

**PLEASE REVIEW THE TEST ORIENTATION FIRST (as many questions are answered only in the orientation slides and notes). The questions listed here are the commonly asked by applicants in attendance the orientation sessions presented by Classified Testing.**

Q. 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.

Q. The Accountability Manual doesn't have pages 38 – 41. Are they going to be on the exam?

A. No. If you did not receive material to study, no questions will be constructed on material that was not provided to you.

Q. 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 Deputy Chief Communications role, about 30% of the time is spent thinking at the analysis/pattern detection level, 40% synthesis levels, and about 30% at the evaluation level. The exam questions will reflect similar levels of Bloom's taxonomy.

Q. 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>

Q. 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.

Q. What about when a source material has an opinion about information that is contrary to HFD opinions or practices?

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.

Q: 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).

Q. 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.

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

A. This test is a lot different from the exam for Deputy Chief Communication that was administered a few 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.

Q: 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.

Q. 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 or observe the 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 position on the specific source materials and how they are used on the job.

Q. Are all of the 100 questions on the exam going to come from the top (10) 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.

Q. Are the item/ question reviewers HFD?

A. Yes. Currently serving in the role or at least have served the role and supervised.

Q: 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 a Deputy Chief of Communications. The important thing is to be able to put together sets of facts from a source material to answer a question.

Q. 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 40% 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.

Q. Are questions ONLY going to come from the items identified on the study aide?

A. Yes. Even though there are other tasks done by the Deputy Chief of Communications, questions will only be constructed based on the Top 10 that are on the study aide.

Q. 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.

Q. 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.

Q. 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.

Q. How many correct answers for each question?

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

Q: Can we wear earplugs during the exam?

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

Q: 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.

Q. 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 12/19/2013 for applicants to verify their points with us before this exam.

Q. How are the points calculated?

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

Q: 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.

Q. 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) by 12/19/2013 and tell her what is wrong so that we can investigate and fix the information prior to the test.

Q. Do we get education points?

A. For the Deputy Chief Communications rank, education points are 1 point for Associate Degree, 2 points for Bachelor's Degree, and 3 points for a Master's Degree. Points for certification are 1 point for Intermediate Certification, 2 points for Advance Certification and 3 points for Masters Certification. 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.

Q. 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.

Q. 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).

Q. 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).

Q. 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.

Q. 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.

Q: 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.

Q: 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.

Q: 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.

In this position of Deputy Communication Chief the vacancy will be filled based on the 125<sup>th</sup> date after the vacancy became opened.