'?

- A. Boston
- B. Bravo
- C. Baker
- D. Beta

11. Which of the following calls should generally receive the HIGHEST priority?

- A. A barking-dog noise complaint
- B. A report of a person not breathing
- C. A cold burglary discovered hours ago
- D. A parking violation

12. If a unit is heading toward the top of a north-up map, which direction is it traveling?

- A. South
- B. North
- C. East
- D. West

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13. A caller rapidly lists a license plate, vehicle color, make, direction of travel, and number of occupants. Why should a dispatcher write these down immediately rather than memorize them?

- A. Memorizing is faster than writing
- B. Working memory can be overloaded and details lost if not recorded
- C. Callers prefer dispatchers who write
- D. Writing prevents the caller from hanging up

14. In the 911 dispatch context, 'multitasking' most accurately refers to:

- A. Rapidly switching attention between several concurrent tasks while keeping each on track
- B. Performing two unrelated tasks with equal mental focus simultaneously
- C. Ignoring lower-priority tasks until the highest priority is fully complete
- D. Delegating every task to another dispatcher to reduce personal load



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15. What is the most appropriate way for a dispatcher to answer an incoming 911 line?

- A. State your name and badge number only
- B. Identify the agency and ask the nature of the emergency
- C. Ask the caller to hold immediately
- D. Ask for the caller's full name first

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16. Passage: 'Every line was ringing, hold times climbed past four minutes, and two dispatchers had called in sick.' What can be inferred about the center?

- A. It was a quiet shift
- B. Callers were satisfied
- C. The center had too many staff
- D. The center was short-staffed and overwhelmed

17. Which piece of information is considered the MOST critical to obtain first on any 911 call?

- A. The caller's phone number
- B. A description of the suspect
- C. The location of the emergency
- D. The caller's date of birth

18. A dispatcher types a license plate as 'ABC 4321' but the caller said 'ABC 4231'. This type of mistake is called a:

- A. Substitution error
- B. Omission error
- C. Transposition error
- D. Phonetic error

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19. A 'Priority 1' (or equivalent) classification in most CAD systems is reserved for what type of incident?

- A. Routine paperwork follow-ups
- B. Non-emergency information requests
- C. Life-threatening emergencies requiring immediate response
- D. Scheduled appointments

20. On a north-up map, the right edge of the map corresponds to which cardinal direction?

- A. North
- B. West
- C. East
- D. South

21. 'Chunking' improves recall by doing what to incoming information?

- A. Repeating it louder
- B. Slowing the caller down
- C. Grouping individual items into larger meaningful units
- D. Ignoring less important items

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22. A dispatcher is mid-sentence entering a caller's address when an officer keys up requesting an immediate records check on a stopped vehicle. The BEST practice is to:

- A. Finish the entire phone call before acknowledging the radio at all
- B. Ignore the radio because the phone call started first
- C. Tell the officer you are too busy and to call back later
- D. Acknowledge the radio promptly, set a mental placeholder for the address, then complete one task before fully returning to the other

23. What is the single most important piece of information to obtain first on any 911 call?

- A. The caller's phone number
- B. The caller's name
- C. The location of the emergency
- D. The caller's date of birth



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24. Passage: 'The veteran dispatcher calmly walked the panicked father through CPR, and the infant began breathing again before the ambulance arrived.' What can be inferred about the dispatcher?

- A. She was experienced and effective under pressure
- B. She had never handled a call before
- C. She refused to help
- D. She transferred the call

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25. A caller's ANI/ALI display shows an address, but the caller is on a cell phone. What should the call taker do?

- A. Trust the displayed address completely
- B. Skip asking for location to save time
- C. Dispatch units to the displayed coordinates only
- D. Verbally verify the caller's actual location

26. What does CAD stand for in an emergency communications center?

- A. Caller Address Database
- B. Call Audio Distribution
- C. Central Alarm Dispatch
- D. Computer-Aided Dispatch

27. Two calls arrive: (1) an active structure fire with people reported trapped, and (2) a minor two-car fender-bender with no injuries. How should they be prioritized?

- A. Dispatch the fender-bender first because traffic is involved
- B. Refer both to a supervisor before acting
- C. Handle them in the order received
- D. Dispatch the structure fire first; it has trapped occupants

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28. Which of the following is an intercardinal (ordinal) direction?

- A. North
- B. East
- C. South
- D. Northeast

29. A dispatcher silently repeats a suspect description over and over while typing it. Which working-memory component is being used?

- A. The visuospatial sketchpad
- B. The episodic buffer alone
- C. Long-term semantic memory
- D. The phonological loop (verbal rehearsal)

30. The brief performance cost incurred each time a dispatcher shifts attention from one task to another is called:

- A. Tunnel vision
- B. Switch cost
- C. Anchoring bias
- D. Echo delay



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Answer Key & Explanations

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1. A — 90%

NENA and NFPA standards call for 90% of 911 calls to be answered within 15 seconds (and 95% within 20 seconds). This benchmark drives PSAP staffing decisions.

2. A — Repeat the address back to the caller for confirmation

Repeating (verifying) the address back catches mishearings before units are sent to the wrong location, which is the single most important accuracy check.

3. A — The immediate threat to life

Prioritization is based on the level of threat to life and safety, not caller demeanor, phone type, or expected call length.

4. A — North

By cartographic convention, maps are oriented with north at the top unless a compass rose or note indicates otherwise.

5. A — About 7, plus or minus 2

Miller's classic finding is that short-term/working memory holds about 7 +/- 2 items, which is why dispatchers should record details quickly rather than rely on holding everything mentally.

6. D — Because the job routinely requires managing multiple calls, radio traffic, and data entry at once

Dispatch work inherently involves overlapping responsibilities—phones, radio, and CAD—so the ability to manage them concurrently is a fundamental, frequently tested skill.

7. A — 90 percent within 10 seconds

NENA's call-answering standard calls for 90 percent of 911 calls to be answered within 10 seconds during the busy hour, ensuring rapid access to emergency help.

8. C — The owner's insurance company

The passage lists address, structure type, and whether anyone is trapped; the insurance company is never mentioned.

9. B — Identify the agency and ask the nature of the emergency

A standard greeting that identifies the PSAP and asks the nature of the emergency ('9-1-1, what is your emergency?') orients the caller immediately and starts information-gathering on the right footing.

10. B — Bravo

In the NATO/ICAO phonetic alphabet adopted by public safety, 'B' is 'Bravo'. Using a standard set prevents letters from being misheard during data entry.

11. B — A report of a person not breathing

A person not breathing is an immediate life threat (cardiac/respiratory arrest) and outranks property and quality-of-life calls.



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12. B — North

On a north-up map the top edge is north, so movement toward the top is northbound travel.

13. B — Working memory can be overloaded and details lost if not recorded

Multiple simultaneous facts can exceed working memory's limited capacity; recording them immediately prevents loss of critical details.

14. A — Rapidly switching attention between several concurrent tasks while keeping each on track

Human 'multitasking' is really fast task-switching; dispatchers manage several active responsibilities by shifting attention quickly while tracking the status of each. True simultaneous focus on two cognitive tasks is not possible.

15. B — Identify the agency and ask the nature of the emergency

A standard 911 greeting identifies the PSAP/agency and asks what the emergency is (e.g., '911, what is your emergency?'), getting the caller to the point quickly.

16. D — The center was short-staffed and overwhelmed

Long holds, all lines ringing, and sick absences together imply the center was overwhelmed and short-staffed, the conclusion the details point to.

17. C — The location of the emergency

Location is the top priority because if the call drops, responders can still be sent if the address is known. 'Where is the emergency?' is the foundational question.

18. C — Transposition error

A transposition error occurs when two adjacent characters are swapped (the 3 and 2 here). It is one of the most common keystroke errors and is why read-back verification matters.

19. C — Life-threatening emergencies requiring immediate response

Priority 1 codes are reserved for life-threatening emergencies that require the fastest possible response.

20. C — East

With north at top and south at bottom, east is to the right and west is to the left.

21. C — Grouping individual items into larger meaningful units

Chunking groups separate items (e.g., a phone number into 3 blocks) into fewer meaningful units, effectively expanding usable working-memory capacity.

22. D — Acknowledge the radio promptly, set a mental placeholder for the address, then complete one task before fully returning to the other

Officer-safety radio traffic is time-critical and must be acknowledged, but the dispatcher should anchor where they left off (a placeholder) to avoid losing address data, then deliberately complete tasks rather than abandoning either.

23. C — The location of the emergency

Location is obtained first because if the call drops, responders can still be sent. Without a location, no help can be dispatched regardless of other details.

24. A — She was experienced and effective under pressure

Calmly guiding effective CPR to a good outcome implies she was experienced and effective under pressure;



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the other choices contradict the result.

25. D — Verbally verify the caller's actual location

Wireless ALI provides the tower or approximate device location, not necessarily the caller's true position. Always verbally confirm the actual emergency location with the caller.

26. D — Computer-Aided Dispatch

CAD (Computer-Aided Dispatch) is the software system where dispatchers enter, track, and update incident data and unit status.

27. D — Dispatch the structure fire first; it has trapped occupants

Trapped occupants in a fire is an immediate life threat and far outranks a no-injury collision, regardless of call order.

28. D — Northeast

Intercardinal directions lie between the cardinal points: northeast, southeast, southwest, and northwest.

29. D — The phonological loop (verbal rehearsal)

Subvocal verbal rehearsal is the phonological loop's function, which maintains spoken/auditory information in working memory until it can be recorded.

30. B — Switch cost

'Switch cost' is the measurable loss of speed and accuracy that occurs every time attention is moved between tasks, which is why minimizing unnecessary switches matters.



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