

Basic Necessities when Testing for the Position of Firefighter

Items that all candidates should have in their toolbox

By [Steve Prziborowski](#), Editorial Staff - Firehouse.Com Contributor



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I liken becoming a firefighter to the television show "Survivor." In many ways, getting hired as a firefighter is survival of the fittest, and not for the faint at heart. Many candidates begin the process, a select few get hired. Why is that you may wonder? Obviously many candidates do not know what they are getting into or realize how tough and challenging (mentally, physically, and financially) it will be to obtain the career of their dreams. The more you can prepare yourself, the better you are going to be. I have provided below a list of basic necessities every firefighter candidate should have in their toolbox to better prepare themselves for the firefighter testing process and the resulting career they are aspiring to.

- 1. Computer access.** Every candidate needs to have computer access for the following reasons:
 - To learn basic computer skills that will be required of them on the job, even as a firefighter.
 - To have a working knowledge of programs such as Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, Microsoft PowerPoint, Microsoft Outlook, and be able to use either a PC or a Macintosh based system.
- 2. Internet access.** Every candidate needs to have internet access for the following reasons:
 - To research fire departments
 - To research the fire service
 - To research the city/county/jurisdiction they are applying to
 - To apply for jobs (some departments allow you to do an online job application)
 - To network with other candidates and fire service professionals.
 - To just be in touch with the latest technology.
- 3. E-mail address.** Not having an e-mail address in today's world is similar to not owning a vehicle or not willing to learn the common language where you work or live. It is a necessity for communication. That said, I strongly suggest having a professional sounding email address, preferably one that has a form of your name

on it, as opposed to something that is hard to read, understand, or just plain immature, suggestive, and/or immature.

4. **Funding source.** Any career worth having is going to take time, energy, education, and most of all money to obtain. Money will be required to pay for education, pay for travel expenses while taking firefighter examinations, pay for appropriate attire to wear to oral interviews and other phases of the hiring process, and so forth. You have to spend money to make money, and this is no different. Preferably mom and dad are not your primary funding source. Why you might ask? Because an oral board does not want to hear that you have lived at home all your life with mom and dad paying for everything. That doesn't prove much in the way of independence, fiscal responsibility, or budgeting on your part. The best funding source is a job (legal and ethical one) that will also provide valuable experience to go on your resume and to sell to an oral board.
5. **Clean presentation.** Even though the world today is not as conservative as it used to be, the fire service, other governmental agencies, and most businesses still look to hire people that present themselves very well, especially in the way of personal grooming, attire, etc. Remember that perception is reality, and if you look like a slob, or look unkempt, then you probably are in the eyes of the beholder.
6. **Reliable transportation.** It is very important to have transportation, and specifically reliable transportation. The last thing you want to have to do is worry about your car not making it to the written examination. If your car breaks down on the way to the test, and you end being late to the test, most departments will not let you continue in the process. While it might seem unfair, it is reality. If you have a vehicle that is not reliable, then you might need to look into alternate means of travel (which may or may not also be reliable) such as friends, public transportation, etc. The problem with those options is that they are subject to breakdowns, traffic delays, availability, overstaying your welcome, etc.
7. **Dress attire.** Males and females need to have at least one (preferably two - in case something happens to the first outfit, if it is in the dry cleaners, or if you have events on back-to-back days and the first outfit is unavailable or dirty) very nice dress outfit in their wardrobe. You will need this outfit for the oral interview, for the chief's interview, and possibly other events of the hiring process. If nothing else, you can always use that outfit for weddings, funerals, dressy events, etc.
8. **Extremely positive attitude.** The fire service is always looking for folks with a positive attitude. Becoming a firefighter can be such a draining, challenging, and depressing process at times that it is easy to get a bad or negative attitude. Been there, done that myself. It can be very depressing at times when you think you did well on a test and you find out just the opposite, or you find out that you missed a testing opportunity because of some reason or another. Regardless, you have to force yourself to stay positive and realize that good things come to those that wait,

and are persistent and positive. What's meant to be is meant to be. Having a negative attitude does nobody any good, especially you.

9. **Good character traits.** Good character traits include such words as honesty, trustworthiness, accountability, a sense of responsibility, a good sense of humor, a tolerance of diversity, loyalty, hard-worker, faithful, and dependable, just to name a few. Besides making you a better human being, they will also make you a more successful firefighter and greatly increase your chances of getting hired. Good character traits are evaluated in almost every phase of the hiring process - from the time you file the job application, to the written test, to the oral board, to the psychological examination, to the chief's interview, and to the background investigation. Character traits (good and bad) will come up at all points of the process, and will more than likely help you get the job, or keep you from getting the job. Additionally, good character traits will help you complete the recruit academy, complete probation, and have a successful career as a firefighter.
10. **Common sense.** Last but not least, is having good common sense. Contrary to popular belief, common sense is not as common as we think (which is one of the reasons firefighters and police officers have jobs!). We cannot teach you common sense; common sense is something that you are either born with or are able to obtain and continuously improve on during your life. Lack of common sense can keep you from getting hired as a firefighter, and also terminate your employment as a firefighter.

Having these basic necessities in your toolbox will greatly increase your chances of employment as a firefighter. Nobody is perfect; however the more of these you can have in your back pocket; the more successful you are going to be!

Steve Prziborowski is a 15-year veteran and student of the fire service and is currently serving as a battalion chief for the Santa Clara County, CA, Fire Department. Other positions Steve has held at the Santa Clara County Fire Department include: firefighter/engineer, firefighter/engineer-paramedic, fire captain, training captain, and operations captain. Additional responsibilities include serving or having served as an on-call safety officer, an on-call public information officer, and an on-call fire investigator.

Steve is also an instructor within the Chabot College Fire Technology Program in Hayward, CA, where he has been instructing fire technology and EMS classes for 14 years. Four and a half years were also spent as the Fire Technology Coordinator, and seven years were also spent as the EMT Program Director and Primary Instructor. Steve is an executive board member for the Northern California Training Officers Association, currently serving as the president.

Steve is a state-certified chief officer, fire officer, master instructor, and hazardous materials technician, as well as a state-licensed paramedic. Steve has an associate

degree in fire technology, a bachelor's degree in criminal justice, and a master's degree in emergency services administration. He is currently a student in the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy.

Steve also provides a free e-mail mailing list and publishes a free monthly newsletter (The Chabot College Fire & EMS News); both are geared toward better preparing the future firefighter for a career in the fire service and the current firefighter for promotion, and are available on his website at www.chabotfire.com.