

Firefighter interview questions

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What to expect

Firefighter recruitment interviews sit within a longer selection process that also includes physical aptitude testing, psychometric assessment and medical checks. The interview itself focuses less on technical firefighting knowledge, which is taught during recruit training, and more on judgement, teamwork and how a candidate behaves under pressure and around the public.

- **Behavioural:** Questions about past experiences handling pressure, teamwork or physical demands, used to predict how you'll perform on shift.
- **Scenario-based:** Hypothetical incident situations testing on-the-spot judgement, risk assessment and decision-making within safety limits.
- **Process and technical:** Questions probing understanding of core tasks like inspections, equipment checks and incident documentation.
- **Safety and compliance:** Questions checking attitude toward following protocols, reporting hazards and holding colleagues to the same standard.
- **Community and communication:** Questions about interacting with distressed members of the public or advising building owners on compliance.

Panels typically run 30 to 45 minutes with two or three assessors from the fire service. Expect an opening icebreaker, then a run of behavioural and scenario questions, a technical or process question tied to daily tasks, and a closing chance for you to ask questions. Some services record answers against set criteria, so structured responses score better than free-flowing ones.

1. Tell me about a time you had to stay calm and make a quick decision under significant pressure.

Why they ask

Firefighters make rapid judgement calls at incidents where hazard conditions change quickly, so panels want evidence of composure under real pressure, not just a claim of it.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the Situation and Task briefly, spend most of your answer on the specific Action you took and why, then close with the Result and what you'd repeat or do differently.

Example answer

"During a training exercise simulating a structural collapse, one of our crew's radios failed mid-search. I signalled the team to fall back to our last confirmed safe point rather than push on without communication, even though we hadn't finished the search pattern. We regrouped, restored comms through a backup handset and completed the search within the extended time window. The instructor noted that prioritising crew safety over speed was the right call, and it reinforced for me that following protocol under pressure protects the whole team, not just the individual."

2. You arrive first at a house fire and find the main entry point blocked by fallen debris, with smoke showing from an upstairs window. What do you do?

Why they ask

This tests risk assessment, adherence to safe operating procedure and whether you'd act within your training rather than improvise beyond your authority as a probationary or junior firefighter.

How to structure your answer

Talk through your judgement under pressure in order: what you'd assess first, what options you'd weigh, the safety limits you would not cross, and how you'd communicate the plan to your crew and incoming units.

Example answer

"I'd first assess the hazard zone from a safe distance, checking for structural signs, smoke colour and any visible occupants, and radio dispatch with an initial size-up. With the main entry blocked, I would not attempt entry alone. I'd look for an alternative access point consistent with our training, brief my crew leader on what I'd observed, and wait for the appropriate equipment and personnel to establish a safe entry method. Getting an extra set of hands and the right tools on a blocked entry point matters more than being first through the door."

3. Walk me through how you would carry out a fire prevention inspection of a commercial building.

Why they ask

Prevention inspections are a real, recurring task for firefighters and this checks whether you understand the practical steps and compliance focus, not just the emergency response side of the job.

How to structure your answer

Give a straightforward walk-through of the process from start to finish: preparation, what you check on site, how you record findings, and how you communicate outcomes to the building owner or manager.

Example answer

"I'd start by reviewing any previous inspection records and the building's fire safety schedule before arriving. On site, I'd check fire exits are unobstructed, extinguishers and hydrants are serviced and tagged, fire doors close properly, and any hazardous storage meets the relevant code. I'd note any non-compliance clearly, take photos where useful, and explain the issues to the building manager in plain terms along with a reasonable timeframe to fix them. I'd then log the inspection so it's available for follow-up."

4. Describe how you maintain the fitness and readiness this role demands.

Why they ask

The physical demands are constant and non-negotiable, so panels want evidence of a genuine, sustained habit rather than a one-off effort before recruitment testing.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a straightforward personal account: what your routine actually involves, how it maps to job demands like carrying equipment or working in SCBA, and how you adjust it around shift work.

Example answer

"I train most days with a mix of strength work and cardio, focusing on grip strength, carrying capacity and cardiovascular endurance since those map directly to hauling hoses, climbing under load and working in breathing apparatus for extended periods. I also do sessions in full kit occasionally to get used to the heat and restricted movement. Around rotating shifts, I plan training in shorter blocks so it doesn't slip when rosters change."

5. Tell me about a time you had to explain a safety issue to someone who wasn't happy to hear it.

Why they ask

Fire prevention work and post-incident advice often involve delivering unwelcome findings to property owners or the public, so this checks communication skill under a bit of resistance.

How to structure your answer

STAR again, but weight the Action toward the specific language and tone you used to keep the conversation constructive, and the Result toward whether the person actually acted on the advice.

Example answer

"During a prevention inspection I found a fire exit in a small business had been permanently blocked with stock. The owner pushed back, saying it was only temporary. I explained the specific risk in plain terms, that in a fire the extra seconds to clear that exit could be the difference for staff getting out safely, and gave him a short, realistic deadline to fix it rather than an immediate shutdown threat. He cleared it within the week and thanked me for explaining the reasoning rather than just citing the code."

6. If you saw a colleague skip a step in SCBA pre-checks before an incident, what would you do?

Why they ask

This probes whether you'll actually hold the line on safety protocol with a peer, which matters more in this job than in most, since a shortcut can put the whole crew at risk.

How to structure your answer

Answer directly and briefly: state the action you'd take first, then how you'd handle it afterward without turning it into an ongoing conflict.

Example answer

"I'd say something immediately, before we moved to the incident, because a missed SCBA check isn't something to raise later. I'd point it out plainly and give them the chance to fix it on the spot. After the job, if it felt like more than a one-off slip, I'd mention it to my station officer, not to get anyone in trouble but because that's the kind of gap that needs to be caught early, not repeated."