

El Paso Fire Department

Achieving Success through the Promotional Process

An Introduction to the Fire Service Assessment Center Process

Amended to Meet The High
Standards of
The El Paso Fire Department
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Introduction and Familiarization

- This class is meant to introduce you to the fire service assessment process.
- You will not find the answers to an assessment here.
- There are no guarantees that your assessment will resemble the curriculum offered today.
- You are responsible for preparing for your assessment.

Achieving Success through the Promotional Process

- Preparing for an Assessment Center
- Introduction to the exercises
- Other important tips

What is an Assessment Center?

The Assessment Center is a method, consisting of a battery of exercises designed to accurately gauge a candidate's supervisory / management skills through workplace simulations.

Candidates are usually chosen based on their performance on a prior written test. The scores of the written test and assessment center are then combined in weighted percentages to make a composite score.

Multiple trained observers and techniques are used to evaluate behavior on multiple inputs.

What is an Assessment Center?

Continued

- The El Paso Fire Department Assessment Centers are usually conducted over the course of 2-3 days depending on the number of candidates.
- It is overseen by Human Resources personnel with assessors being hired from various external Fire Departments.
- You will not know the assessors by name or agency affiliation.

More of What is an Assessment Center?

- An orientation session will be conducted introducing the candidates to the system. Pay very close attention to the instructions and ask questions if there is any confusion.
- You will be assigned a numeric identifier and have your photograph taken. Faces are easier for the assessors to remember. Be confident. Smile.
- You will be given your exercise schedule.
- The exercises will begin according to your assigned schedule.

You Are the Chief

- Go into the assessment as a the Battalion / Division / Deputy Chief.
- Stay on your game for the entire assessment.
- Be courteous to the proctors and the assessors. You may run across each other in the hallways, coffee shop, restroom and such. You are always being assessed.

This is your Goal!



Preparing for an Assessment Center

- First, become familiar with the position you are applying for and your agency.
- What does your agency expect from it's Chief officers?
- Talk to Division Heads, Deputy Chiefs, Assistant Chiefs, the Fire Chief and any Chief who is willing to impart their knowledge upon you.
- Know the current issues of concern in your Department.
 - *Staffing shortages
 - *Low employee morale
 - *Overtime issues
 - *Contract negotiations
 - *Equipment / Apparatus Issues
 - *Disciplinary issues
 - *Training Deficiencies

Preparing Continued

- Know your agencies labor agreement
- Be familiar with the various programs your agency is engaged in.
- Be familiar with the Departments organizational chart.
- Be familiar with how your organization interacts with other agencies.
- There are very good books on Fire Service Assessment Centers. Read them well in advance of your Test or Assessment

Keep These In Mind

- Know your agencies policies and procedures and philosophies
- The “Big Four” – Safety, Response Readiness, Public Relations, Legal Ramifications.

Going through the Exercises

Some of the exercises may consist of the following:

- **The Written Exercise**
- **The In-Basket Exercise**
- **The Incident Scenario Exercise and Presentation**
- **Multiple Situation Exercise – (New For EPFD!)**
- **Group Exercise (Round Table)**
- **The Structured Interview**

Exercise Dimensions

Candidates will be judged on skills identified as essential by your agency.

Referred to as “Dimensions”

Each exercise may have a different set of dimensions.

Candidates should be familiar with the various dimensions.

Exercise Dimensions Cont.

Some of the more common dimensions are:

- Decisiveness
- Judgment
- Flexibility
- Adaptability
- Abilities Under Stress
- * Organizing and Planning
- * Leadership
- * Initiative
- * Perception
- * Communication Skills

The Written Exercise



The Written Exercise

- Effective writing is a skill.
- It can be learned, developed and improved.
- Like any other skill it takes practice to increase ones expertise.
- For the purposes of an Assessment Center, assessors are looking at your written communication ability. Be able to convey your thoughts in written form.
- Neatness, spelling, grammar, and sentence structure are every bit as important as content.
- Its not what you say, but how you say it!

The Written Exercise 4-Step Approach.

- Step 1 – Read the Instructions!
- Step 2 – Plan your Attack
- Step 3 – Roughing it
- Step 4 – The Final Copy

Step 1

Read the Instructions

-Read the assignment carefully.

- If the instructions call for you to write a letter, write a letter. If the instructions as for a memo, write a memo and so on.
- If you are not clear on the proper form for these documents, a dictionary is usually provided, most have the accepted forms for business communication in the appendix.
- Use those dictionaries!

Step 2

Plan your Attack

- Once you have decided what your assignment is, the next step is to plan your attack.
- You may first need to narrow the subject. Often the topic is too broad and you cannot address it in the time and page length constraints given in the instructions.
- You will write best about subjects you already know about, so look first at your own interest and experiences.
- Don't try to put down all your ideas, just pick a few and develop them....stick to the best two or three.

Step 2 Continued

- Once you have chosen your idea, you need to outline your paper.
- The outline does not have to be completely detailed, just enough to help you gather your thoughts and send you off in the right direction.
- Writing a paper without an outline is like taking a trip without a roadmap...if you don't know how to get there you will likely get lost.
- A sentence outline is more thorough and serves as a better guide to writing your first draft. These can serve as the topic sentences of your paragraphs.

Step 3

Roughing it

- In this step you will use your outline to more fully develop your ideas.
- The topic sentences are developed into paragraphs, the paragraphs are linked to each other, and everything is summed up with a closing paragraph.
- You may not have time for a rough draft! Check your time and use it wisely!

Step 4

The Final Copy

- Your paper should have an Introduction, A Body, and a Closing.
- You just completed the body of the paper, so now all you have to do is write an introduction and a closing to your rough draft.
- Compose and Proofread your final copy.
- Writing is just a process of simple steps
- HINT – “Tell’ em what your gonna tell’em, tell’ em, and tell’ em what you told’ em.”
- Use short paragraphs.
- Don’t forget to use the proper format, To:, From:, Date, etc.

The In-Basket



Pay Attention



The In-Basket

The In-Basket exercise is a test of your decision making ability. You will be given a packet containing various items and you will have a limited amount of time to deal with the items.

This exercise will test a candidates effectiveness under stress, decision making ability and written communication skills.

In-Basket

6- Step Approach

STEP 1 – Read the Instructions

STEP 2 – Sorting through Everything

STEP 3 – Instant Promotion

STEP 4 – Tell the Boss

STEP 5 – First Things First

STEP 6 – The Reckoning

The In-Basket

Step 1

- Read the instructions!
- You may be provided with a pad of memo forms, phone messages, a staffing roster, a legal pad, other appropriate forms and writing materials.
- The instructions will indicate how many items are in the In-Basket. Use the legal pad to keep track of the disposition of the items.
- Be the position!

Step 1 continued

- Create an item list on the left margin of your pad to help keep track of the items. This is a very important step, as you will be asked questions on individual items later. By having the notes you can instantly recall the item and the disposition.
- Remember, the instructions will provide you with information on your position and who you can and can not contact. Sometimes the situations are a bit unrealistic, but it tests your decision making skills. You have to play the game by the rules.

Step 1 continued

- The contents of the In-Basket will be miscellaneous memos, messages, incident reports, requests, orders, etc..
- Each Item will be numbered
- There will be a calendar
- There may be a work schedule and an organizational chart and a brief description of the personnel who work for you.

Step 2

“Sorting Through Everything”

- Now it’s time to skim through each item in the In-Basket. Go through all items before deciding what to do with any of them.
- The solution to the In-Basket amounts to making one of four decisions: HANDLE, HOLD, DELEGATE or FORWARD.
- HANDLE – These are items which you have responsibility for and the appropriate information to make the decision. Depending on the position for which you are competing for... first line Supervisor, Manager, Executive position.

Step 2 continued

- **HOLD** – These are items that are not due until later or are too controversial to forward or delegate. You would also hold anything that is potentially damaging to your predecessor's reputation and is not in the best interest of the Department to reveal.
- Other items you would hold could involve long range planning. For example, if you had a memo requesting staffing for an event that occurs in 3-months, and the plans are not due until after you return to the office. Hold the item until you return to the office.
- Other items may include informational material, such as a long magazine article.

Step 2 continued

- **DELEGATE** – These are items you are going to have done by your subordinate or another Division. These should be items that have immediacy but are not a high priority. Always follow up on anything delegated.
- **FORWARD** – Items that are urgent, or are the jurisdiction of another Division should be forwarded to another supervisor of equal rank to you or to your immediate supervisor.

Step 2 continued

- You will create a fifth pile – items used in making your decisions - like a calendar, work schedule, description of your personnel.
- Initially you made snap decisions, so some of your decisions may change as you will find items related to one another. When you find related items, place them together.
- Use a highlighter to underline dates and names
- Now that you have your four decision making piles, you should have some ideas on prioritization.

Step 3

“Prioritize and Process”

- Prioritize the items based a system of priorities- High, Medium or Low.
- You will need to rely on your intuition. Use the schedules and items in the In-Basket to aid you in making the decision. Some general guidelines:
 - Keep the philosophy of the Department in mind.
 - Keep your boss informed. He doesn't like surprises.
 - Orders from the Fire Chief take a high priority.

Step 3 continued

- Whatever decision that you make, be sure that you can articulate your reasons for arriving at that choice.
- If you absolutely can not make a choice from the information given...tell the boss!

Step 4

“Keep Your Boss Informed”

- You will need to inform your boss of items in your In Basket that could affect “The Big Four”.
- Let him/her know how you are handling situations and when the items have been resolved or completed.
- This doesn’t mean that you need to consult him/her for every item. You’re a freakin’ Chief – Make a Decision.
- Again – Be The Position!

Step 5

“First Things First”

- Now you need to go back to the items in your piles and read them carefully and prioritize them.
- As you are doing this you will be making changes to the status from HOLD to DELEGATE to FORWARD and back.
- **MAKE UP YOUR MIND!!**
- Try not to read too much into the items. Your first instincts are likely to be your best.
- Once you have convinced yourself what course to take on the items, jot a note on the legal pad as to the description of the item, its priority and your action.

Step 6

“The Reckoning”

- An Interview with one or more assessors usually follows the In-Basket to determine how you handled the items.
- Be prepared to justify your actions.
- This is where your notes come in handy as they are very useful in answering the questions. If you’ve kept accurate notes, you can quickly find answers to the questions and have plenty of time to complete the exercise.
- These notes will also show the assessors your organization skills.

The Incident Scenario and Presentation



Incident Scenario

- The Incident Scenario will examine your ability to command and control an emergency scene.
- It may be a simple fire scenario or it may be a complicated HazMat incident.
- Be proficient in emergency scene operations and Incident Command procedures.
- You may be given written materials including the scenario, building / incident scene layout, the run cards, building record forms and a visual image of the scenario via photo or computer display.

Don't Be Fooled By the Name

- The Scenario may be a House Fire, Apartment Fire, High Rise Fire, HazMat, Aircraft Crash, MCI, Water Rescue, ComSar, High Angle, Confined Space, etc.
- You get the picture!
- Know your operations for each scenario.
- You are the Incident Commander, not the Technical Specialist.
- Put your team together and play ball.

Incident Types



Scenario Presentation

- You will present your scenario to a panel of assessors for scrutiny.
- Keep in mind that you are the expert on El Paso "system". Know our procedures.
- Also keep in mind that the panel members are Chief Officers. They know how to fight fire as well.

Scenario Presentation Continued

- Use your notes and scene diagrams to illustrate your decisions and actions
- Be thorough with your explanations
- Utilize departmental procedures to defend your actions and decisions.

Helpful Hints

- Do not use regional slang, profanity or wisecracks.
- Be positive and friendly
- Be professional
- Don't speak in a monotone voice
- Speak in a strong, clear voice
- Again, KNOW your subject and KNOW your audience
- Practice! Practice! Practice!
- Practice some more!

Run Card

Sample Run Card

District 552

Single / Double

Rescue 15 25 35 45 55 65
Fire P41 P51 P61 Q61 P71 L71

Primary

B7 P41 P51 P61 Q61 R41

Full

B7 B8
P41 P51 P61 P71
Q61 L71
R41 R51

Order of Response

B7 P41 P51 P61 Q61 R41
B8 P71 P81 P91 L71 R51 HM91
B9 P101 P111 P121 L81 R61
B10 P131 P141 P151 Q91 R71

Multiple Alarms

2nd P81 P91 P101 L81 HM91
3rd P111 P121 P131 Q91

Fire Scenario

Sample Fire Scenario

Dispatch Information

Respond to unknown type fire at 123 Main St.

Response Companies

Primary Response

B7 P41 P51 P61 Q61 R41

Situation

You are Battalion Chief on B7. P41 arrives on scene and reports heavy smoke and fire involving two mobile home residential structures. They indicate that they are making an initial “quick attack” on the Division B structure. You are second on scene and observe two structures fully involved with occupants and neighbors frantically helping P41. Residential structures on Divisions B and D are being exposed to heat, fire and smoke.

Actions

Indicate your course of action, operations and command structure.

You will present your scenario to four assessors to discuss your actions and decisions.

The Group Exercise (The Round Table)



The Group Exercise

- The group exercise tests your ability to work with others.
- It reveals your problem solving ability as well as your communication skills.
- You will be divided into small groups and given a problem.
- The goal is to reach a consensus to the solution of the problem.
- Typically it will be some problem facing your agency, I.e. morale, discipline, equipment, budget issues, etc..
- You will usually be given a few moments to reflect on the topic before you discuss it as a group.

Group Exercise

5 Step Approach

STEP 1 – Gather your Thoughts

STEP 2 – Speak Up

STEP 3 – Setting the Table

STEP 4 – Playing the Part

STEP 5 – Reaching a Consensus

The Group Exercise

Step 1

STEP 1 – Read the instructions carefully and be sure you are clear on the task.

- Many times, it's to come up with a solution to an existing problem.
 - Take the allotted time to jot as many of your own ideas on the subject. (Make sure you keep track of the time, it pays to be the first to speak.)
 - Make sure your notes are neat and orderly and don't doodle.

Step 2

- The point of the exercise is not how good your ideas are, but how well you work together.

STEP 2 – Speak Up

- An easy way to gain points is to be the first to speak.
- If someone else jumps in before you, don't interrupt just enter the conversation at the earliest convenience.
- Remember, the assessors can't read your mind - there are no points for thinking.
- You don't want to just say anything, so a good opening line might be:

Step 2

“We don’t have much time so I suggest we get started. I think a good first step is to make sure we have a consensus on what we are to accomplish today. Can everyone agree that our task is _____?”

- At this point everyone will agree or disagree – resolve the disagreements quickly.
- You or someone may suggest that someone be assigned to keep time.
- You or someone may suggest that someone take notes for the group? If no one makes the suggestion, take the initiative to make those assignments. – Be sure to phrase it as a request.

Step 3

- If you are asked to perform one of these tasks accept it, but don't get bogged down in it.
- Remember, the clock is ticking...so dispense with the housekeeping chores as quickly as possible.

STEP 3 – Setting the Table

- Get everyone's ideas on the table – everyone should be given the opportunity to briefly state their ideas without justifying them.
- You don't want everyone to start talking at once, so you may want to say something like...

Steps 3 & 4

“I’m sure we all have ideas on the subject, but in the interest of time, I think we need to proceed in an orderly fashion. Why don’t we each take two minutes to present our own ideas and then we can discuss them as a group and select the best ideas. I suggest we proceed clockwise, _____ can go first.”

- Once everyone’s had a turn, offer up any of your own suggestions. If yours have already been suggested, expend on it.

- **STEP 4 – Playing the Part**

By this point in the exercise, the participants will be adopting one of the following roles:

Step 4

- **LEADER** – Though it is supposed to be a participatory or “leaderless” group exercise, a natural leader always emerges.
- **FACILITATOR** – This is the person who works to move the group along.
- **PARTICIPANT** – These are the people that speak only when it is their turn or when asked a direct question.
- **DISRUPTOR** – These people can wear many disguises. They are often argumentative and abrasive. Often times they are just confused and sidetrack the group by going off on tangents.

Step 4

The group exercise is dynamic and the participants will slip in and out of their roles. It is best to adopt the role of the **LEADER / FACILITATOR**.

Your goal is to lead without dominating and work in harmony with others to ensure the group completes the task.

The key is to bring in **PARTICIPANTS** and put a lid on **DISRUPTORS**.

Step 5

STEP 5 - Reaching a Consensus

- This doesn't mean that everyone unanimously agrees, it means that everyone is aware of the others viewpoint and agrees to support a decision.
- Watch the others for non-verbal cues, nodding heads, facial expressions that indicate approval or disapproval of an idea.
- Remember, this a group effort, agreeing with a different idea is not a sign of weakness, but it displays attitude and flexibility.
- You may need to put an issue to a vote if some still can't come to a consensus.

Step 5

- The point is for the group to come to a decision, you may need to remind everyone of this.
- You can sum it up by stating- “Just to make sure we are all in agreement, I’d like to restate our final decision. We have all agreed to ____... Thank everyone and let them know that you have enjoyed working with them.

Group Exercise

Helpful Hints

- This may be the 1st time the Assessors will see you – make a good first impression.
- Appearance is very important. Be professional and be prepared.
- When called in to be seated, greet the other candidates, but not the Assessors...they are strictly observers.
- Be aware of the time, but don't get distracted by it.
- Be yourself, it will allow you to be more confident and comfortable.
- Practice “active listening” – make eye contact and use appropriate gestures and facial expressions.

Helpful Hints

- You want to appear open and cooperative at all times.
- Try not to interrupt, if you must do so politely and constructively.
- Bring non-participating individuals into the group – be encouraging.
- Be careful about going on the offensive, remember the Assessors are looking for candidates who are participatory and use compromise to seek agreement.
- Mediate disputes immediately – you don't need to win an argument.

Multiple Situation Exercise



Multiple Situation Exercises

- This exercise presents a number of written work related situations requiring your consideration and written response.
- As with the In Basket, you will be required to justify your actions to one or more assessors after the written phase.
- The subjects may be disciplinary, operational, or administrative in nature.

Helpful Hints

- Use the rules and procedures of the Department as your guide.
- Use the “Big Four” as your guide.
- Use your intuition and common sense as your guide.

The Structured Interview



The Structured Interview

You will be asked several questions by a panel of two or more Assessors. Each candidate is asked the same questions.

- Candidates will be judged on their ability to make sound judgments and their decision making skills.
- This exercise reveals a candidates:
 - Oral Communication Skills
 - Job Knowledge
 - Experience
 - Decision Making Ability

The Structured Interview

The 3-Step Approach

- **STEP 1 – Be Prepared**
- **STEP 2 – Job Applicant**
- **STEP 3 – Sell Yourself (Figuratively)**

Step 1 – Be Prepared

The key to a successful interview is anticipating questions that may be asked and practicing answering them.

Some of the questions you should anticipate:

1. Can you tell us about yourself, highlighting your career and experiences that will help you in this position?
2. Why do you want to get promoted?
3. What are your strengths / weaknesses?
4. What is the biggest problem facing your Department?
5. In the time we have remaining, is there anything else you would like to tell us?

Step 1 – Be Prepared

The questions will concern current trends, situations currently facing your Department, or field decisions you may be called upon to make.

Anticipate several of these type of questions and be prepared to answer them.

Keep your answers to one minute each.

Step 2 – Applying for the Job

The STRUCTURED INTERVIEW is exactly like a job interview. You are trying to convince the Assessors that you are the best candidate for the position.

- From the minute you enter the room, be poised, confident and professional. **RELAX!**
- Sit comfortably erect with our feet flat on the floor in front of you.
- Keep your hands on your lap or laid naturally on the table unless you are making appropriate gestures. Don't cross your arms. Be aware of your body language signals!
- Make eye contact with all the Assessors, but look at an Assessor if he/she is speaking to you.

Step 3 – Sell Yourself

This is when the Assessors have asked all of the allotted questions and if there is time remaining will probably ask you if you have anything else to add.

You cannot be something you are not. Be yourself and let your abilities shine through.

This is your opportunity to expand on any traits, strengths, experience, training or education that you failed to mention earlier. This is your chance to show the assessors what you have accomplished over the years in preparation for this moment.

Thank the Assessors and shake their hands.

Helpful Hints

- Don't answer questions too quickly. Make sure that you listened carefully and understand the question.
- When responding to a question, make eye contact with all the Assessors. (Even if they are not looking at you.)
- Speak naturally and use appropriate hand gestures.
- If an Assessor disagrees with you, don't argue with them. Acknowledge their point of view but do not change your answer unless you are clearly wrong. i.e.- "That's an excellent point, and I will consider that as an option."

Other Important Tips

- Integrity & Honesty
- Do the right thing
- Remember, Nothing can be taken from you. Worst case scenario is you return to job that you love to do
- A plan is nothing, Planning is everything! (FDR)
- Believe in yourself and be positive
- You can do it! Look at those who have gone before us and made it. Certainly, you are better than them.

Good Luck!

With preparation, you won't need it.

Iron Man

