

2020 DENVER FIRE CAPTAIN PROMOTIONAL PROCESS

CANDIDATE PREPARATION GUIDE

Prepared by FirstIdea, Inc. and the Denver Civil Service Commission

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION	PAGE
I. Overview of the Examination Components.....	1
WRITTEN EXAMINATION	
II. Written Examination Introduction.....	1
III. Written Examination Structure and Administrative Procedures.....	2
IV. Written Examination Frequently Asked Questions.....	2
V. Written Examination Preparation.....	6
VI. Taking the Written Examination.....	8
ASSESSMENT CENTER	
VII. Assessment Center Introduction.....	8
VIII. Assessment Center Exercises.....	10
IX. Assessment Center Structure.....	10
X. Assessment Center Administrative Procedures.....	11
XI. Assessment Center Frequently Asked Questions.....	12
XII. Assessment Center Preparation.....	16
XIII. Assessment Center Candidate Feedback.....	17

I. OVERVIEW OF THE EXAMINATION COMPONENTS

<u>COMPONENT</u>	<u>ADMINISTRATION DATE(S)</u>
1. Written Knowledge Exam	April 28, 2020
2. Assessment Center Process	
Written Exercise	June 9, 2020
Remaining Exercises	June 16-19, 2020

II. WRITTEN EXAMINATION INTRODUCTION

Time:	As announced by Denver Civil Service Commission
Place:	As announced by Denver Civil Service Commission
Number of items:	120 multiple-choice items. The majority of the items will be taken from the identified sources listed on the official reading list. There will also be a section of situational judgment items that is a maximum of 20 items in length.
Purpose:	Acquisition of knowledge as appropriate for position

From our very first days in school, we have taken written exams. This familiarity can be a real asset. However, for some people, the experience of taking written exams has not been a positive one. Some people get excessively nervous or forgetful. Others have a difficult time concentrating, and still others may simply not be motivated to succeed on this type of task.

Though we cannot change personalities or past experiences, we can provide you with information to assist you in preparing for our written exam. We recommend you read through this information and take our advice seriously.

In addition to the knowledge-based items that will come from the source material you've been provided and instructed to study this test may include a **maximum** of 20 situational judgement items. The situational judgment items are designed to provide information regarding your thoughts and choices regarding dimensions such as problem-solving, customer service, judgment, interpersonal communication, and decision-making. Each item will be accompanied by five (5) options as a response to the question. Please respond to each item that most closely fits what you would do in each situation. If you believe more than one option is a response you would do, select the response that you would do first. The correct response has been designed and determined by a group of subject matter experts from the Denver Fire Department.

III. WRITTEN EXAMINATION STRUCTURE AND ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES

- Each item will have four or five responses from which to choose. Only one response is most correct.
- Candidates will have 2½ hours to complete the exam.
- Candidates are NOT allowed to bring source materials into the testing building.
- Candidates will NOT be permitted to use any outside materials during the written examination.

IV. WRITTEN EXAMINATION FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

“WILL YOUR EXAM BE DIFFICULT?”

Generally speaking, difficulty of a written exam is less a function of test design and is more about the amount of study and dedication of the personnel who take the exam.

“WHO CHOOSES THE MATERIAL FROM WHICH THE EXAM ITEMS ARE DERIVED?”

For this exam, the textbooks and other study materials were selected by the Fire Chief and his command staff, with assistance from the Civil Service Commission and FirstIdea.

“WHAT IF THERE ARE CHANGES TO THE MATERIAL AFTER THE READING LIST IS ANNOUNCED?”

There are times when changes in the reading materials are made between the time the reading list is announced and the exam is given. For example, Department policies and procedures are frequently being updated and implemented. It is very important to note we develop the exam using only those materials specified on the reading list as of the date of the announcement. You will **not** be responsible for any changes in reading materials occurring after the reading list was released.

“WHAT IF ONE SOURCE CONTRADICTS ANOTHER SOURCE?”

It is possible different study materials contain contradictory information. To address this issue, we conduct several stages of item review, by multiple people, during development of the exam. Nevertheless, we may not catch all contradictions. As a result, we organize the exam by source, and under each item, we state the location in the source where it can be found.

“WILL THERE BE A PENALTY FOR GUESSING?”

There is no penalty for guessing on this examination. Therefore, it is in your best interest to mark a response for each and every item, even if you are not sure of the correct answer.

“WHAT IF I DO NOT UNDERSTAND AN ITEM, A WORD ON AN ITEM, OR ONE OF THE OPTIONS?”

Your opportunity to ask questions during the testing process is severely restricted. The monitors are present only to ensure a regulated and fair testing process. They do not know the items or answers, and they cannot answer questions concerning item content.

The reading level of the exam items is the same as that of the material from which the items are developed. In those rare circumstances when you might encounter a word with which you are unfamiliar, you will simply have to guess as to its meaning.

Furthermore, if you do not understand an item or, perhaps, you are confused with respect to one or more of the options to an item, you will simply have to use your best judgment. Again, there is no penalty associated with guessing, other than the possibility you may get the answer wrong. Remember too, you are to select the best option of the four presented.

“WILL I HAVE TIME TO FINISH THE EXAM?”

We design our exams so over 99% of candidates will have sufficient time to complete the exam. It is in your best interest not to “rush” through the exam. However, you must work diligently and monitor your time. If your mind wanders or you become “stuck” on one item for a prolonged period of time, you may experience difficulty getting through the entire exam in the allotted time.

If you need to use the restroom, or have some other emergency, please inform a monitor. Any time you take using the restroom or away from the exam itself is lost. We will not give you any extra time. Should you need to leave your desk or table, turn your answer sheet over and place your closed exam booklet on top of the answer sheet.

Under **no circumstances** will candidates be allowed to speak to one another once the testing process has begun. This includes all areas of the testing facility, including the restrooms, testing room, registration areas, and hallways. Even if you have completed the exam, if you are in or around the testing facility, you **may not speak** to another candidate, until all candidates have completed the exam.

“WHAT MATERIALS CAN I BRING TO THE EXAM?”

The Civil Service Commission will supply you with the exams, answer sheets, pencils, and other materials appropriate for the exam. We do advise you to bring a watch or timer, without noise or communication abilities, to assist you in keeping track of time.

Do **not** bring pagers, radios, cell phones, or other communication devices into the testing area. A cell phone may **not** be used as a timer.

“HOW IS THE EXAM SCORED, AND HOW CAN I BE ASSURED THE EXAM IS SCORED ACCURATELY?”

Our exams are machine-scored on-site. The answer key used with the machine is reviewed by multiple people for accuracy. We then score each exam twice and verify the consistency of scores. We also double-count the number of answer sheets.

Be aware though, when an exam is machine-scored, if the machine senses there is a problem with an item (for example, the machine detects a candidate has selected two options for an item or has not selected any option for a particular item), it will mark the item as incorrect. Therefore, prior to turning in your exam, make sure you have removed all stray marks, erased any changes you made, and answered all items.

“ARE YOUR EXAM ITEMS AND OPTIONS TAKEN DIRECTLY FROM THE STUDY MATERIALS?”

We do take the exam items and response options from the material. You will be able to go to the source and find the correct option, and usually, the incorrect options. In addition, we generally use the same verbiage as used in the source.

“SO, I JUST NEED TO MEMORIZE THE INFORMATION, AS OPPOSED TO LEARNING IT?”

The fact of the matter is, just as in many situations, written exams are largely a process of learning material, then using what was learned to answer items. Whether that material is learned by memorization or through the use of another learning technique is largely up to the individual candidate. As a result, to a large extent, we cannot influence through the design of an exam whether memorization or some other learning technique will cause candidates to perform better or worse on that exam. Find the best process for you. Section V below provides some suggestions for effectively preparing for this exam.

“HOW ARE YOUR ITEMS FORMATTED?”

We use several different formats when developing the items. Below are some examples:

Suppose you are taking a course on introductory psychology, and you learned about Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. A typical, fairly standard multiple-choice written exam item might read as follows:

1. Which one of the following persons developed the Hierarchy of Needs theory?
 - A) Sigmund Freud
 - B) Ivan Pavlov
 - C) Abraham Maslow
 - D) Carl Jung

The above item is simply knowledge. Do you know who developed the Hierarchy of Needs theory? In many settings, however, what we really want to know is whether you understand the concept more than who developed it. An item like that might read as follows:

2. According to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs theory, people must satisfy _____ needs before moving on to _____ needs.
 - A) Belongingness and Love; Physiological
 - B) Esteem; Safety
 - C) higher order; lower order
 - D) less important; more important

This item requires more knowledge and thought about the concept. Sometimes, we can examine whether a person understands a concept by putting it some sort of a context. An example exploring the Hierarchy of Needs theory in a work context might read as follows:

3. Suppose you supervise a subordinate who complains she is not feeling a part of the social environment of the organization. She feels she is not being respected, admired, or trusted as a fellow employee. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory, this subordinate is most likely trying to satisfy which one of the following needs?
- A) Belongingness and Love
 - B) Physiological
 - C) Safety
 - D) Self-Actualization

This item requires use of the information in a familiar setting related to a supervisory position.

We endeavor to develop exam items measuring the knowledge areas contained in the source material and relevant to the position. Where possible, we also attempt to allow candidates the opportunity to use the information. Obviously, we are limited by the source materials and the information contained within them.

Listed below are examples of items developed by FirstIdea for other agencies:

4. Regarding theories of group behavior, it is **correct** to say:
- A) social behavior is organized much more on an individual basis than on a group basis.
 - B) Reference Group Theory helps explain why racial, gender, social class, and disabled prejudice are individual phenomena rather than group phenomena.
 - C) often people who have been victimized as an outsider by one group react by rejecting their own group.
 - D) tension only exists between groups when individuals have personal reasons to dislike the members of the other group.

This item was taken from a particular city's training manual on diversity. The answer to this item is C. While you might have guessed the correct answer, the only way to have known C was the correct option would be to have read and understood the material.

5. According to Aerial Apparatus, NFPA 1904 requires new aerial apparatus to be capable of carrying their full-rated capacities on grades of **up to** _____ percent in either direction.
- A) three (3)
 - B) six (6)
 - C) nine (9)
 - D) fourteen (14)

This item was taken from an Aerial Apparatus manual. However, if you were familiar with NFPA 1904, you might know B is correct without having read the manual.

6. Which one of the following statements regarding operating apparatus in reverse is **correct**?
- A) In case the apparatus does not have the minimum of four (4) persons on board, the company officer will be required to act as one of the spotters located near the rear of the apparatus.
 - B) During night backing, a flashlight should be used and directed toward the mirror.
 - C) Before operating apparatus in reverse, one (1) firefighter shall position him/herself near the rear of the vehicle as a spotter.
 - D) If at any time the engineer loses sight of the primary spotter, the engineer shall sound the horn until the spotter makes him/herself visible again.

Department SOP: Operating Apparatus in Reverse

While a textbook, such as an IFSTA manual, may have general statements regarding backing apparatus, this item specifically states the answer should be taken from the department's SOP. In this department, Option A is correct. However, in other departments, another option may be correct.

This is an example of a situational judgment item:

7. It is often said that once a person graduates from the fire academy, the real learning begins. This statement most likely indicates:
- A) that what is taught in the academy is not very useful once you get out to do the real work of actual firefighting.
 - B) that you should never stop trying to learn new things in order to be an effective firefighter.
 - C) that when it comes to fire work, learning from and relying upon experience is more important than learning from or relying upon books.
 - D) that academy instructors need to get their students more real world experience before the students graduate.
 - E) that the academy is not as important as it once was.

The situational judgment items are designed to provide information regarding your thoughts and choices regarding dimensions such as problem-solving, customer service, judgment, interpersonal communication, and decision-making. The correct options have been designed and determined by a group of subject matter experts from the Denver Fire Department. Each item will always be accompanied by five (5) options as a response to the question. Respond to each item with that which most closely fits what you would do in each situation. If you believe more than one option is a response you would do, select the response that you would do first. The correct answer for this question is "B", that you should never stop trying to learn new things in order to be an effective firefighter. Unlike the other options, Option "B" gives the perspective that there can be benefit from learning on an ongoing basis, and ultimately, should never stop.

V. WRITTEN EXAMINATION PREPARATION

Regarding exam preparation, the better you prepare, the better you will do. It is as simple as that. A significant, distinguishing characteristic between successful and unsuccessful candidates concerns study habits. It is an unfortunate truth that many of us have not learned sound study habits. You will find there

are as many study techniques as there are people. We can offer only some modest suggestions in this document.

To begin, those who perform well generally get started early. They make up their minds quickly they will take the exam and they will dedicate themselves to putting in the necessary time and effort to study effectively. This is a very important, but often overlooked, step. It is our strong belief that a significant difference between successful and unsuccessful candidates is their dedication and motivation to succeed at this endeavor.

You must find a quiet area where you can study undisturbed. We realize this can be difficult, particularly if you have a family. However, you can take what appears to be a disadvantage (such as a spouse or children who necessarily require time) and turn it into an advantage. Announce to your family and friends you are preparing to take a very important exam that will have a big impact on your life. By telling others about your effort and dedication, they can join in the process of helping you. Instead of seeing those around you as a hindrance, use them as a resource for assistance and support.

You must also set aside specific time for study. If you go about your normal daily activities hoping for some “spare” time to study, it won't appear. You generally cannot “find” time; you must “make” time. Change your habits and dedicate time each day to studying. Understand, this will require some sacrifice on your part.

Look at the study materials and break them down into manageable chunks. Reading an entire book, or even an entire chapter, without mulling over the information is generally very ineffective. If you do not focus on smaller portions, you will make understanding the concepts more difficult and will inhibit the information from becoming part of your long-term memory. Instead, focus on a subsection: a page, a paragraph, sometimes even a sentence. Study and learn that material before progressing on to the next section.

Many candidates find taking notes while they read to be very useful. At a later date, they then rewrite those notes into a more condensed version, taking perhaps twenty pages of notes and reducing them to ten pages. A few days later, they take those ten pages and reduce them to two or three pages. The process of taking notes requires you to read in small chunks of information. You cannot, for example, attempt to take notes after reading an entire chapter. Instead, you have to take notes as you read smaller sections of the source materials.

The process of writing and re-writing the material helps to engrain it in your memory. Psychologists have found information is frequently stored in human memory through processes of association. One key word, contained in the final two pages of notes, will therefore be connected to the additional material contained on the original twenty pages of notes. When you see that key word or concept on the exam, your mind will connect it to many of the additional details you originally studied.

Make comparisons of the information you are reading. Many authors present information by comparing information to other information. The authors discuss what makes one concept unique or different from another concept. As a result, when you come across this sort of issue, stop and compare the concepts.

Another technique is the use of study groups. We know of several organizations where study groups are commonly used. These groups often purchase study guides for some of the materials used in the exam, share these materials, develop mock exams, set aside study areas in their facilities, offer coaching and

mentoring, and do other activities to assist each other. However, study groups are not for everyone. Some people study best alone. The most important key is to find out how you study best.

VI. TAKING THE WRITTEN EXAMINATION

Do what you can to be rested and energized at the time of the exam. Many successful candidates compare their mindset when taking an exam to when they get an emergency call at work. On their way to the scene, they are energized, yet they are also focused. They channel their energy so it assists them in performing their functions, rather than interfering with their abilities.

Below are recommendations to help minimize distractions and address issues that can occur during the written examination administration:

- Candidates should arrive at the testing site before the start of the check-in period to ensure they have enough time to relax, use the facilities, prepare for the exam, and to complete all check-in procedures.
- Carefully listen to and understand all administrative procedures.
- Know how to correctly fill in your answer sheet, including identification information.
- Frequently check your answer sheet against the test booklet to make sure you are responding to the correct item.
- Know how much time is available for the exam and pace yourself accordingly.
- Read each item and answer option completely and carefully before selecting your answer.
- To make sure you answer all of the items in the given amount of time, go through the entire exam answering those items you know the answer to first, then go back to those items you need to spend additional time considering.
- When considering difficult items, remember you are permitted to write on your exam booklet – cross out those options you know are wrong so you can more easily concentrate on those options you think may be correct. Only your answers on the answer sheet will be scored, though, so make certain you place your answers on the answer sheet.
- If, after careful thought and consideration, you still are uncertain of your answer to an item – make your best guess.

IF YOU HAVE A DISABILITY REQUIRING ACCOMMODATIONS FOR TESTING, YOU MUST IMMEDIATELY CONTACT THE DENVER CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION.

VII. ASSESSMENT CENTER INTRODUCTION

In accordance with the Guidelines and Ethical Considerations for Assessment Center Operations, we are obliged to make an announcement of the following information prior to the assessment center so participants will be fully informed about the process.

1. Objectives

Objectives of this assessment center include:

- a. assessing required skills of eligible candidates for the rank of Captain for the Denver Fire Department.

- b. providing the Denver Civil Service Commission with information to use in establishing an eligibility list of candidates for promotion to Denver Fire Captain.

2. Selection

Any individual who meets the eligibility criteria, registers to participate in the promotional process for the rank of Captain, and passes the written examination may participate in the assessment center.

3. Choice

In order to be placed on the eligibility list for Captain, an individual must pass all phases of the examination, including the assessment center. You do not have to participate in the process, but if you do not participate in all portions of the process, you will not be placed on the eligibility list.

4. Staff and Assessors

Denver Civil Service Commission personnel will administer the assessment center. FirstIdea staff will provide training to assessors and assist in administration. External assessors of equal or higher rank will evaluate candidates.

5. Storage of Materials

The Denver Civil Service Commission will maintain all assessment center materials.

6. Results

Assessment center results will be used to assist the Denver Fire Department in making a determination of who will be promoted to Captain. Your final score on the eligibility list will be determined using the procedure set forth by the Denver Civil Service Commission.

7. Feedback

Each candidate will receive individual feedback on his or her overall performance in the process. Strengths and recommendations for improvement will be provided to the candidates for each exercise.

8. Testing Materials

All materials needed to perform in the assessment center will be provided.

9. Access

The Denver Civil Service Commission will have access to all candidate performance information in the assessment center. For reasons of test security, assessment center exercises are exempt from disclosure to candidates.

10. Contact

The Denver Civil Service Commission will be responsible for the records stored in its office.

11. Reassessment

There is no option for reassessment under this process.

12. Dress

You must dress in either uniform or business attire. You must follow any restrictions announced by the Denver Civil Service Commission. You will have direct contact with assessors.

An assessment center consists of several job simulation exercises. You will be presented with a variety of issues you might expect to encounter as a Fire Captain in Denver. A panel of trained assessors who are familiar with the position, as well as with the Department's and City's particular needs and concerns, will evaluate your response to those issues.

VIII. ASSESSMENT CENTER EXERCISES

This assessment center will consist of three exercises: (1) Written Exercise, (2) In-Basket Exercise, and (3) Tactical Exercise.

Written Exercise. In this exercise, you will be given an issue or issues relevant to the City of Denver, the Denver Fire Department, and the Fire Captain position. You will then provide a written plan for addressing the issue/issues. You will be given 2.5 hours to write your plan. Performance Dimensions measured on this exercise are: Job Knowledge, Leadership/Supervision, Planning and Organization, Problem Solving/Decision Making, and Written Communication Skills.

Tactical Exercise. In this exercise, you will be given information regarding the beginning of an incident, such as you would receive from dispatch. You will be given time to review this information and prepare your initial response to the incident. You will then have a set amount of time in front of the assessors. Finally, the assessors will ask you follow-up questions regarding your responses to the incident. The Performance Dimensions measured on this exercise are: Fire/Emergency Scene Tactics & Strategy, Leadership/Supervision, Oral Communication Skills, Planning and Organizing, and Problem Solving/Decision Making.

In-Basket Exercise. In this exercise, you will be given a series of messages from various types of communication in your "inbox" with various topics or issues that a Denver Fire Captain often sees. You will be given a set amount of time to review those items and prepare your response to how you would handle them. You will then have a set amount of time in front of the assessors. Performance Dimensions measured on this exercise are: Job Knowledge, Leadership/Supervision, Oral Communication Skills, Planning and Organizing, and Problem Solving/Decision Making.

IX. ASSESSMENT CENTER STRUCTURE

This assessment center will occur over multiple days, so you are reminded that disclosing or discussing information related to the assessment center in any way can result in legal or disciplinary action being taken against you.

The written exercise will be administered prior to the other two assessment center exercises. During this exercise, you will work at a computer station using Microsoft Word to compose your document. While other candidates will be working in the same room, you are to work alone. There will be a monitor in the room. Assessors will evaluate your document during assessment center administration.

On your assigned assessment center day, you should plan to be at the testing site for one-half of the day (either all morning or all afternoon). You will have one break, between the two exercises. We do our best to minimize the amount of break time.

It is essential you show up to the facility on time for registration and for each exercise. If you are late or absent to your registration time or to the preparation room, you may forfeit your opportunity to be considered for the position.

For each oral exercise, you will have a preparation period and a presentation period. The specific amount of preparation and presentation time may vary by exercise based on the type and content of that exercise. At the beginning of the preparation time for each exercise, you will be given instructions for the exercise and a set period of time to prepare for your presentation to the assessors. You are not evaluated during this preparation time, though there will be a monitor in the room. You will be working alone, although there may be other candidates in the room.

Once the preparation time has elapsed, you will be escorted to the room where the presentation to the assessors takes place. Your escort will organize your paperwork, then bring you into the room. Assessors will inform you of when to begin your presentation. Once your presentation time has elapsed, you will be informed by the assessors. They will not give you any warnings (i.e., they will not tell you X minutes are remaining). You are expected to pace yourself. There are clocks in each room, and you will not be downgraded for occasional glances at your watch or timer.

Once you have completed both exercises, you will go through check-out procedures, then asked to leave the testing site. Again, it is essential you do not discuss any portion of the assessment center, including instructions, assessors, content of exercises, or responses, with one another until after the entire process is complete.

X. ASSESSMENT CENTER ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES

- Candidates are only permitted to bring standard watches, stopwatches, and timers to the testing site. Smart watches are NOT permitted.
- Candidates may NOT bring reference materials (e.g., Department General Orders, IFSTA Manuals) to the testing site.
- Candidates are NOT permitted to bring any pre-prepared notes or resumés to the assessment center.
- The preparation room will have basic office supplies (e.g., easel paper, markers, pens, pencils, pads of paper, dictionaries) available for candidate use. Candidates may use any of these materials to assist in preparation. Any materials created and notes taken during the preparation period may be brought to the presentation room.
- Candidate notes will not be evaluated by assessors. Assessors will only evaluate information conveyed to them verbally.
- Candidates are permitted to write on any exercise instructions and materials they receive during the assessment center.
- Administrators and assessors keep the official time throughout the process. However, candidates are responsible for monitoring their own time for pacing purposes.

XI. ASSESSMENT CENTER FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

“I HAVE HEARD SOME ASSESSMENT CENTERS USE MORE THAN ONE ASSESSOR PANEL. HOW DOES THIS WORK?”

We will use three panels of assessors for this assessment center. One panel will score the Written exercise. The other two panels will specialize in one exercise, and they will see all candidates in that exercise. For example, one panel will evaluate all candidates in the Tactical exercise, while another panel will evaluate all candidates in the In-Basket exercise.

“WILL THE ASSESSORS ASK THE SAME QUESTIONS OF ALL CANDIDATES?”

The short answer to this question is frequently yes, but not always. For most of our exercises, we encourage follow-up questions from the assessors. Many have been scripted for the assessors. Assessors have reviewed and discussed the follow-up questions during training, including the types of responses they may hear from candidates. In addition, assessors often ask general questions such as “Why?” “How?” and “Would you please explain that further?”

There may be times, however, when one candidate is asked a question another candidate is not. There are two primary conditions under which this might occur.

First, some candidates anticipate questions from the assessors and, during their initial presentation, answer a follow-up question the assessors were prepared to ask. If a candidate has already answered such a question, the assessors won't ask it. However, if a candidate has not answered that question in his or her initial response, the assessors may ask it.

Second, our exercises are designed so candidates must make a judgment when responding to each issue presented. One candidate might head in one direction while another candidate might go in a different direction. Each candidate may therefore receive a different follow-up question. The follow-up question for a candidate who went in one direction might not be relevant for a candidate who went in a different direction.

The primary purpose of allowing assessors to ask follow-up questions is to give them the opportunity to clarify information you have provided to them. So, in many cases, the questions they ask will depend upon the response you have given.

“WILL THE ASSESSORS TRY TO TRICK ME?”

This is a difficult question to answer since what one person regards as a “trick” question may not be the same as how another candidate perceives it. For example, the assessors may question candidates about their decision making. This may be to see if the candidate recognizes he or she has made a poor decision. Or, it may be to see if the candidate is willing to defend a decision. While some may regard these as “trick” questions, we view them simply as opportunities for additional insights into the candidate's thinking.

You should always assume the exercises are as they appear to be. For example, if the instructions state you will be in a meeting with one other person and you will not be disturbed, you can assume such conditions

will exist. If something like a fire alarm goes off or someone walks into the room during your presentation, the assessors will handle it and you will not be evaluated on your reaction to such unlikely, but possible, interruptions. To that extent, we do not try to “trick” you during any of the exercises.

“IN SOME ASSESSMENT CENTER EXERCISES, THE INSTRUCTIONS REFER TO A FICTITIOUS ORGANIZATION WHICH RESEMBLES OUR FIRE DEPARTMENT, BUT IS NOT AN EXACT DUPLICATE OF IT. WHY DO YOU USE A FICTITIOUS ORGANIZATION AND CONVERSELY, WHY NOT JUST USE OUR CITY AND DEPARTMENT?”

In some exercises, we will give you a reference point. We will place you in the Captain position and give you issues to address relevant to that position. If we were to simply select some area of Denver as the reference point, those candidates who were less familiar with that area would likely feel disadvantaged compared to candidates who currently work there.

Furthermore, changes in personnel can occur rapidly in many departments. In the time between the design of the exercises and actual administration of the assessment center, many names may have changed. As a result, we create a Fire Department (and/or an area within the Department) which resembles, and is frequently identical to, the Denver Fire Department. Often, there will not be a name associated with the agency. It will just be known as “the Fire Department.” Real names will not be used.

When you encounter such a fictitious setting, you should assume the policies, protocols, procedures, rules, regulations, and related directives of the Denver Fire Department are the same as in the fictitious department we have created.

For example, let’s say the Denver Fire Department rules and regulations require any firefighter who comes to work with liquor on his or her breath must be immediately sent home and may be subject to disciplinary action. Should you encounter such a situation in the fictitious setting of an exercise, you would follow those Department rules and regulations regarding sending the firefighter home and possibly subjecting him or her to disciplinary action.

“WHO ARE THE ASSESSORS AND HOW ARE THEY CHOSEN?”

The assessors are sworn fire and rescue personnel. Some assessors may be from career fire departments in Colorado. Most assessors however, will be from national departments similar in size and structure to the Denver Fire Department. The assessors will be at the rank of Captain (or organizational equivalent) or higher.

“HOW DO I KNOW THE ASSESSORS WILL EVALUATE ME FAIRLY AND ACCORDING TO WHAT THE DENVER FIRE DEPARTMENT NEEDS?”

Assessors will complete an extensive training program, conducted immediately prior to administration of the assessment center. FirstIdea and the Denver Civil Service Commission train assessors on the assessment center methodology, how to observe candidate behaviors, how to take notes, how to rate performance, and how to provide useful feedback.

The assessors will receive documentation about the Department, the position, and the environment, and the Fire Chief or a member of the Command Staff will meet with the assessors to discuss his or her expectations for the position and to provide more information about the Department. Subject matter experts from the Department will also work closely with assessors to review and practice the exercises assessors will be evaluating.

“THE ASSESSORS TAKE NOTES AND MAKE NUMERICAL RATINGS FOR EACH EXERCISE. WHAT ARE THEY NOTING AND HOW ARE THEY RATING?”

During your presentation, the assessors are listening to you and observing behaviors. They will take extensive notes on these behaviors to use in rating you and in providing feedback. Generally speaking, they will be using categories of behavior, known as performance dimensions, as a basis for their notes, ratings, and feedback. The performance dimensions being measured in each exercise were determined both by the content of the exercises and by conducting an analysis of the job and discussing the needs of the position with the Fire Chief and subject matter experts in the Department.

Based on this information, assessors will independently assign each candidate’s observed behaviors to the performance dimensions for that exercise, then score the candidate’s performance on those dimensions. Each rating will be based on a 5-point scale, with a low of 1 and a high of 5.

Below is the list of performance dimensions being measured in this assessment center. Every performance dimension listed will not be measured in every exercise.

Fire/Emergency Scene Tactics & Strategy

Able to direct firefighting/emergency activities in a safe, effective and efficient manner. Considers and adapts to changing circumstances in order to minimize losses and eliminate risks. Uses proper terminology, issues clear precise commands, and takes decisive action. Displays the ability to apply information contained in Departmental and standard firefighting references to problem situations in order to resolve them. Is aware of the availability of resources on the fire ground (and in other situations) and is practical and resourceful in their application.

Interpersonal Relations

Able to deal with people in a tactful, diplomatic and polite manner. Interacts with others in a way that demonstrates sensitivity to their needs and motives. Does not unnecessarily arouse antagonistic or negative feelings in others. Is cooperative and amicable in dealing with others and functions as part of the “team.” Is able to accept constructive criticism. Demonstrates the ability to effectively deal with people in confrontational situations. Is aware that customer service issues include crew members, other members of the Department, and people within the community.

Recognizes the value the Department places on customer service. Displays an attitude and demeanor that conveys a professional commitment to the tenets of customer service that is global in perspective, encompassing citizens and community as well as every member of the Department. Applies the concept of customer service to all actions.

Leadership/Supervision

Able to direct individuals toward the accomplishment of a task. Accepts responsibility for providing direction and ensuring procedures are followed. Is self-confident, assertive, and a self-starter. Demonstrates initiative in perceiving and dealing with problems. Can make proper assignment of personnel and the appropriate use of resources. Utilizes the chain of command. Is loyal to the organization.

Assumes responsibility for directing and guiding the activities of subordinates; understands and applies disciplinary measures as appropriate. Engages in on-going informal performance evaluation, development, and training of subordinates.

Oral Communication Skills

Displays the ability to speak in a clear effective manner so listeners grasp the message. Is persuasive in explaining his/her actions. Listens to what individuals have to say and can elicit information from others. Can communicate the technical aspects of fire service work in an understandable manner. Has the ability to follow written and oral instructions. Uses proper terminology and procedures and issues clear, precise commands both in person and over the radio. Uses few distracting verbal mannerisms.

Planning and Organizing

Able to coordinate tasks and assignments in an effective and efficient manner, can prioritize work, and demonstrates the ability to handle unanticipated events. Is able to implement a plan of action under mental, and sometimes physical and emotional, stress. Is able to remain calm and can function under pressure in frustrating or difficult situations. Manages his/her time in an effective manner so that all issues are addressed. Willing to spend whatever time is necessary to get the job done.

Problem Solving/Decision Making

Displays the ability to interpret available facts and information and can “size up” normal and/or emergency situations and determine the logical and appropriate course of action. Can sort through details to determine what is important or relevant in a situation or in a body of information. Demonstrates the ability to make judgments and choose appropriate solutions from a number of alternative choices. Is open-minded and seeks the input and participation of others in making decisions and solving problems. Demonstrates the ability to manage multiple tasks effectively. Knows available resources and utilizes them.

Recognizes when to take action and what type of action is appropriate. Demonstrates a willingness to make decisions. Is willing to make a decision based on a limited amount of information. Displays the ability to understand the ramifications or possible impact of decisions. Appropriately delegates assignments or tasks.

Written Communication Skills

Conveys written information in a clear and effective manner. Organizes ideas in a logical format. Uses proper writing mechanics (e.g., grammar and spelling) and appropriate writing style. Creates a document in a format appropriate for the audience.

“HOW WILL THE ASSESSMENT CENTER BE SCORED?”

As mentioned above, assessors will rate your performance or document on specific performance dimensions. These ratings are then used to calculate a single score for each exercise. Your scores on the exercises are combined for an overall score on the assessment center. These results will then be used to create an eligibility list for the position. The Denver Civil Service Commission is responsible for maintaining this overall rank-ordered list.

“WHO HAS ACCESS TO THE ASSESSMENT CENTER DATA, AND WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THOSE RECORDS?”

We provide the information and results of the promotional process to the Denver Civil Service Commission. They are ultimately responsible for maintaining these records.

“DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER ‘WORDS OF WISDOM’ FOR A PROSPECTIVE CANDIDATE?”

First, candidates and assessors have been very consistent in their comments regarding our assessment centers, saying they are challenging, fair, and relevant. You can expect the assessment center to thoroughly examine your abilities to perform as a Captain in the Denver Fire Department.

Second, we encourage everyone to simply “be themselves.” Look upon the assessment center as an opportunity to demonstrate your skills and learn something about yourself. Do not become discouraged should you experience difficulty in an exercise; simply focus on performing better on the next one. Also, don’t try to “out-guess” the purpose of the exercises. It is important you present yourself as you are, not as you think someone wants you to be.

Finally, you will discover various issues in our assessment centers may not have clear-cut solutions, just as many real-life issues lack clear-cut solutions. As a result, for some problems you encounter, it is not only which choice you make that is critical, but also, whether you understand and are prepared to handle the consequences of the choices you make.

XII. ASSESSMENT CENTER PREPARATION

There are several general steps we recommend in preparing for an assessment center. First, find out as much as you can about the position. Second, find out as much as you can about the Department’s needs and concerns. Third, understand the needs and expectations of the city, community, and citizens. Fourth, learn as much as you can about the fire and rescue industry. Finally, spend some time examining your own strengths and weaknesses as they relate to the position and the Department's needs.

You need to understand the position for which you are applying. This document is too brief to go into detail about the position, but we recommend you give some thought to the types of problems likely to be faced by a Fire Captain in Denver. Read the job description. Speak to current Fire Captains. As a matter of fact, we recommend you speak to as many job incumbents as you can, in as many assignments as you can, to discover both the common and the unique aspects of this particular position.

We recommend you speak with leaders in your organization. Find out as much as you can about the mission, vision, goals, priorities, challenges, and changes going on within the Department, especially as it relates to the position of Fire Captain.

We recommend you do some investigating of the environment. What are the problems facing Denver, and how will those problems impact the Denver Fire Department? What does the future hold, what are the citizens' concerns, what is the predominant management style of the organization? We recommend you seek the answer to these and other questions in an effort to help you understand what will be expected of this position in this particular environment.

It is helpful to understand the fire and rescue industry as a whole. Discover the trends, technologies, and important topics being discussed, especially as it relates to the Denver Fire Department.

Finally, after you have learned all you can about the job, the organization, the community, and the profession, you should do some self-examination. Identify your individual strengths and weaknesses. Perhaps you have excellent speaking skills when you deal with individuals in a one-on-one setting, but you have trouble speaking before groups. Perhaps your supervisory skills are strong, but your tactical skills need improvement.

Once you have identified your strengths and weaknesses, work on them. If there is any “secret” to preparing for assessment centers, it is to practice those skills required for the position. The more you practice, the better you will become, and the better prepared you will be, not only for the assessment center, but for the position. Remember, the assessment center will be designed to see how well you handle the demands of the Fire Captain position in the Denver Fire Department.

XIII. ASSESSMENT CENTER CANDIDATE FEEDBACK

We believe it is important for candidates to receive feedback on their performance in the assessment center. After completion of the assessment center, you will receive your scores on each exercise and on each performance dimension measured.

In addition, as part of the administration process, assessors provide FirstIdea with comments regarding each candidate’s strengths and areas where that candidate could improve. You will receive a document with a summary of those feedback comments for each exercise.

IF YOU HAVE A DISABILITY REQUIRING ACCOMMODATIONS FOR TESTING, YOU MUST IMMEDIATELY CONTACT THE DENVER CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION.