



Seized Drugs FAQs

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1. General minimum educational requirements for your section:

- Requires 30 hours of Chemistry, 3 hours in Statistics, and a degree in Chemistry or Forensic Chemistry
- A Master's degree is preferred but not required.

2. What advice would you offer someone considering this career path?

- Look at job postings and make sure you are hitting the requirements for whatever field(s) you might be interested in pursuing. There are some very general degree programs that give you a little bit of experience in every field, but you don't actually have the specifics needed for most of them.
- Internships and any other hands-on experience (like joining a forensic professional organization) will also better determine which fields you might like more than others.
- The world of Seized Drugs is constantly changing, with many new substances and laws changing our workflow frequently, so research experience (graduate or undergraduate) becomes quite valuable.

3. Besides a degree(s), what other things does HFSC look for in future analysts in this section?

- The science is a big part of the job, but there is so much more to it than what you learn while earning a degree. Primarily, a strong ethical backbone and straightforward nature will be very important – this is not a job where you can tolerate tricks, deception, or cutting corners.
- Public speaking and a professional presentation are also important, especially for testifying in court.

- Lastly, a reliable and steady nature with the ability to manage stress will definitely be a good indication to look for in a new hire. This job can be difficult. The caseload never ends, and we cannot afford to crack under pressure.

4. What is a typical day/week like for a forensic analyst in this section?

- A typical day starts in the laboratory. First, any necessary quality duties will be done – maintaining safety procedures, keeping up with instrument checks and maintenance, cleaning, etc. Then, casework will begin and that makes up the large majority of the day. Outside of that, there is some amount of paperwork and report writing to be done at our desks as well as infrequent meetings. Some days, we have to testify in court, which takes up an entire day due to the long hours of waiting.
- Most of our section comes in relatively early in the morning and leaves in the early afternoon. We are expected to work 40-hour weeks but have a lot of flexibility in our schedules. Of course, when court is involved, all of the above can be very different.

5. Is it typical to work overtime? How often?

- Drug Chemistry is a job that is almost impossible to take home. Thankfully, when we are off the clock, we are OFF the clock.

6. How often do analysts in this section appear in court to testify?

- Testimony varies a lot in our section. We are typically on call for court almost every day, but most cases plead out and do not go to trial. Most analysts testify once a year, but some testify more and others not at all. This does not count the times where we are requested to appear in court but end up not taking the stand, which occurs frequently.

7. How important is communication in the daily function of your job?

- Communication is the most important skill when it comes to the job. In obvious terms, we need good communication for testimony and interacting with officers. In the lab, good communication is critical for conveying information correctly and accurately to your management and coworkers regarding casework, as well as dealing with quality duties and possible incidents.

8. In your opinion, what do you think is the most challenging part of your occupation?

- The most challenging part of this occupation is dealing with long-term stress. There is very little rhythm or routine, so it is almost impossible to fall into a rut. In the same way, you never truly get comfortable in what you are doing. Be sure to pace yourself and take care of your mental health. Have a good sense of prioritization.

9. What advancement opportunities are available in your line of work?

- Unlike many corporate or other jobs, there are not a lot of management layers. Analysts report to supervisors. Above them are the managers, then the executive management. This is the management career path. Outside of management, you have the opportunity to progress in experience with a corresponding increase in responsibility and pay.

10. What is a common misconception people have about your job?

- A common misconception about the job is the idea that our function is to aid in the prosecution of criminals. While our work often does that, it is not our objective in the slightest. The work is to analyze cases, accurately report results, and testify in court to make sure the accuracy of this information is maintained for the jury. A lot of the work goes to exonerating the wrongfully accused. We have also testified for the defense side of the law.

11. How is the work-life balance for an analyst in this section?

- Work-life balance is important, and while some people haven't quite balanced that well, yet, it is not the work environment's fault. If we need to leave early or flex time, it is typically not a problem. We have many coworkers balancing all sorts of responsibilities with their children, and they have had no problems. In our section, when you are off the clock, work rarely gets in the way of your personal life.