

Austin Fire Department Firefighter Interview Process



Candidate Orientation and Preparation Guide

This guide has been designed to inform you about and to help you prepare for the firefighter structured oral interview (herein referred to as the SOI), conducted by the Austin Fire Department. 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 Structured Oral Interview

The SOI consists of a series of questions that will assess the skills and abilities necessary to perform as a firefighter in the Austin Fire Department. These questions will take the form of hypothetical scenarios that require you to provide a detailed response. Your answers will be rated by a panel of assessors.

You will be given a specific arrival time for your interview. You must arrive on time for your interview. We strongly recommend that you make plans to arrive prior to your assigned check-in time. On the day of your SOI, you will check in with an interview administrator. You will be provided with specific written instructions for the SOI. Be sure to read this document in its entirety and ask any questions you may have before your interview begins. When it is time for your SOI, you will go to an assessment room to begin your interview.

When you enter the interview room, assessors will read a brief introduction and then begin the interview immediately. You will be asked a total of five (5) questions during the interview. Each question will be read aloud to you. A printed copy of the questions will also be available to you at your seat. You will have the option to follow along as each question is read and to reread a question during your response time. You will also have a pen and notepad available to you in the interview. You may use this resource during your response time to make any notes while the question is read or to outline your response.

There is a time limit for each question. The time limits may vary question to question, depending on the amount of content included in a question. You will be informed of the time limit for a question after it is read; it will also be documented on the printed copy of the questions. You may use as much or as little of your allotted time as you choose. A countdown timer will be visible to assist you in managing your time. If you complete your response before the time is up for a question, you can verbally announce that you are finished with that question. On the other hand, if you have not completed your response in the allotted time, you must move on to the next question. In such a case, an assessor will say, "Your time has ended for this question," and will move on to the next question in the interview. It is important to note that once the assessors have read a given question, they will start a timer to time your response. You may choose to take some time before starting your response to reread the question, outline your response or otherwise collect your thoughts. Please understand that if you take this opportunity, the time is counted as part of your response time. You will not be penalized for outlining your response prior to presenting it, but you are responsible for managing your time so that you have sufficient time to present your response.

This format will continue until you have responded to all of the interview questions. After you have completed all interview questions, you will be excused and will then check out with the interview administrator.

The Assessors

As stated previously, your performance during the assessment process will be evaluated by a panel of assessors, who all will be acquainted with the essential duties, skills and abilities of firefighters. The assessment panel will be composed of members of the community. Assessors will participate in extensive rater training before participating in the assessment. You can therefore be confident that these assessors will be fair and competent judges of your abilities.

Areas of Measurement

The oral assessment is designed to assess the most critical job-related skills and abilities. Some of the dimensions that may be assessed in the oral assessment include the following: decision making, conflict resolution, interpersonal skills, teamwork, judgment, problem-solving, community orientation, composure and oral communication.

The questions will be presented in the form of scenarios with fire department themes. While the scenarios will be fire-related, they **will not** require any knowledge of fire department structure or operations to answer successfully.

While you will not need any knowledge of the fire department or firefighter job to answer the interview questions, the following information is provided to offer deeper understanding of the structure of a fire department. Drivers, or engineers, operate fire engines/trucks. In Austin, the driver is referred to as a fire specialist. Lieutenants are first-line supervisors and supervise a crew, or company, of firefighters and a fire specialist. Captains also supervise crews, and they directly supervise lieutenants and firefighters.

Preparation

Here are a few steps you can take to prepare for the structured oral assessment:

- Conduct an interview session with a study partner, friend, significant other, etc. Each individual can prepare questions, and you can practice by answering your partner's questions. **Example questions are contained within this guide to familiarize you with the type of questions you may experience during the SOI.**
- 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.

Suggestions for Responding to the Oral Interview Questions

- After hearing an interview question, take some time to formulate an organized response. Do not be afraid to pause during the interview 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. Do not go outside the bounds of the question or ramble on about unrelated issues.

- Questions will not be reread for you. If you need to review a question, you must do so yourself using the printed question handout provided.
- Questions are provided on paper for each candidate. Review the question to ensure that you have answered all parts of the question.
- Keep your answer concise but ensure that you provide a comprehensive response to the question that is posed.
- Make sure you verbally present any information you think is important. You will only be rated based on what you say, so say everything you believe is necessary to answer the question. Raters will be trained to avoid any inferences or assumptions in an effort to maintain standardization.
- Ensure that you answer each question fully within the time limit.
- The panel will be rating each question separately. Therefore, if your answer to a question seems to overlap with your response to a previous question, you should repeat any pertinent information to receive credit for that question.
- Speak clearly. Oral communication skills are obviously of paramount importance in an oral interview. Oral communication is usually rated separately from your answers to the questions in the interview. Thus, if you communicate poorly, the assessors will not penalize you on your answers to each question. That said, the rating of oral communication and presentation is an important element of the oral assessment. Convey a professional demeanor by speaking clearly and demonstrating good posture and appearance. Good communication skills will only accentuate your response to a question.
- Provide an honest answer to each question and be yourself throughout the assessment.
- After you are asked to respond to a question, a timer will be started. Thus, you will have a certain predetermined time in which to respond to a question.
- You will not be allowed to ask for clarification regarding a question, and the interview personnel will not ask you to clarify an answer that is incomplete or confusing. Therefore, you must be prepared to answer the questions to the best of your ability with the information given in the question.
- This SOI does not allow candidates to give an introductory statement and does not allow candidates to prepare or present outside material (e.g., a resume, etc.). The SOI will follow a consistent script for each and every candidate.

Assessment Day Instructions and Tips

The following are instructions and advice that will help you on the day of the assessment:

- Be on time for the SOI. Allow yourself plenty of time to get to the site as this will give you one fewer thing to worry about that day. During the check-in process, you will be provided with basic instructions. Thus, ensure that you arrive on time so that you have ample time to read these instructions!
- Do not bring personal cellular phones, PDAs or paging devices to the interview location. These devices are not allowed during the interview process and city employees will not hold them for you.
- Bring photo identification.
- Dispose of any gum, candy or mints. You do not want this to interfere with your speech or cause an unnecessary distraction.
- Dress and prepare appropriately for this professional job interview.
- It is natural to be nervous. Be sure to keep a positive attitude and an open mind as you participate in the assessment so that the assessors can see you perform to the best of your ability.

Security Issues

In this retooling of the SOI process, security has been significantly enhanced. Once you have entered the testing facility site, you will be accompanied by a proctor throughout your entire interview process.

The prohibition of bringing any cellular telephone, PDA, pager, camera or other communication device into the testing facility will be **STRICTLY ENFORCED**. If you bring such a device into the facility and don't have time to return it to your vehicle before your appointment time, you will **NOT** be rescheduled for another interview slot.

The testing facility will be equipped with security cameras inside and outside the premises and in the parking areas.

Candidates are required to enter the testing facility immediately upon arriving at the parking area and to leave the premises, including the parking area, immediately upon completion of testing.

All notes made during the interview process will be collected by the proctor at the end of your interview.

During the entire process there will be uniformed and non-uniformed security personnel throughout the testing facility and in the parking area to monitor and enforce all security requirements.

You will be competing with a number of other candidates for the firefighter position. Any information you divulge about the structure of the assessment, specific questions or otherwise will provide another candidate with an unfair advantage. If you are found to have shared information with other candidates, you will be disqualified from the hiring process, and additional charges may be brought against you.

Keep the content and structure of the oral assessment confidential. 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. You will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement at check in. You will not be allowed to take any interview materials with you at the conclusion of the interview process.

ANY VIOLATION OF ANY SECURITY PROVISION SHALL BE GROUNDS FOR A CANDIDATES DISQUALIFICATION FROM THE TESTING PROCESS AND SUCH CANDIDATE WILL BE ESCORTED OFF THE PREMISES IMMEDIATELY.

Sample Interview Questions

Question 1: You have just been assigned a full-time position as a firefighter after firefighter training. You immediately develop positive working relations with three members of your crew, but you seem to have on-going conflicts with one of the individuals. You feel as though this firefighter holds your lack of experience against you. Further, you believe that he resents your enthusiasm to learn, as evidenced by experiences when he has scoffed at your questions. He has made comments that you are not well trained and are a liability to the rest of the crew. After four weeks on the job, this situation has only deteriorated.

- How will you deal with this situation?
- Who will you speak to for support or to attempt to resolve this issue?

Question 2: Imagine you have been with the department for two years and have recently been re-assigned to a new crew. You have noticed that members of this crew often do not wear their reflective vests during traffic accident responses even though the vests are a mandatory safety procedure for traffic accident calls. You begin to recognize that your crew members only wear their vests at traffic accidents when the captain is around. You decide to approach one of your peer firefighters on your crew about the discrepancy you notice with regard to the vests. The firefighter explains that their station is not in a high traffic area, and thus, there are rarely any cars on the road when they respond. He continues by stating that since the vests serve little purpose for them, the crew and he decided that their intent is to get to their patient faster rather than fumbling to get their vests on first.

- What will you say to this firefighter?
- What actions will you take to handle this situation?

Question 3: Imagine the following situation. You have been on the job for a few months, and you have just made a tactical mistake in handling a task that can be attributed to your lack of experience. The result of your mistake makes your entire crew look bad. Your crew is approached by a captain, who proceeds to criticize your entire crew in front of other personnel for the mistake you made. Your crew members know that you made the mistake; however, while the captain is speaking, none of them direct the blame to you and instead allow the captain to assume that the whole crew is to blame.

- What will you do in this situation?
- How will you react to the criticism from the captain?

Question 4: Imagine that you have been working for the Austin Fire Department for approximately two months. You are assigned to a station with a supervisor and three other members. The individuals at this station have worked together for approximately five years. They have developed an efficient routine over the years. You believe that your supervisor and the other members at the station do not want to spend time training you because it will disrupt this routine. You are given minimal instructions about your tasks, you sense that your supervisor is annoyed by your questions when you ask any, and you receive little feedback about your performance. After speaking with individuals at different stations who started with the department around the same time as you, it appears that their experiences are quite different. Compared to your peers, you have received less training on daily station and maintenance tasks and substantially less training on emergency responses.

- What concerns do you have regarding this situation as a newly hired firefighter?
- Describe in detail what you will do to address this situation with your supervisor and other crew members.
- How will you ensure that you receive the training you need?

Question 5: You have been called to the scene of a residential house fire. Your crew and you pull two victims from the structure and begin CPR to resuscitate the victims. Your company officer instructs you to retrieve a piece of medical equipment from the engine. As you are returning to your crew with the piece of equipment, the father of one of the victims approaches you. The father begins to yell at you, questioning why you appear to be doing nothing when his son is just barely fighting to stay alive. He continues to tell you that he has little trust in the fire department's abilities to treat his son. The man continues to yell at you, using profanity and a confrontational tone of voice.

- What is your initial reaction to this situation and what actions will you take?
- What will you say to this father?