How to Excel at Promotional Exams – The Key Points

By Steve Prziborowski
OBJECTIVES:

• Define common scoring dimensions

• Identify the top 10 pitfalls of poor performers in promotional exams

• Identify what to expect in the most common promotional events

• Identify at least one new item that may benefit you on your next promotional exam.
This Info Is Based Upon:

How To Excel At Fire Department Promotional Exams

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Whether you want to be in command of this company:
...Or this company:
You need a plan of action to get there!
What are they looking for?
You’re the Fire Chief:

What are you looking for in promotional candidates?
Top 10 Pitfalls Of Poor Performers:

1. Not preparing for the position
2. Focusing too much on “checking-the-box”
3. Inability to think “long-term” or “big picture”
Top 10 Pitfalls Of Poor Performers:

4. Lack of knowledge of SOP/SOGs, policies, best practices, etc.

5. Not understanding scoring dimensions

6. Nervousness gets the best of them
Top 10 Pitfalls Of Poor Performers:

7. Lack of detail / unable to justify or defend actions or non-actions

8. Unsafe / unorthodox practices
Top 10 Pitfalls Of Poor Performers:

9. Lack of preparation

10. Inability to demonstrate to the raters they can hit the ground running – not just be a safe beginner!
Common Promotional Exam Scoring Dimensions:

- Oral / Written communications
- Problem solving ability
- Leadership
- Delegation
- Decision making
- Judgment
- Problem analysis

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Common Promotional Exam Scoring Dimensions:

- Command presence
- Planning ability
- Organizational skills
- Situational awareness
- Strategy/tactics
- Time management
- Flexibility
Common Promotional Exam Scoring Dimensions:

- Knowledge of F.D. SOGs/SOPs, Rules and Regulations
- Interpersonal skills
- Risk management
- Safety
- Knowledge of local, state and federal standards & laws (OSHA, NFPA, accepted industry standards)

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GENERAL INFO:

• *Follow* all instructions provided carefully
• *Read* the fine print, don’t assume
• Know *where* you’re going
• Know *what* you’re going to wear
• *Talk* to others who’ve already taken the exam
• *Take* professional development courses
MOST COMMON EVENTS:

• Written Examination
• Oral Interview
• Personnel Counseling
• Oral Presentation / Teaching Demo
• Emergency Simulation
• In Basket / Writing Exercise
THE WRITTEN EXAM

- What to expect -

• Usually 100 questions, multiple choice
• May be a % of your final score, or used to determine whether you’ll go farther
• Common subject areas include: supervision, leadership, management, ICS, department manuals, strategy & tactics, etc.
THE WRITTEN EXAM

- Key Points -

• Know reading list well in advance
• Obtain your own copies
• Obtain any study guides
• Study a little every day
THE WRITTEN EXAM

- Key Points -

• Start reading well in advance
• 3 x 5 cards to study & be quizzed on
• Write down questions afterward
• Don’t read into the questions
THE ORAL INTERVIEW:

- What to expect -

• Questions can include:
  – Opening and closing statement
  – The dept., the community, the position
  – Your vision, values, leadership style, etc.
  – How you would handle different situations
  – Your current / future goals
  – Customer service
  – Your background

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THE ORAL INTERVIEW: Key Points

• Know yourself inside and out

• Rehearse answers for all questions

• Use the “Intro/Body/Conclusion” method

• Back up statements with facts
THE ORAL INTERVIEW:

Key Points

• Use personalized stories
• Use past experience to prove a point
• Listen to the question
• Answer the way you would do something - not how you think they want you to answer

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PERSONNEL COUNSELING SESSION:
What To Expect

• May have role players
• May have videos
• May have follow-up questions
PERSONNEL COUNSELING SESSION: 
What To Expect

- Is usually based on current issues relating to the department or fire service in general

- **Multiple problems**

- May be expected to diffuse a highly stressful situation
PERSONNEL COUNSELING SESSION:

Key Points

• Remember, it’s the behavior, not the person!

• Understand progressive discipline and how you fit in

• Be able to be the designated adult

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PERSONNEL COUNSELING SESSION:  
Key Points

• Ask open-ended questions

• If role playing, don’t expect immediate agreement

• Understand resources available to your department (EAP, CISD, etc.)

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You are the captain:

While at the fire station, you hear some loud noises and some yelling and when you go to investigate, this is what you find..............
To Play Video:

CLICK HERE
Based On Previous Video:

• How could this have been prevented?
• What are the issues?
• Are there any policies violated?
• What would you do and why?

• Level of discipline and why?
• Would you notify your supervisor?
• What documentation to complete?
8 steps to a successful counseling session

1. Start with friendly greeting
2. Briefly state problem
3. Employee talks, you listen
4. You talk (facts, observations), they listen
8 steps to a successful counseling session

5. State rules for desired behavior
6. Develop an action plan
7. Review with employee feedback
8. Positive closing
Oral Presentation / Teaching Demo

- What to expect -

• May have 15 to 30 minutes to prepare

• May have 10 to 15 minutes for presentation

• Manipulative or technical presentation
Oral Presentation / Teaching Demo

- What to expect -

• Will have an audience

• Will typically be a current issue or topic affecting the department

• Teaching / Audio-visual aids
Oral Presentation / Teaching Demo

- Key Points -

• Use the four-step teaching method:
  1. Preparation
  2. Presentation (3 to 5 bullet points – max)
  3. Application
  4. Evaluation
Oral Presentation / Teaching Demo

- Key Points -

• Use your time wisely
• Ask / allow time for questions
• Use teaching / AV aids
• You’re graded on oral communications!
THE EMERGENCY SIMULATION:
What To Expect

• May be static or dynamic
• May have multiple incidents to manage
• May have follow-up questions
Water Supply

Area

Life Safety

Location / Extent

Apparatus

Construction / Collapse potential

Exposures

Weather

Auxiliary Appliances

Special Matters

Height

Occupancy

Time of day

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THE EMERGENCY SIMULATION:
What To Expect

• May have writing expectations (tactical worksheet, NFIRS report)

• May have challenges:
  – Firefighter down, missing, trapped
  – Civilians to rescue, evacuate, treat, diffuse
  – Media or civilians or other responders in your grill

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PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER…..
You’re the first due officer

• Write out your initial / follow-up radio reports

• Be prepared to discuss size-up concerns
Using the following slides, write out your size-up concerns so that you are in practice to start sizing up a situation and that you can also verbalize what you see.
• Water Supply
• Area
• Life Safety
• Location / Extent
• Apparatus
• Construction / Collapse potential
• Exposures
• Weather
• Auxiliary Appliances
• Special Matters

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On the prior slide, I used the size-up acronym “WALLACE WAS HOT.” That is one of a number of memory joggers you can use. Regardless of what you choose, ensure you cover all of the necessary size-up items!
THE EMERGENCY SIMULATION:

Key Points

• Prepare for the position!

• Expect any type of incident!

• Practice every day!

• Use ICS!

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THE EMERGENCY SIMULATION:  
Key Points

• Call sufficient resources **early**!

• Have a full alarm in staging if large event

• **Big fire = big water!**

• If you don’t say it, you didn’t do it!
THE EMERGENCY SIMULATION:

Key Points

• Ensure “benchmarks” are stated:
  – Establish Command / Command Post location
  – 2 in 2 out established or not established / RIC
  – Strategic mode / Objectives
  – Water supply
  – Staging area location
THE EMERGENCY SIMULATION: Key Points

• Ensure “benchmarks” are stated:
  – All clear / Secondary search completed
  – Utilities secured
  – PARs / CAN Reports, etc.
  – Knock down, Under control
  – Key notifications

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Emergency Simulation
- Key Points -

• Provide detailed, concise & appropriate size-up & radio reports

• When assigning units:
  – Advise them what they’ll be called (ICS terminology) or who they will report to
  – Give clear, concise orders that contain tactical objectives (1 to 3 total)
Emergency Simulation

- Key Points -

• If provided paperwork, use it

• Remember the incident doesn’t start when the bell goes off, & doesn’t end when you leave the scene
In Basket / Writing Exercise

- What to expect -

• 1 to 16 hours to complete
• 10 to 30 items to complete
• Lots of paperwork
• May have computer access
• May or may not have enough time to complete everything
• May be in advance
In Basket / Writing Exercise

- Key Points -

• Use your time wisely

• Be familiar with department specific guidelines for emails, memos, etc.

• Prioritization is the key
In Basket / Writing Exercise

- Key Points -

• Be aware of sensitive issues

• “Filter” items to get to “real problem”

• Be comfortable with computers

• Take writing classes

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Remember

Every day is an assessment center!!

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THE BOTTOM LINE:

• Set yourself up for success **long before** the process begins and your odds of success will greatly increase!!!

• Doing so will not only prepare you for the promotional process itself, but for situations like this…………………
Why Prepare For The Position?

• Take care - Be safe
• Be creative
• Keep the faith – Remain committed to our mission
• Do the best you can with what you have to work with
Resources:

• Soft cover copy; or

• EBook version

• Available at:
  – iTunes
  – Amazon
  – www.code3firetraining.com
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QUESTIONS?

Thank you very much for your time!

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