

**PLEASE REVIEW THE TEST ORIENTATION FIRST (as many questions are answered only in the orientation slides and notes). The questions listed here are the additional questions that were commonly asked by applicants in attendance at one of the ten sessions presented by Classified Testing from October 14<sup>th</sup> to October 18<sup>th</sup>.**

**1-18: Questions about Source Materials and Source Announcements**

1Q: In the **PUMPING APPARATUS DRIVER/OPERATOR HANDBOOK**, do we need to know the metric stuff?

A: No. The HFD E/O job does not require the use of metric measurements on the job, so the test will not ask you to use metric measurements to answer a question.

2Q: In **HFD Patient Guidelines (Vol. III)**, do we need to know the ALS information in the guidelines?

A: No. The HFD E/O job requires the use of BLS information, so the test will only ask you about BLS information or information that both an ALS and BLS would be expected to know.

3Q: Some of the guidelines that are listed on the source material announcement are not on the study aide. Do we still have to study things that are not on the study aide?

A: Yes. The study aide is just an aide used by Classified Testing to help us write test questions. We share the aide with you to help you learn how to write good practice questions for yourself. The source material announcement is the definitive and complete listing of materials that are fair for us to test over.

4Q. The **HFD Electronic Accountability Guideline** refers to a system that HFD no longer uses. Do we need to study this guideline?

A. The Houston Fire Department tells Classified Testing what materials are appropriate to test over and to list on the source announcement. Even if a guideline is out of date, if it is on the source announcement list, then you should still study it unless an official correction is made to the source announcement list. In this case, HFD is making a correction to the announcement and this guideline will be removed. It is important to remember though that (by law) no corrections, omits, or additions can be done to the source material list after the 60<sup>th</sup> day before the test. So if an outdated guideline is still on the list 59 days before the exam, that guideline is still one that could appear on that exam.

5Q. Some materials/ books talk about equipment that HFD does not have or use, will information about this type of equipment be on the exam (for example, tiller trucks)?

A. As we try to build our tests to be as job related as possible, it is very likely that the test will not include information about equipment that HFD does not use very often. However, the Houston subject matter experts that we depended on to help pick and validate these source materials still thought it was important enough to include the reading on this equipment for your study. For example, you probably won't see a question about tiller trucks on the HFD E/O exam, but knowing about tiller trucks in general will probably help make you a more informed and knowledgeable firefighter.

6Q. Source materials/ books talk about processes, things, or differences that don't matter much for HFD operations...for instance do we need to know about automatic transmissions versus manual transmissions since the pumper book discusses these?

A. It's good to know about these things, but keep in mind that Classified Testing will have HFD experts review all questions and tell us which ones are the most job relevant. We are not likely to ask exam questions from source materials about facts that are not used very much by HFD, or aren't critical for safe operations.

7Q. Information in one source material contradicts something from another source material, so how do I know which one is the right one to study?

A. It depends. If one source contradicts an HFD guideline, then the HFD guideline is always the final answer and the bottom line we will use to build the test. If one text book contradicts another, then Classified Testing tries to avoid asking any questions that would require you to decide which source is the correct one. We try not to ask questions about information that is contradicted from source to source or questions that contradict HFD practices or guidelines. If you have concerns about a specific contradiction or spot two HFD guidelines that contradict one another, please notify a member of Classified Testing so that we can investigate the contradiction and avoid making exam questions that might have multiple correct answers before the test is administered.

8Q. Do the Guidelines overrule other texts?

A. Yes.

Q. The study aide gives an estimated number of questions that will come from each source, but can you give an estimated number of questions that will come from each Bloom's taxonomy level?

A. This is ONLY an ESTIMATE, but we do investigate what Bloom's taxonomy levels of the thinking are used on a job during our job analysis and that does help us come up with more job related questions. For the E/O role, about 15% of the time is spent thinking at the knowledge/ fact recall level, 80% at the comprehension and application levels, and about 5% at the analysis/ pattern detection level. The exam questions will reflect similar levels of Bloom's taxonomy.

9Q. Some of the guidelines or parts of guidelines seem to pertain more to the District Chief levels etc., do I need to know that stuff for an E/O exam?

A. We try to make our exams as job related as possible, so it is most important for you to know the actions that are related to the E/O role...but it is also important for you to know the actions that are related to the next rank up (so when you ride up as a Captain you are prepared). For ranks above the next rank up, it is more important that you have just a very general understanding of what those ranks do, so that you can be a good follower and have some ideas about where to find those officers if you need them.

10Q. I ordered the **25 TO SURVIVE: REDUCING RESIDENTIAL INJURY AND LODD** and it hasn't arrived yet—they don't have enough copies. Is this book going to be omitted? What should I do?

A. Before putting a book on the source materials list, HFD and Classified Testing always check to make sure the publisher has enough copies of the book for all applicants to get it on the day the source list is announced. The publisher that we listed (Penwell) has 1000 copies of this book reserved specifically for HFD members and the publisher can overnight the book to you as soon as place the order with them. You can also get an electronic copy of the book immediately through Google Books. Amazon reported selling out of the 100 copies they had available—we cannot guarantee anyone but the publisher has enough copies of the book for all applicants. Since the 1000 copies have been available direct from the publisher since the list was announced, this book will not be omitted.

11Q. Am I wasting my time studying materials on the source list that might be omitted when issues arise?

A. The source list can only be corrected up to 60 days before an exam. We do our best to eliminate any issues with getting source materials before the list is announced. If issues are discovered after the announcement, they are usually minor and do not involve omitting entire sources (rather they omit or clarify certain parts of sources). Even if we do spot an issue with a source, if there are only 60 days left before the exam, then we cannot make any corrections to the list and those materials must be included on the exam as they were announced. If an announcement with correction is made in the

allowable time frame, you can find a copy of the announcement of source materials we are working from on our website: <http://www.houstontx.gov/hr/classified-testing.html>

12Q. How about formulas, equations, tables, figures, case studies, and stories in the source materials? Do we need to study or memorize these and will they be on the exam?

A. You do NOT need to memorize numbers or details from formulas, tables, figures, case studies, and stories. However, you do need to study these things and understand the concepts they are illustrating. For example, the exam will NOT ask you to recall what John Doe did or thought during his story about getting entangled by his own SCBA straps in the dark at a fire scene. But the exam may ask you to identify one entanglement threat related to using an SCBA at a fire scene. A good rule of thumb is to think about how the information in a formula, figure, table, or story helps to do one of the E/O tasks listed in the study aide we provided. That is the same way we think about writing exam questions.

13Q. There are some Guidelines with forms and attachments; do we need to know them?

A. Mostly you need to be familiar with the fact that there is a form and what you need it to do. You do not need to memorize a form, as you would never have to remember what is on a form in order to do your job. Attachments are only important to know if they convey information that is important to helping you do one of the tasks on the study aide, as we won't ask questions about materials that don't help you do or learn how to do one of these tasks.

14Q. What about when a source material has an opinion about information that is contrary to HFD opinions or practices? For example, the **25 to Survive** book talks about horizontal versus vertical ventilation and doesn't have the same opinion about the merits of each as HFD.

A. Again, remember the test is a job knowledge test and is focused on using the facts. A source may have a different opinion, but the facts and how to use those facts to make decisions on the job are the important parts of each source. We are more likely to ask you something along the lines of "which of the following is a potential pro to doing both horizontal and vertical ventilation in X situation?" We are not likely to ask you which type of ventilation is best in general –as that wouldn't really be a factual question.

15Q. Why use the **25 to Survive** book (or any other book) when it doesn't seem job relevant?

A. The book review committee, made up of firefighters currently in this position or supervising this position, picked each source because that source offered the best information available on learning to do the most critical tasks for this job. Sometimes, it is just the best source available at this time, even if it isn't perfect. If a source doesn't seem very job relevant to you then we recommend you consult with current E/Os to find out how the information in that source might help to do one of the critical tasks.

16Q: Some tasks on the Study Aide pertain to specific guidelines. How do the books contain information about HFD specific guidelines?

A: Somewhere in those materials the experts found something that contributes to your ability to follow those guidelines. This could be information about a topic (like infectious disease) that is related to that guideline, or it could be information supporting your ability to do the action part of that guideline (like clean the apparatus/ ambulance or do better patient care).

17Q: Do we need to know guidelines that concern higher ranks than Captain?

A: Yes, but not as much as that which is directed at E/O rank. During job analysis, we found it was important for E/O to be able to ride up as a Captain on the first day on the job, and that it was important for an E/O to know what the other ranks were generally responsible for doing. However, the test will be as job related as possible, so it is most important to know the guidelines as they pertain to

an E/O well, know the Captain well enough to ride up as one, and the other ranks well enough to know where they will be on scene in relation to you.

18Q: NFPA standards – how much do we have to know?

A: For NFPA or similar, you don't have to memorize by reference number. The key is to know how to use that information to perform a task. For things like NFPA standards we usually give you the number and title and ask you to identify the main point, best summary, or compare it to similar standards and identify the important conceptual differences or additions.

### **19-33: Questions about Classified Testing and the Tests**

19Q. Why are the tests Classified Testing gives now so different from the tests that were given in the past?

A. Much like firefighting science and technology evolves and improves every day; the science of test design is also improving. Classified Testing is making changes to our test design to keep up with new best practices and to enable us to deliver World-Class, state-of-the-art testing services to the Houston Fire and Police departments for the City of Houston.

20Q. How different is this test from the last one?

A. This test is a lot different from the exam for E/O that was administered two years ago. Testing science has found that job knowledge tests that use information, facts, and knowledge in the same ways as people do on the job are more fair, more cost effective, more job relevant, and better predictors of how good an applicant will actually be at performing the job. That is why we changed the way we create tests—we want our test to be as fair and job related as possible given the current state of testing science.

21Q: Why did you make the study aide if we've never used one before?

A: The goal of Classified Testing is to improve our service to the City of Houston, to become more state of the art, more transparent, and to make things easier for the test-takers. The Study Aide contributes to that goal.

22Q. If the test is more based on job knowledge now, how fair will it be for applicants who have not had a chance to ride-up as an E/O or observe the E/O job as often?

A. Not everyone has had equal experience or even equal opportunities for experience, since some folks have been with the fire department longer than others. This is why we try to explicitly limit and state what job knowledge the test will cover well in advance of the test—so that everyone at least has an equal chance to review and study the stuff on the test. Everyone has the same opportunity to the study the test materials and the same time and opportunity to get guidance from current E/O on the specific source materials and how they are used on the job.

23Q. Are all of the 100 questions on the exam going to come from the top (8) tasks listed on the study aide?

A. Yes. Those tasks help us write questions that are as job relevant as we can make them, so we stick to those most important tasks.

24Q. Are the item/ question reviewers HFD?

A. Yes. Currently serving in the role or at least have served the role and supervised it (e.g. HFD E/O, HFD Captain, etc.). Preferably, we also recruit reviewers who are on the street (e.g. in an operational role).

25Q: If most of the test is based on comprehension and application, but the questions won't be verbatim, how do we interpret information and facts from the books? Do the authors' opinions count as fact?

A: The authors' opinions still do not count as fact, and you will not be expected to know what the author believes. If the book gives a definition or refers to technical details, take that as a testable fact. If a book repeatedly states something is specific a must or a best practice common to many departments, take that as a testable fact. Remember, the test is conceptual and based on using and putting together important facts at the same level of thinking you would do on the job as an E/O. The important thing is to be able to put together sets of facts from a source material to answer a question.

26Q. On the test study aide, how close will those estimated test questions from each source be to what is actually on the test?

A. Usually, we are within 1 to 2 questions for each estimate on the aide. For example, if we say there will be about 42% of exam questions from the guidelines, it is very likely there will be 40 to 44 exam questions from the guidelines on the exam. However, the aide is just an aide, and we ask that you use it accordingly. Ultimately, you are responsible for knowing the source materials, and studying these materials goes beyond the test toward helping you become a more informed and better prepared firefighter.

27Q. Any extra study tips not mentioned in the orientation?

A. Our test guide, distributed with your guidelines for this exam (from the quartermaster), contains some more study tips. Additionally, SQ3R works well for many students (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SQ3R>). Research on learning also shows that study in small, frequent chunks (like 45 minutes six to eight times a day) over a longer period (like 90 days) leads to more knowledge retention and higher test scores for most adults. It turns out good sleep is also really important for allowing your brain to clean out the mental junk and solidify everything you studied. Getting 8 hours of sleep on average at the same time each day (like 10pm to 6am) accelerates learning rates.

28Q. Opinion on test preparation sites, workshops, and commercial practice tests?

A. It really depends on you and what you prefer. I work out more if I pay for a gym membership because I'm cheap and it hurts me not to make it worth the membership fee I paid. Maybe paying for study aides motivates you, or maybe just the idea of getting together with others who are studying makes the task of studying sound more social and fun for you. We don't endorse any particular method of studying because what works best varies a lot from person to person. However, we do advocate making up your own practice questions (and aiming for making them as challenging as you can) even if you do pay for practice tests; because making up your own questions gives you another way to practice with the information and takes some anxiety out of the exam for most people.

29Q. Compare to past promotional tests for HFD, will this test be more difficult?

A. In general, our tests are becoming more and more job relevant. This means there is less focus on memorization, and more focus on applying information practical to the job to answering questions similar to the question you will have to answer on the job in that rank in order to do those most important tasks well. For many folks, this will make the test easier, but for some applicants who have relied on superior memory skills to do well on past tests; this might seem harder at first.

30Q. How many correct answers for each question?

A. There will be one correct/ best answer for each test question.

31Q: Can we wear earplugs during the exam?

A: Yes, you can wear earplugs (but **not** headphones that plug into any electronic devices).

32Q: I printed out the source announcement and some information appears cut off?

A: Be careful to adjust the print or view to legal size paper (instead of the letter size default) when you open the official source announcement. The CSC uses legal size paper for all documents, and if you print or view it on letter it might cut off some information or shrink it all to fit and make it fuzzy.

33Q: On the guidelines I picked up at quartermaster it states that you will not be let in the test site late (after 9am), but you said we could come in late...which one is it?

A: We are rewriting the rules to reduce disruptions for the most applicants. For future exams (after 1/8/2014), we will lock the doors at 9am. But for the exam on 1/8/2014 (since this change was not on the exam announcement yet), we will allow you in after 9am, but you will not be given any additional time to finish the test. We also ask that you please strive to be at the test site early (by 8:30am) so we have plenty of time to register and seat you all together and other applicants are not disturbed by your late entrance.

#### **34-40: Questions about Points and Eligibility Lists**

34Q. Are points (seniority, etc.) calculated up until the test date?

A. Yes, we use the test date as the end day to earn points for that test. However, we aim to have all points calculated and verified before the test date, and that is why we have a deadline of 12/18/2013 for applicants to verify their points with us before this exam.

35Q. How are the points calculated?

A. From hire date (first day on the HFD payroll as a firefighter trainee) to the test date.

36Q: Are seniority points based on date of hire?

A: Yes, points are based on your first day on the HFD payroll as a firefighter trainee.

37Q. What do I do if my points are wrong?

A. Email or phone [Jennifer.Nolan@HoustonTX.gov](mailto:Jennifer.Nolan@HoustonTX.gov) (832-395-4836) before 12/18/2013 and tell her what is wrong so that we can investigate and fix the information prior to the test.

38Q. Do we get education points?

A. For the E/O rank, education points are NOT used on the exam. This is determined by the collective bargaining agreement (in Section 5(d) on Page 8 signed on 12/21/2012) for this rank at this time.

39Q. If a couple questions are tossed out how does that change the test scores and rankings on the eligibility list?

A. If the Test Review Committee/ CSC decides to omit a question entirely or add acceptable answers to a question, then Classified Testing rescoring every applicant's exam and recalculates the raw and total exam scores (out to the third decimal point). The TLGC 143 requires us to use a 100 point scale even if there are fewer than 100 questions, so if an exam question gets omitted or dropped from the exam then we calculate the scores to be what percentage of the remaining 99 questions each applicant got correct. Usually rescoring a test results in less than a 1 point difference for any 1 to 2 questions removed, and rankings do not change unless the difference between two places or people is less than one seniority point.

40Q. How is the test ranked?

The test or eligibility list is ranked first by your total score, which consists of your raw test score on a 100 point scale plus your seniority points. If the total score is tied, then we use just the raw test score next. If the raw test score is tied beyond 3 decimal points, then we use your total number of days with HFD. If your total number of days with HFD is still tied, then we use your score on the first 25 items of the test, then on the second 25 items of the test and so forth. We've never had a tie go beyond this, but if it did, then we would go by alphabetical order of last names. The way we rank test scores is determined by your collective bargaining agreement and current Civil Service Rules (Classified Testing cannot change this ranking system solely on our own).

#### **41-43: Questions about Appeals and Rebuttals**

41Q. Is there strength in numbers when it comes to appeals? If 80 applicants appeal 1 question does that mean the TRC/ CSC is more likely to change it?

A. No, there is no strength in numbers on appeals. The TRC/ CSC place more importance on the logic or argument of an appeal. If a test question is bad or wrong, then it seems more important to explain why and how the test question is wrong, and what information supports your argument (for example, referencing an HFD guideline where the right answer can be found is usually most helpful).

42Q. Say a test question or the answer to that question is contradictory in the study material, is this grounds for an appeal?

A. Yes. This is exactly what appeals were meant for—to help eliminate unfair questions from the exam entirely or to provide dual credit for answers that are equally supported in the material the question is derived from.

43Q. Say after the test, I cannot find the answer to a question in the material that was cited for that question on the test, is this grounds for an appeal?

A. Maybe. Just remember that the question and the answer do not have to be verbatim from the material—the questions just have to be about or using factual knowledge from the material. If the facts that lead to that answer or support that answer are not deducible from the material cited on the exam, then yes, there is probably a mistake in the answer key or the way the question was written that should be appealed.

#### **44-50: Questions about the Promotion Process**

44Q. If I am on the Communication Captain promotion eligibility list, should I take the E/O test? Can I demote back down to E/O if I first accept the Communication Captain promotion?

A. Yes, you can take the Engineer Operator exam; however you can only hold one promotion at a time. If you accept the Communication Captain promotion and later decide you want to demote or accept the EO position once your name is reached on the eligibility list you can. You can't demote to E/O and then choose later to re-accept the Communication Captain position.

45Q: Due to a retirement vacancy when is the vacancy open? When he puts his paperwork in or when he actually leaves.

A: The vacancy becomes available when the member has officially resigned/retired from the department on his/her signed paperwork.

46Q: Do positions trickle down? At what date would an EO vacancy be available, for instance, if a DC position became open, then filled?

A: Yes, in some instances positions will trickle down to the Engineer Operator rank. However based on the dates of various list being in existence and list not being in existence, the rules of the 60<sup>th</sup> day and 95<sup>th</sup> day based on TLGC 143.036(e) will be the determining factor.

47Q: If there is a vacancy in a staff position and a classified member fills it, does that open up a spot?

A: No, unless a member is appointed to a position such as Assistant Fire Chief, Fire Marshal or Executive Assistant Fire Chief. Otherwise, the member that was moved to a staffing position outside of the three mentioned will still hold his/her classification in that rank by City Ordinance rules on positions for HFD.

48Q: When did the most recent E/O list die?

A: August 2, 2013. Under the new collective bargaining agreement and for the next E/O list, it will be good for two years from the date it was certified (expected sometime in March 2014).

49Q: Are they still promoting off of the old list?

A: Please contact HFD HR at 832-394-6605, Janice Thomas. (Classified Testing does not process any promotions for HFD and is not involved in HFD business beyond providing testing services).

50Q: In the TLGC 143, how do the dates of vacancy versus date of hire compare? Are the 60 days, 90 days, etc., before backpay? How do you accommodate for any gaps?

A: From TA 083112b.docx (Article 11 TA 08/31/2012)

- (d) Notwithstanding any other provision of this Article, the filling of vacancies for the ranks of Captain and Engineer/Operator that result from the filling of vacancies that exist on the ratification date of this Interim Agreement in the rank of Senior Captain, shall be in accordance with the Civil Service Act, Chapter 143 of the TLGC. That will mean that if a Captain is promoted to Senior Captain off of the next Senior Captain eligibility list and the effective date of that promotion is the 95<sup>th</sup> day after the position was vacated, then the Engineer/Operator promoted to Captain to fill that vacancy will come from the Captain's eligibility list in effect on the 60<sup>th</sup> day after the Senior Captain vacancy was filled by operation of law. Likewise, the Firefighter promoted to fill the resulting Engineer/Operator vacancy will come from the Engineer/Operator eligibility list in effect on the 60<sup>th</sup> day after the Captain vacancy was filled by operation of law.