

Structured Oral Interview

Candidate Orientation & Preparation Guide

Austin - Travis County EMS Medic I Position

THE PUBLIC SAFETY SELECTION SPECIALISTS™



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Introduction

This guide has been designed to inform you about and to help you prepare for the Structured Oral Interview (SOI) for the Austin - Travis County EMS Medic I position. In this guide, you will learn about the SOI, the types of questions you may encounter while participating in the SOI, and instructions and tips that will help you to do your best on the day of the assessment.

Be sure to read through this entire guide carefully. By understanding how SOIs work and by knowing what to expect during the process, you will be more self-confident. Self-confidence, in turn, will increase your chances of performing well during the assessment.

The goal of the process is to facilitate the selection of candidates who are best qualified for the position. We are committed to doing this in a manner that treats all candidates fairly. The goal of this and other candidate preparation is to make candidates feel comfortable about the assessment process and to level the playing field so that we may identify the top performing candidates—not those most familiar with the process! This guide will also supply information to assist you in performing your best on the upcoming SOI. Following are the topics that this guide will cover:

- SOI overview
- The assessors
- SOI content and preparation
- Suggestions for responding to the oral interview questions
- Test-day instructions and tips
- Security issues

I. Structured Oral Interview Overview

The SOI consists of a series of questions that will assess the skills and abilities necessary to perform as a Medic I for Austin - Travis County EMS. These questions can range from hypothetical scenarios to specific questions about how you tend to deal with situations. Your answers will be rated by a panel of assessors.

In the SOI room, you will meet with two to three assessors. You will have a copy of all of the questions on a table in front of you. An assessor will read each question to you and time your response. These questions will be presented to you one at a time by the assessor and you will be allowed a fixed amount of time to respond to each question. Individual questions will have varying time limits (e.g., question one may have a time limit of four minutes, whereas question two may allow three minutes of response time), though you will be informed of these time limits.

A note pad will also be provided. You may take notes as you prepare to answer. You may refer to your copy of the question and any notes you've written while providing your response. If you have completed your response before the assessor indicates that your time is up for that question, you can verbally announce that you are finished with that question—this is perfectly acceptable. On the other hand, if you have not completed your response in the allotted time, the assessor will tell you that your time is up. At that time you will be presented with the next question. This format will continue until you have responded to all interview questions with that particular panel. There will be eight (8) questions presented. After you have completed all interview questions with a panel and left the room, the panel will discuss your performance and provide a rating for each question.

The individuals on the panel will be taking notes throughout your response. You should look at, and talk to, the assessors when you provide your responses. Only your verbal responses will be assessed. Keep in mind that you must provide **detailed responses** to interview questions in order to score well. Strong answers will contain enough information for someone to fully understand your actions and behavior in a given situation. Very short answers (such as

a one-sentence answer) most likely will not provide enough information to result in even a passing score.

The possible dimensions for the SOI are included as Appendix A, in the back of this document.

II. The Assessors

As stated previously, your performance during the SOI process will be evaluated by a panel of assessors, who all will be acquainted with the essential duties, skills and abilities of the Medic I position. The assessor panel may possibly consist of a representative from the ATCEMS Human Resources Department, ATCEMS Commander(s) and/or ATCEMS Captain(s).

All assessors are thoroughly trained before participating in the SOI. The assessor's role is simply to determine if each of the specific rating criteria have been met. Consensus between assessors on the panel is required in determining whether you have met particular criteria. Therefore, the process is extremely objective. You can therefore be confident that these assessors will be fair and competent judges of your behavior and your abilities.

III. SOI Content and Preparation

The oral assessment is designed to assess the most critical job-related abilities. Some of the dimensions that may be assessed in the oral assessment include the following: interpersonal skills, judgment and problem solving, self motivation, honesty and integrity, decision-making, composure, stress tolerance and adaptability, and oral communication.

The first step you can take to begin to prepare for the interview process is to become comfortable with presenting information in a question and answer format. It may benefit you to use a video camera and work with another individual to practice answering questions. The more comfortable you are with this type of interaction, the better you will perform on the day of the interview. Many candidates walk into the interview and require one or two questions to calm down and then will begin to relax and answer in a meaningful and organized manner. By

this time, the interview is almost over and the candidate has not made a good impression. Preparing to be comfortable is a critical step for performing well.

Here are a few steps you can take to prepare for the structured oral interview and feel confident on the test day:

- Practice listening to questions with multiple parts, taking a few notes about the questions being asked and then answering all parts of the questions.
- Make an audio and/or video tape of your practice session or watch yourself practice in a mirror. Identify any distracting mannerisms that you may have and try to correct them.
- Conversely, you might conduct an interview session with a study partner. Each individual can prepare questions, and you can practice by answering your partner's questions.
- Familiarize yourself with the roles and responsibilities of the position. This will help you learn as much as you can about the position and what will be expected of you. You may be asked questions regarding how you will handle certain hypothetical situations that relate to the ATCEMS Medic I position. Therefore, it is important to understand what duties you will be responsible for on the job.
- Review your job experience. Think about some specific examples of skills performed in your past work experience so that you have examples to draw from.
- Be well rested. Get a good night's sleep for several nights in a row before the interview date.
- Allow plenty of time to get to the SOI location. If you are rushed and late, you will be upset when you get there. Plan to arrive a few minutes prior to the scheduled time for check-in.
- Keep a good attitude. There are a few ways to fine-tune your attitude about taking this exam: Look at this SOI as a challenge, but try not to get stressed out by thinking about it too much. By using this *Structured Oral Interview Orientation and Preparation Guide* and practicing your strategies, you can be more prepared for the assessment.

IV. Suggestions for Responding to the Oral Interview Questions

- After listening to the interview question, take some time to formulate an organized response. Do not be afraid to pause for a period of time to carefully consider your answer and to organize it in a way that is meaningful and that will ultimately make sense to those individuals who are rating your response. The more organized and well thought out your answers, the more favorably they will be viewed by assessors. You will be provided with paper and a pen if you want to write down your thoughts to better organize them.
- Answer the question as it is asked. It is common for interview candidates to answer a question other than the one posed. Interviews are stressful, and it is not uncommon for a candidate to misunderstand or misinterpret the question and then provide an answer that is completely off-base. Be sure to listen carefully to the question and provide an answer for that specific question.
- Questions are provided on paper for each candidate. Review the question to ensure you have answered all parts of the question.
- Provide a complete response to each question. It is common for a candidate to answer a question and repeat the same answer over and over. Offer an answer that is complete but does not reiterate your response multiple times. Keep your answer concise but ensure that you provide a comprehensive response to the question that is posed.
- Organize your thoughts before answering the question. It is better to give more information than less. However, do not ramble about things that are not relevant.
- Ensure that you answer each question fully within the time limit.
- Speak clearly. Oral communication skills are obviously paramount in an oral interview. Oral communication ability will be rated by the panel. The rating of oral communication ability is an important element of the structured oral interview. Convey a professional demeanor by speaking clearly and demonstrating good posture and appearance. Strong communication skills will only accentuate your response to a question.
- Provide an honest answer to each question and be yourself throughout the assessment.
- **Assessors will not repeat a question after it is read.** This is why the questions are provided for you on paper.

- You will not be allowed to ask for clarification regarding a question and the assessor will not ask you to clarify an answer that is incomplete or confusing. Thus, you must be prepared to answer the questions to the best of your ability with the information given in the question.
- SOIs often do not allow candidates to give an introductory statement and do not allow candidates to prepare or present outside material—you will respond to the specific questions (or instructions) asked of you in the exercise. An SOI follows a consistent script for each and every candidate with the goal of measuring skills and abilities relevant for the position.
- Avoid responding to questions using terms like “we” or “us”. The purpose of the interview questions is to gain insight on your past and future behavior. It may be difficult for someone judging your response to determine exactly what you did in the situation.
- Avoid responding in the second person. Responses like, “You should always...” does not reflect your past or future behavior.

V. Test-Day Instructions and Tips

The following are instructions and advice that will apply on the day of the SOI:

- Be on time for the SOI. Allow yourself plenty of time to get to the site, as this will give you one less thing to worry about that day.
- Do not bring cellular phones or paging devices.
- Your personal appearance makes an impression, so be sure to look your best on the day of the SOI.
- It is natural to be nervous. Be sure to keep a positive attitude and an open mind as you participate in the SOI so that the assessors can see you perform to the best of your ability!
- Don’t act! Be yourself.
- Test proctors will be available during the SOI if you have questions throughout the test-day.

VI. Security Issues

You will be competing with a number of other candidates for the position. Keep in mind that offering information about the process to others creates an advantage for those individuals. First, if you share information and if this is determined, you will be removed from the selection process. Secondly, it is to everyone's benefit to remain silent about this process and the interview questions until all candidates have completed the SOI. By participating in this process you agree not to divulge information about the nature of the questions or the manner in which they are administered. The administrators, assessors, and candidates all share that responsibility. You will be required to sign a confidentiality form prior to starting the SOI.

VII. Conclusion

We encourage you to follow the tips in this guide and enter the SOI with confidence. After reading this guide, we hope that you will feel comfortable with the SOI process. The SOI has been carefully designed for the specific goal of fairly and accurately measuring the job-relevant abilities of all candidates. We wish you the best of luck!

Appendix A

Possible Rating Dimensions for the Structured Oral Interview (SOI)

The following presents the skill dimensions determined from the job analysis for the position of Medic I for Austin - Travis County EMS, through the efforts of I/O Solutions. Both the skill and the definition are included.

Skill Areas and Definitions

1. **Honesty and Integrity:** Ability to act in an honest and fair manner. Willingness to accept responsibility for actions when things go wrong. Ability to display a high degree of integrity and professionalism in action and word.
2. **Decision-Making Ability:** The ability to understand when a decision must be made and the willingness to make such a decision. The ability to determine an appropriate course of action quickly and efficiently to target a particular situation.
3. **Stress Management and Adaptability:** Ability to remain calm and rational under pressure, to include tolerance to abusive language, slander and/or criticism as needed to maintain control of situations; to maintain composure; to diffuse potentially hostile situations; to display appropriate flexibility in situations involving change; to appropriately modify a course of action based on changes in the situation; to maintain constructive behavior despite time constraints or pressure exerted by others.
4. **Oral Communication:** Ability to speak in a clear, concise, understandable and appropriate manner. Ability to deliver a message in such a way that others clearly understand the meaning of an intended message. Appropriate use of nonverbal cues, such as good eye contact, posture, etc. Oral communication differs from interpersonal skill in that oral communication deals with the content of the message while interpersonal skill deals with the surrounding aspects of communication.
5. **Composure:** Ability to work under stress and perform in unpleasant or traumatic circumstances. Ability to remain calm in stressful situations. Ability to handle stressful situations appropriately, remaining poised and professional. Ability to maintain emotional control in stressful situations.
6. **Interpersonal Skill:** Ability to listen to others and be considerate of the concerns of others. Ability to successfully and appropriately handle interpersonal interactions with others to gain trust, respect and mutual understanding. The ability to act with tact and diplomacy in dealings with the public - keeping public relations concerns in mind when interacting with other agencies and the general public. Ability to counsel, support and be empathetic towards others. Ability to maintain positive work relations with others and interact with people of diverse backgrounds.
7. **Self-Motivation:** Ability to remain motivated to perform one's job despite difficult circumstances, distractions or monotonous work. Ability to take charge when necessary and conduct tasks without being told to do so. Ability to work without supervision and accomplish tasks without prodding.
8. **Judgment and Reasoning:** The ability to perceive the important elements of a situation accurately, to evaluate the situation and to determine plausible courses of action that would bring about a desirable result. The ability to reason through a particular problem and determine a logical course of action. The ability to use common sense and intelligence in handling day-to-day activities, problems and decisions.