



**STATE OF NEW JERSEY**

In the Matter of Scott Sweeny, Fire  
Lieutenant (PM2361C), Clifton

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

CSC Docket No. 2023-2344

Examination Appeal

**ISSUED: September 25, 2024 (ABR)**

Scott Sweeny appeals his score on the oral portion of the promotional examination for Fire Lieutenant (PM2361C), Clifton. It is noted that the appellant passed the subject examination with a score of 90.420 and ranks seventh on the subject 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 Lieutenant 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 5 on the technical component, a 5 on the supervision component, and a 4 on the oral communication component. On the Arriving Scenario, the appellant scored a 5 on the technical component and a 3 on the oral communication component.

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

On the oral communication component of the Arriving Scenario, the assessor stated that the appellant displayed a major weakness in word usage/grammar, as evidenced by the repeat of words and phrases within a sentence and by the use of the filler "um" excessively while responding to the questions. Based upon the foregoing, the assessor awarded the appellant a score of 3. On appeal, the appellant maintains that he only uttered "um" three times during his presentation and contends that he should have been awarded a higher oral communication score for the scenario, as the quality of his oral communication was comparable, if not identical, to his Evolving Scenario presentation.

## CONCLUSION

In reply, a review of the appellant's presentations fails to demonstrate that his oral communication score for the Arriving Scenario should have been higher. At the outset, a minor weakness in word usage/grammar may include not only the excessive utterance of fillers like "uh," "um," or "you know," but also the repetition of words and/or phrases within a sentence. Although the appellant is correct that his utterance of filler words like "um" on the Evolving and Arriving Scenarios was roughly comparable, he repeated words and phrases within sentences at a noticeably greater rate during his Arriving Scenario presentation. Specifically, a review of the appellant's presentation on appeal demonstrates that he repeated words and phrases like "gonna" mid-sentence no fewer than a dozen times. It was appropriate for the assessor to characterize this as a major weakness in word usage/grammar in the appellant's presentation and to award him a score of 3 on that basis.

## 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 25<sup>TH</sup> DAY OF SEPTEMBER, 2024




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