



**STATE OF NEW JERSEY**

In the Matter of Michael Blakely,  
Fire Officer 1 (PM2389C), Jersey City

**FINAL ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION  
OF THE  
CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION**

CSC Docket No. 2023-2285

Examination Appeal

**ISSUED: July 24, 2024 (ABR)**

Michael Blakely appeals his score on the oral portion of the promotional examination for Fire Officer 1 (PM2389C), Jersey City. It is noted that the appellant passed the examination with a final average of 87.110 and ranks 50<sup>th</sup> on the eligible list.

This two-part examination consisted of a written multiple-choice portion and an oral portion. Candidates were required to pass the written portion of the examination, and then were ranked on their performance on both portions of the examination. The test was worth 80 percent of the final score and seniority was worth the remaining 20 percent. Of the test weights, 35.90% of the score was the written multiple-choice portion, 22.04% was the technical score for the evolving exercise, 7.45% was the supervision score for the evolving exercise, 5.71% was the oral communication score for the evolving exercise, 23.20% was the technical score for the arriving exercise, 5.71% was the oral communication score for the arriving exercise.

The oral portion of the Fire Officer 1 examination consisted of two scenarios: a fire scene simulation with questions designed to measure the knowledge of safe rescue tactics and procedures to safeguard citizens, supervision of fire fighters and the ability to assess fire conditions and hazards in an evolving incident on the fireground (Evolving Scenario); and a fire scene simulation designed to measure the knowledge of safe rescue tactics and procedures to safeguard citizens, supervision of firefighters and the ability to plan strategies and tactics based upon a building's

structure and condition (Arriving Scenario). Knowledge of supervision was measured by a question in the Evolving Scenario, and was scored for that scenario. For the Evolving Scenario, candidates were provided with a 15-minute preparation period, and candidates had 10 minutes to respond. For the Arriving Scenario, a five-minute preparation period was given, and candidates had 10 minutes to respond.

The candidates' responses were scored on technical knowledge and oral communication ability. Prior to the administration of the exam, a panel of Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) determined the scoring criteria, using generally approved fire command practices, firefighting practices, and reference materials. Scoring decisions were based on SME-approved possible courses of action (PCAs) including those actions that must be taken to resolve the situation as presented. Only those oral responses that depicted relevant behaviors that were observable and could be quantified were assessed in the scoring process.

Candidates were rated on a five-point scale, with 5 as the optimal response, 4 as a more than acceptable passing response, 3 as a minimally acceptable passing response, 2 as a less than acceptable response, and 1 as a much less than acceptable response. For each of the scenes, and for oral communication, the requirements for each score were defined.

On the Evolving Scenario, the appellant scored a 5 for the technical component, a 5 for the supervision component, and a 5 for the oral communication component. On the Arriving Scenario, the appellant scored a 2 for the technical component and a 3 for the oral communication component.

The appellant challenges his score for the oral communication and technical components of the Arriving Scenario. As a result, the appellant's test material, video, and a listing of PCAs for the scenario were reviewed.

The Arriving Scenario involved a report of a fire in a storage unit in a storage facility where the candidate will be the incident commander throughout the incident and will establish command. The question asks what the candidate's concerns are when sizing up this incident and what specific actions the candidate should take to fully address this incident.

On the oral communication component of the Arriving Scenario, the assessor awarded the appellant a score of 3 based upon a finding that the appellant displayed minor weaknesses in non-verbal communication and rate/volume of speech. Specifically, in terms of non-verbal communication, the assessor presented that the appellant failed to make sufficient eye contact when speaking and mostly looked around the room when speaking, instead of at the camera. As to rate/volume of speech, the assessor stated that it was difficult to understand the appellant during most of his presentation because he spoke at an extremely fast rate. On appeal, the

appellant argues that his rate of speech and eye contact were consistent throughout the entirety of both the Evolving and Arriving scenarios. He further presents that his eyes “bounced around the room as if there were more than one person and [he] was looking at the scene” and that doing so was consistent with lessons from public speaking courses, which instruct orators not to keep eye contact on a single individual when giving a public speech.

With regard to the technical component of the Arriving Scenario, the SME found that the appellant failed to perform the mandatory actions of stretching a hoseline to extinguish the fire in the storage unit and to order a hoseline stretched to protect exposures. Further, the SME stated that the appellant missed a number of additional PCAs, including the opportunity to setup a command post. On appeal, the appellant argues that he covered the mandatory PCA of stretching a hoseline to extinguish the fire in the storage unit by stating at specified points that he would have the first and second arriving engines establish primary and secondary water supplies; set up master stream devices in front of the building; establish a defensive posture on the onset of the fire; set up mobile blitz nozzles (*i.e.*, mobile master streams); and locate, confine and extinguish the fire while operating the master stream device. He additionally proffers that master stream devices in the form of a deck gun attached to the engine company’s could also be used to direct water at a desired target in lieu of stretching a hoseline. Further, the appellant contends that with his units performing defensive operations based upon a possible HAZMAT situation, he sufficiently protected the exposures from extension by setting up elevated master streams from aerial devices.

## CONCLUSION

In the instant matter, the appellant’s arguments regarding his oral communication score on the Arriving Scenario are without merit. The 2022 1<sup>st</sup> Level Fire Supervisor Orientation Guide advised candidates to, in relevant part, “make eye contact with the camera, do not read directly from your notes the entire time. (The candidate will be instructed on the day of the exam to treat the camera as though it was their audience.)” Additionally, a review of the recordings of the appellant’s oral presentation confirms that he received an instruction to that effect on the test date. Further, it cannot be said that such an expectation was unreasonable or arbitrary. Moreover, a review of the appellant’s presentation confirms the accuracy of the assessor’s conclusion that the appellant displayed minor weaknesses in eye contact and rate of speech. Accordingly, the appellant’s oral communication score of 3 for the Arriving Scenario is affirmed.

As to the technical component of the Arriving Scenario, the Division of Test Development, Analytics and Administration (TDAA) advises that stretching a hoseline to extinguish the fire in the storage unit and to protect exposures allows for greater mobility and adaptation as circumstances change compared to a master

stream on an engine in one designated position. TDAA proffers that there is nothing in the scenario to indicate that a fully defensive operation is necessary or appropriate. In this regard, TDAA observes that the appellant treats the scenario as a HAZMAT situation because the contents of the storage unit are unknown. TDAA notes that firefighters never fully know the contents of a residential house fire, but they do not conduct solely defensive operations because of it. TDAA advises that since the response would not be solely a defensive operation, mobile blitz lines were not sufficient to cover ordering a hoseline stretched, as, under the fact pattern, firefighters would be expected to go inside to verify with confidence whether any extension occurred. The Civil Service Commission (Commission) further notes that John Norman, *Fire Officer's Handbook of Tactics* 555 (5th ed. 2019) provides further support for stretching hoselines, stating:

The number of personnel on hand, the height and area of the structure, the location of the fire, and the distraction of other operations all influence the time it takes to position a hoseline. Get the first line in place between the fire and the occupants as soon as possible. If necessary, commit all available personnel to this task. Once the line has reached the fire area, the normal nozzle team will be sufficient to carry out the operation, and any excess personnel can return to the apparatus to stretch additional lines. If the building is unoccupied, place the line in a position to confine the fire without exposing the firefighters to danger.

Based upon the totality of the record, the Commission finds that the appellant has failed to sustain his burden of proof regarding the PCAs at issue. Accordingly, the appellant's score of 2 on the technical component of the Arriving Scenario is affirmed.

### ORDER

Therefore, it is ordered that this appeal be denied.

This is the final administrative determination in this matter. Any further review should be pursued in a judicial forum.

DECISION RENDERED BY THE  
CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION ON  
THE 24<sup>TH</sup> DAY OF JULY, 2024

*Allison Chris Myers*

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