



STATE OF NEW JERSEY

In the Matter of Keith
Suthammanont, Fire Officer 1
(PM2389C), Jersey City

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

Examination Appeal

CSC Docket No. 2023-2448

ISSUED: July 24, 2024 (ABR)

Keith Suthammanont 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 85.240 and ranks 69th 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. It is noted that candidates were told the following prior to beginning their presentations for each scenario: "In responding to the questions, be as specific as possible. Do not assume or take for granted that general actions will contribute to your score."

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 2 for the technical component, a 5 for the supervision component, and a 4 for the oral communication component. On the Arriving Scenario, the appellant scored a 5 for the technical component and a 5 for the oral communication component.

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

The Evolving Scenario provides that the candidate is the First Level Fire Supervisor of the first responding engine company dispatched to a report of a fire in a 12th floor apartment in a 27-story apartment building. Question 1 asks the candidate to describe, in detail, what orders they will give their crew to complete their orders from the Incident Command. Question 2 asks the candidate to describe the possible causes of a significant drop in water pressure and what actions they and their crew should take in order to solve the problem with regard to each possible cause.

On the oral communication component of the Evolving Scenario, the assessor found that the appellant displayed a minor weakness in clarity by referring to

firefighters as “girls and guys.” Based upon the foregoing, the assessor awarded the appellant a score of 4 for the oral communication component of the subject scenario. On appeal, the appellant proffers that he only used “guys and girls” as a descriptive term in a single instance. Specifically, he states that he did so when discussing the decontamination process. He presents that he did so to offer linguistic variety, as he repeatedly used the term “firefighters” throughout his presentation and he contends that his use of “guys and girls” was both accurate and clear, and should not be penalized because “penalizing such language use would be catering to a personal preference over content knowledge.”

On the technical component of the Evolving Scenario, the SME found that the appellant failed to perform at least one mandatory response and that he missed a number of additional opportunities, including, in part, the opportunity to instruct the crew to stay low as they advanced. Based upon the foregoing, the SME awarded the appellant a technical component score of 2. On appeal, the appellant avers that while he did not explicitly tell his crew to “stay low” as it advanced the hoseline, firefighters are taught to stay low when advancing a hoseline as a standard operating procedure and it is common practice to do so when advancing a hoseline. Accordingly, he maintains that it was unnecessary to give an explicit instruction to do so, just as there would be no need to give verbalized instructions to other things that are “second nature,” such as controlling breathing and staying calm at an incident.

CONCLUSION

In the instant matter, the appellant’s arguments are without merit. Regarding the oral communication component of the Evolving Scenario, the reference to “guys and girls” could understandably be interpreted as going beyond a reference to firefighters. Even assuming, *arguendo*, that the appellant needed to provide greater linguistic variety when referencing the firefighters serving under him, he clearly could have done so with greater specificity and in a more professional manner than with the phrase “guys and girls”. In this regard, “unit,” “crew,” “company,” “team,” “personnel,” “squad,” and “subordinates” are some examples of more appropriate alternatives to the phrase “guys and girls” in this context. As such, the assessor’s determination was reasonable and the appellant’s score of 4 for the oral communication component of the Evolving Scenario is affirmed.

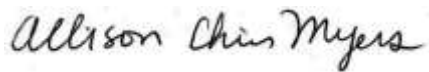
Regarding the technical component of the Evolving Scenario, candidates were told the following prior to beginning their presentations for each scenario: “In responding to the questions, be as specific as possible. Do not assume or take for granted that general actions will contribute to your score.” The appellant’s arguments regarding the additional PCA at issue are clearly contrary to this unambiguous directive. Based upon the foregoing and a review of the appellant’s presentation, his technical component score of 2 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 24TH DAY OF JULY, 2024



Allison Chris Myers
Chairperson
Civil Service Commission

Inquiries
and
Correspondence

Nicholas F. Angiulo
Director
Division of Appeals and Regulatory Affairs
Civil Service Commission
Written Record Appeals Unit
P.O. Box 312
Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0312

c: Keith Suthammanont
Division of Test Development, Analytics and Administration
Division of Administrative and Employee Services
Records Center