

Austin Fire Department Cadet Candidates Structured Oral Interview (SOI) Process



The SOI consists of a series of questions that assess the skills, abilities and other personal characteristics necessary for successful performance as an entry level firefighter in the Austin Fire Department (AFD). The interview questions take the form of hypothetical situations. Your response to the questions will be videotaped. Your answers will be reviewed and rated by a panel of assessors at a later date.

Steps in the Process

STEP 1: You have been assigned a specific date and time for your interview. The schedule is posted on the AFD website. We strongly recommend that you arrive at the testing site at least a half hour before your assigned interview time.

Do not bring cell phones, cameras, pagers or other electronic devices to the interview. These devices will not be allowed in the building.

The only things you can take into the interview are your keys, identification cards, glasses, and other small personal items. Purses, back-packs, prepared notes, hats, food, etc. should be left in your vehicle or at home. Knives or concealed handguns are not allowed on the school campus.

Dress and groom appropriately for this professional job interview.

You will need a photo ID and your applicant confirmation number to check-in prior to the interview. The SOI check-in process is similar to the written exam check-in process.

After check-in, you will go through a short orientation and be provided with written instructions. Read the written documents thoroughly and ask questions at that time – before the interview. When it is time for your interview, you will be escorted to an individual interview room.

STEP 2: When you enter the interview room, you will hear a brief introduction and then begin the interview. You will be given three hypothetical scenarios with related questions. The amount of time for each response is provided in the introduction instructions. You will hear the question read aloud and a written copy of the questions will be available for you to follow.

There is a time limit for your response to each question. A timer will be visible, counting down your remaining response time. You can use as much or as little of the allotted time as you choose. However, if you have not completed your response in the allotted time, you must stop and move on to the next question. You may choose to take some time before you respond to re-read the question, collect your thoughts, and outline your answer. If you choose to take time to prepare, the time is counted as part of your allotted response time. You will not be penalized for preparing your response prior to presenting it, but you are responsible for managing your time. Be sure you leave yourself sufficient time to present your full, detailed response.

Your response to the interview questions is being videotaped. It is natural to be nervous. Many candidates have found the following suggestions to be helpful:

- Try to look at the camera or the screen and speak clearly. Many people find that watching themselves in a mirror or videotaping themselves while they practice answering questions gives them an idea of how they will look on camera.
- Listen carefully to the interview question and formulate an organized, comprehensive response. Do not be afraid to pause during the interview to gather your thoughts.
- Answer the question that is asked.
- Avoid rambling on about unrelated issues or, the opposite, providing answers that are too short and don't convey your knowledge on the subject.

Remember- these are just suggestions. You must decide what is best for you when preparing for the interview.

The total time for the video-capture of your response to all the interview questions is approximately 15 to 18 minutes.

When you exit the room, you will be required to leave behind the written questions and any notes you may have prepared during the interview.

STEP 3: After your interview, you will be required to stay at the testing site until everyone else in your group has completed their interview. If you have a morning interview time (8am or 10am) expect to stay until 1pm. If you have an afternoon interview time (1pm or 3pm) expect to stay until 5pm. You will have access to water and restrooms during this time. Food will not be provided and you will not have access to phones or other methods of communication during this time. If someone needs to reach you due to an emergency situation, they should call the main phone number for the Austin Fire Department (512-974-0130) and a message will be relayed to you.

When you are released, your personal items will be returned and you will be asked to leave the school campus immediately. You cannot share information about the interview questions or details about the process with other people, especially other candidates. You will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement in Step 1 of the process that clarifies what is meant by sharing information. If you are found to have provided information with other persons, you will be disqualified from the hiring process.

STEP 4: Your videotaped responses will be rated by a panel of diverse assessors the week after your interview. The assessors are required to participate in training that acquaints them with the important abilities required to be firefighters. They are also trained in methods proven to increase the reliability of their ratings. The assessors are community members who are not affiliated with the Austin Fire Department. They will be trained and supervised by professional consultants who design and administer testing for public safety agencies all over the world.