

## Hints on Preparing for an Oral Exam

- Refer to the job description located on the [www.owensborofire.org](http://www.owensborofire.org) website (click on Recruitment). You will note within the content of the job description that there is information pertaining to required skills, knowledge, abilities, and characteristics. The oral exam will generally be designed to help assess various components such as these (any one or more).
- The oral exam is a scored, timed, highly structured interview process administered by trained subject matter experts, in which each candidate will be asked the same questions/exercises.
- Sometimes oral exams consist of more than just questions. For example, we may have you perform an actual exercise, or we may score you on your overall ability to communicate throughout the exam.
- Almost every candidate is tense and nervous before an oral examination, and you are probably no exception. Rest assured that the panel will not try to add to your nervousness. They will not attempt to increase your stress level with trick questions or high-pressure tactics – so try to relax as best you can.
- Get a good night sleep the night before.
- Two of the most common errors that candidates commit in oral examinations are to say too little OR to say too much. You should try to avoid both of these errors. Be sure that you say enough to fully respond to the question asked or the scenario presented – but try not to ramble, over-analyze, or go beyond the problem presented. If your responses are too long, you may run out of time before you have answered the questions/exercises.
- You will be informed how long you have to respond for each question/exercise (usually anywhere from 2 to 5 minutes). Your score will be based on whether you appropriately respond to each question/exercise, dealing with all the key elements.
- Do not assume that the interview panelists already know that you know the information (e.g., from your job application, resume, etc.). You have to actually respond orally to the question/exercise in order to receive credit for it.
- In responding, you should stay focused on the question/exercise presented, and respond in a detailed and organized manner.
- You may not return to an earlier question, even if you did not use all the allotted time for that particular question/exercise. This is necessary to stay consistent.
- Questions/exercises will not be repeated, however you will be provided with the questions/exercises in writing. This information will be in front of you, turned face down. Do not turn the information over until we begin the exam. Do not get ahead. Turn to the next question/exercise only when we begin to read it.
- Do not take exam material from the room when you leave.
- Unless otherwise stated, to help you in formulating your responses you will have up to 20 seconds of the allotted time to gather your thoughts. We will provide you with paper/pencil for you to jot down your thoughts before responding. At the end of 20 seconds, if you have not already responded, you will be asked to respond. If you fail to respond at that time, we will move on to the next question. You will not be allowed to return to the question at a later time.

- Prepare yourself in advance to ensure you have confidence in yourself during the oral exam. For example, research the position and the City of Owensboro in general. Also, practice your interview skills in advance. Practice interviewing at home; Use a tape recorder or video recorder to see how you present yourself; have family/friends serve as a mock interview panel and have them interview you. This should assist you in feeling more confident. When you feel more confident, it will help you to maintain good eye contact, good posture, normal breathing, and effective communication.
- Communicate clearly, thoroughly, and try not to ramble or repeat yourself.
- Answer the question in full whether it takes just a few seconds or the full time allotment. For example, if a question has 3 parts, make sure you answer all 3 parts.
- If we ask for an example, try to give an actual work-related example. If you can't come up with an actual example, then perhaps use a school project example, or at least explain how you would handle the situation if you were faced with it – *don't just skip the question*.
- Please try to not relate personal information for your answer (e.g., if we ask you about your most stressful situation, please don't tell us about a personal issue you had to face such as a divorce, medical problem, etc.).
- It is OK to bring your resume if you want to refer to it, but you must orally communicate your answer in order to receive credit.
- If it sounds to us like you're finished responding to a question, we'll move on to the next question. If you weren't finished and time was remaining, tell us before we move on to the next question. Otherwise, we can't go back.