



Preparing for your Oral Assessment exam; what test designers and evaluators do not tell you.

As test design and preparation consultants, we have spent years researching and gathering information on how oral assessment scenarios for the fire service are designed. Through a combined effort of subject matter experts and behavioral experts, a tremendous amount of time is spent ensuring that each scenario, their questions, and most notably the answers are formulated to truly assess the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA's) of a future company or chief fire officer. Listed below are the performance dimensions that can be measured during a strategy and tactics, as well as an administrative and supervisory oral presentation. It is critical that you understand the meaning of these dimensions and not attempt to memorize them in verbatim. What is important, is that you understand the behaviors and actions associated with each dimension and that you can exhibit these behaviors during the assessment center exercises.

Technical Knowledge/Experience: In the technical knowledge dimension, assessors will measure if the candidate's responses represent an efficient, effective, and safe course of action to the challenges being presented. Undoubtedly, to do well with the technical knowledge questions, you need to be well versed in the test subject areas. As many have said before, "knowledge is power." As simple in thought as this quote may seem, it is an individual and essential trait that develops from two resources: the candidate's education and understanding of the subject matter, and his or her practical experience with the material. For many, this will come in the form of one's education through referencing and reading. Reading, studying, and reviewing documented principles and practices will provide the candidate with a knowledge base of information to refer to. Simply relying on your experience is not enough when preparing for a promotional exam. As valuable as one's "street smarts" are on the fireground, it must be supplemented with academics. It is common practice for test developers to give the candidate a list of potential resources to study for their exam. Resources will often

include specific textbooks, standard operating guidelines, training bulletins, and departmental policy and procedures to name the more common. What should be gathered from this thought is without a significant knowledge base of all the test subject matter; you will score poorly in this area.

Safety: This is the extent to which you address any safety concerns related to your firefighters, incident scene occupants, other emergency service personnel and the public. Safety is always an overriding concern in all-strategic and tactical exercises and must be strongly exhibited and expressed by you.

Incident Scene Management: This is the extent to which the candidate shows their ability to assign, mitigate, and account for all individuals operating within or near the emergency incident. If any free-lancing is detected anytime throughout your presentation, your score will be adversely affected. You must be prepared to express resource allocation and assignment using Operations, Divisions/Sectors, and Groups to name the more common.

Delegation: This is the extent to which you assign tasks to subordinates to effectively, efficiently, and depending upon the exercise, safely accomplish individual and organizational goals. Delegation is a division of labor widely utilized in the fire service that is measured in an assessment exercise through your ability to decentralize without losing control.

Administrative skills: Within this scoring dimension, assessors will be measuring the candidate's ability to effectively plan, organize, implement, manage, and evaluate. This measurable skill is often reserved for those candidates seeking a higher rank. Job analysis often shows that these skills fall within the responsibility of a Chief officer. This is not to say that candidates studying for the rank of Captain will not be assessed in this area. Due to rank structure and the responsibilities of those ranks within a given fire department, many departments around the country will require a company commander to possess

significant administrative responsibilities to perform his/her job. Again, this goes back to knowing the test subject areas for the rank being tested.

Organizing and Planning: This is the extent to which your oral presentation is well thought out and delivered in an organized manner. This dimension is often reserved for a formal presentation that may involve a simulated training exercise, the possible development and presentation of a program or a procedure, or the delivering of a speech to a civic group on a specific subject.

Problem Solving/Decision Making skills: Within this scoring dimension, assessors will be measuring the candidate's ability to exhibit problem solving and decision-making skills that is within their scope of responsibility as either a company or chief officer. The one thing you will notice in this performance dimension, as well as in a few others, is the *multitude of behaviors* that can be measured. The number of behaviors that can be measured from this dimension will depend upon the exercise. Measurable behaviors within this dimension can include:

- ❑ The candidate's ability to recognize problems or concerns within his/her scope of responsibility.
- ❑ The candidate's ability to identify the source of problems or concerns.
- ❑ The candidate's ability to develop logical solutions for eliminating and dealing with problems and concerns.
- ❑ The candidate's ability to take organized action within his/her scope of responsibility.

Attention to Detail and Directions: This is the extent to which your oral presentation provides an adequate amount of information concerning the topic/subject area being presented. Your responses and objectives must be specific to the subject and its questions, and it must follow departmental rules, regulations, and guidelines. This dimension can be measured in any strategic and tactical oral assessment exercise.

Standards and Initiative: This is the extent to which you possess an internal drive to excel or achieve personal and professional goals and motivate others within the organization, without yourself being ordered, coerced, or motivated by others. This is one of my favorite dimensions. When an assessment center exercise is designed to measure this dimension, I believe it starts to paint a vivid picture of the candidate's qualities and capabilities.

Anticipation: This is the extent to which you can forecast, prepare, and plan for what might be ahead. Some may compare this to the concept of pro-active versus re-active or expect the unexpected. In either case, it is a highly measured skill evaluated in all strategic and tactical assessments, so be prepared for it. It is quite honestly our favorite scoring dimension!

Adaptability: This is the extent to which you can effectively adapt to any new situations you are confronted with, while maintaining your composure and control with the incident.

Composure: This is the extent to which you appear calm and under control during your presentation. This dimension can be measured in several different exercises. Examples may include your reaction and response to questions from the assessor or role player, time pressure situations in a fire, collapse or hazardous materials scenario, or other pressured stimulus displayed during an oral exercise. It is a necessary quality of a fire officer!

Decisiveness: Just as composure is a necessary quality of a fire officer, so too is your ability to initiate action. Decisiveness is the extent to which you can initiate action when action indeed is necessary.

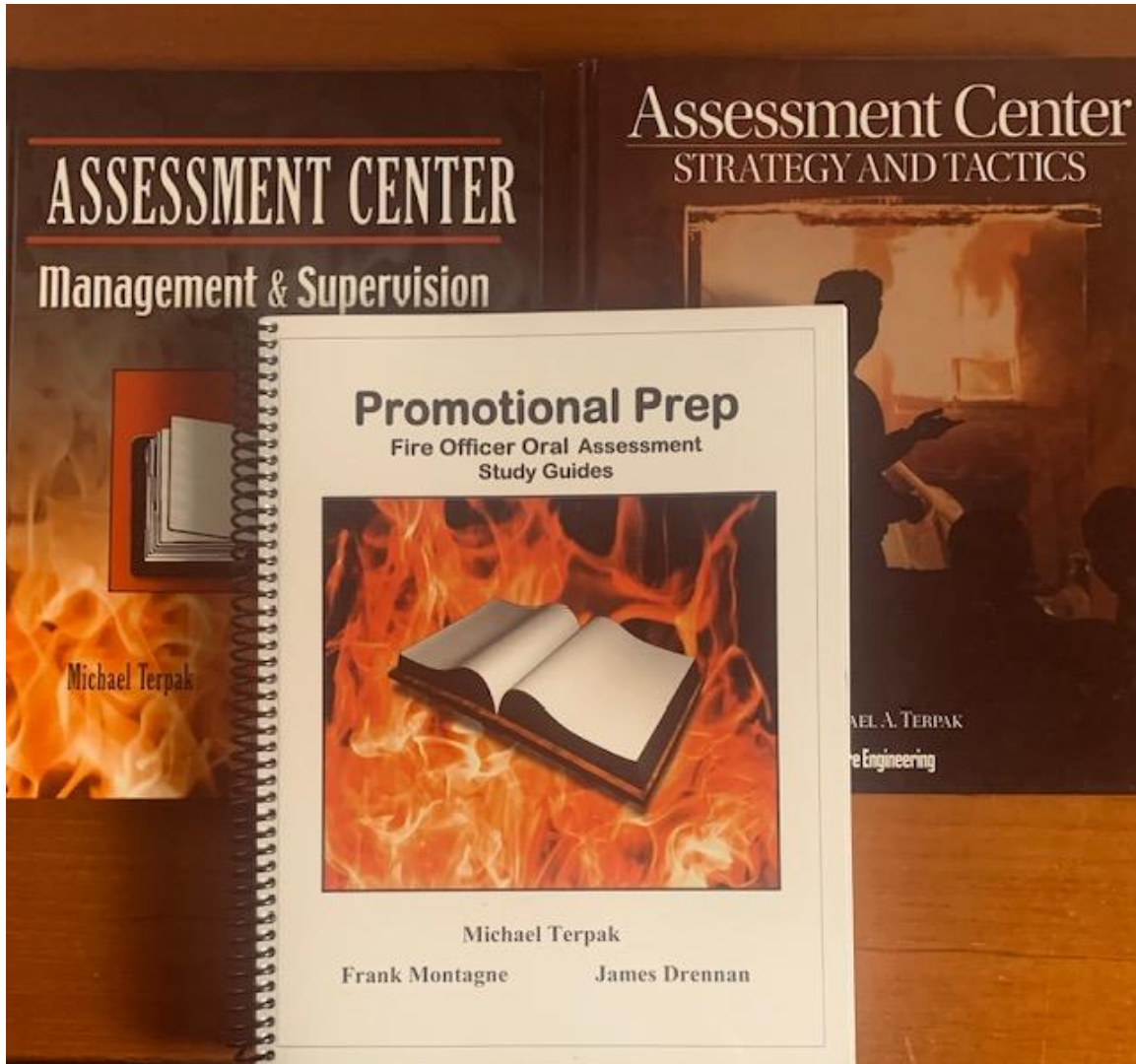
Creativity, Energy and Enthusiasm: This is the extent to which your presentation is stimulating, positive and motivating. This is an excellent and necessary quality to possess for every exercise. What is important to remember here is that you will do poorly within this dimension if you know little about the roles and responsibilities of the position being tested. Having a strong knowledge base of the material/subject matter being presented is the key to performing well within this dimension.

Oral Communications Skills: The ability to clearly and persuasively present information to a group or an individual can be a difficult area to master. We often see the most difficulty with those candidates who are studying for their first promotional exam. We state this primarily from the fact that the firefighter position and the responsibilities associated with that position are not required to possess many of the skills outlined in the oral communications dimension. They need to develop them for the company officer position. This accompanied with the anxiety of taking their first promotional exam will often interfere with their ability to perform well in this area.

Regardless of the rank being evaluated, the ability of a candidate to organize and express their thoughts, ideas, and concerns is a measurable skill and requirement of a company and chief officer. If you can express yourself well during the exercise, you will not only score well within the oral communications dimension, but you will also make it easier for evaluators to identify whether you have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to carry out the responsibilities required by the position. This is another critical component of your promotional preparation.

Time management: Using your time wisely and efficiently is another measurable skill within an assessment center exercise. Your ability to organize and present your thoughts/responses in the allotted time frame of the exercise is a skill that will be cross-referenced and scored within your planning and oral communication dimensions.

Student Note: To assist you in your preparation for your upcoming exam, the Team at Promotional Prep recommends the following textbooks, which are all available at promotionalprep.com. We also recommend the many on-line programs and seminars available on our website.



Good luck from the Team at Promotional Prep