



# **Austin Fire Department Cadet Candidates Structured Oral Process (SOP)**

The SOP consists of a series of hypothetical situations, followed by 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). Your response to each question will be video recorded. Your answers will be reviewed and rated by a panel of trained assessors at a later date.

## **Steps in the Process**

STEP 1: You have been assigned a specific date and time for your SOP. The schedule is posted on the AFD website. We strongly recommend that you arrive at the testing site at least forty-five (45) minutes before your assigned time. If you are late, you will not be allowed to continue in the hiring process.

Do not bring cell phones, cameras, pagers or other electronic devices (i.e., I-watches, I-pads, etc.) to the SOP. These devices will not be allowed in the building.

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

Of course, it is up to your best judgment; however, you may want to consider dressing and grooming appropriately, just as you would for a professional job interview. If you are in the military, fire service, or in some other uniformed position, we are requesting that you do NOT wear your uniform to the interview.

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

After check-in, you will be given a short orientation and provided with written documents. Read the written documents thoroughly and ask questions at that time – before the SOP. When it is time for your assessment exercise, you will be escorted to a testing room.

STEP 2: When you enter the testing room, you will hear a brief introduction from a test administrator and then you will be instructed, via a video monitor, to begin the assessment exercise. You will be given several scenarios based on hypothetical situations and asked one or more questions at the end of each scenario. An example of a hypothetical situation might be, "Imagine you have been working in a new job for a few months and you notice that one of your co-workers is not following the workplace safety rules." The related question(s) might be, "What would you say to the co-worker? If the behavior

continues, what actions will you take to handle this situation?” or “What would you do and why?” Each scenario and all questions will be read aloud and you will be provided a printed copy as well so that you may follow along.

There is a time limit for your response to each question(s). You can use as much or as little of your allotted time period as you choose. However, if you have not completed your response in the allotted time period, you must stop and move on to the next scenario. 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 each question is being video recorded. It is natural to be nervous. Many candidates have found the following suggestions to be helpful, but you must decide for yourself what would be helpful for you.

- Try to look at the camera or the video monitor, speak clearly, and loud enough to be heard (do not speak softly). Many people find that watching themselves in a mirror or video recording themselves while they practice answering questions gives them an idea of how they will look on camera.
- Listen carefully to each scenario and its question(s) and formulate an organized, comprehensive response. Do not be afraid to pause during the assessment exercise 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 do not convey your knowledge on the subject.

Remember, these are just suggestions that other candidates have found helpful; however, ultimately, you must decide what is best for you.

The total time for the video capture of your response to the entire assessment exercise is usually less than 20 minutes.

When you exit the room, you will be required to leave behind the printed exercise material and any notes you may have prepared during the SOP.

**STEP 3:** After your assessment exercise, you will be required to stay at the testing site until everyone else in your group has completed their assessment exercise. Be prepared to be on-site for 4 – 5 hours. 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 AFD Cadet Testing Emergency Number (512-839-1606) and a message will be relayed to you.

When you are released, your personal items (if any items were brought and collected), will be returned to you and you will be asked to leave the school campus immediately. You cannot share information about the assessment exercise or details about the process with other candidates or people. 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 shared information with other candidates or persons, you will be disqualified from the hiring process and other charges may be brought against you.

STEP 4: Your video recorded responses will be rated by a panel of assessors at some time after your SOP. The assessors are required to participate in training on the professional scoring procedures and on using the dimensions that will be presented to you on test day, to evaluate your response to the assessment exercise. 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.

This preparation guide represents an attempt to familiarize candidates with all aspects of the 2015 Structured Oral Process.

We know that this is an important event for you and we wish you all the best.