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11 requirements to become a firefighter

The firefighting career field is very competitive; here's a quick breakdown of what you should and should not do as you prepare to join the fire service

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Becoming a firefighter is no easy task. It requires hard work, long hours of training, dedication and a sincere desire to help others.

The firefighting career field is very competitive, too. You'll be up against hundreds, possibly thousands of applicants depending on the department. How will you stand out and where do you start? [Download our how to become a firefighter infographic.](#)

Here's a quick breakdown of what you should (and should not) do as you prepare to join the fire service.



The firefighting career field is very competitive. (Photo/Joe Thomas of Greenbox Photography)

1. Meet basic requirements to become a firefighter

In order to become a firefighter, you will need a valid driver's license and meet the age requirement of 18 years old. For those younger than 18, you can look into limited involvement as a junior firefighter. There also will likely be a maximum age, usually between 28 and 35 years old, depending on the department you're applying to.

2. Meet (and exceed) education requirements

At the very minimum, you'll need to obtain a high school diploma or GED. Many firefighters earn a degree in fire science to advance their career. It's also wise to become an EMT. Having both a fire and EMS background will improve your odds of being hired. Some departments might even require an EMT certification; larger departments may require a paramedic's license.

3. Get in good physical condition

Becoming a firefighter requires passing a physical ability test. The CPAT events are stair climb, hose drag, equipment carry, ladder raise and extension, forcible entry, search, rescue, ceiling breach and pull. Prepare yourself for the physical nature of the job as well as the demands of the test.

4. Stay out of trouble

At one point in your life, you've probably done something you're not proud of. How you've acted to rectify your mistakes will be important when applying to become a firefighter. FireRescue1 columnist Mike Pertz, who founded a website aimed at helping others become firefighters, [recently wrote an article](#) on this very subject.

If you are asked about your past record during an interview, do not lie. Instead, take ownership for your mistakes. Explain to the hiring panel how you've changed and what you've done to change. Also, be up front about your driving record – include dates, locations and outcomes of tickets and accidents.

5. Keep your social media nose clean

If you use Facebook or other social media platforms, [be mindful of what you post](#), repost, comment on and like. Expect all potential employers to scan your social media presence. If there's embarrassing, immature, risqué or otherwise inappropriate posts on your pages, remove them. Ask your friends to remove any such posts involving you from their pages. In some cases, it makes sense to close out your accounts.

6. Prove your fiscal responsibility

This is often overlooked, but the required background check [covers credit score](#). Bad credit will hurt you. Be disciplined about improving your score if need be.

7. Get involved in your community

Working in public safety is all about community service. Volunteering your time for a great cause is one way to prove you're ready to serve your community. And it doesn't matter if it's fire-related or non-fire related. There's a lot of great opportunities out there for you to make a difference. The [American Red Cross](#) or [Habitat for Humanity](#) are two excellent options.

8. Pass the written exam

Study, study, study. And, when in doubt, study some more. The written exam consists of multiple-choice questions and is divided into categories. Check out [these test-taking basics](#) to give yourself the best chance at passing with flying colors.

9. Prepare for a psychological evaluation

You can't study for this one. This evaluation will look at your mental and emotional stability to withstand the stresses associated with firefighting.

10. Graduate a fire academy

Getting your state entry-level firefighter certifications, such as Firefighter I and II, is a great move. You'll still need to attend a department's academy once hired, but this gives you a leg up and helps you learn the book and practical skills of the job. Joining a volunteer fire department is one way to get into an academy.

11. Ace the interview

Why do you want to be a firefighter? Cliché, we know. But you better prepare for this question. Here are [four additional questions](#) you'll be sure to get in a firefighter interview – how you answer will influence a panel's hiring decision. This is your time to shine and stand out.

The requirements to become a firefighter can seem daunting. Be sure to check out [FireRecruit.com](#) to stay up to date on firefighter employment and hiring information for nationwide fire department jobs.

About the author

Sarah Calams previously served as associate editor of FireRescue1 and Fire Chief. With nearly a decade of writing experience, Calams is now working as a freelance writer for the Lexipol team, delving deep into the people and issues that make up the fire service to bring insights and lessons learned to firefighters everywhere. She has a bachelor's degree in news/editorial journalism from the University of North Texas in Denton, Texas. Have a story idea you'd like to discuss? Send Calams an [email](#) or reach out on [LinkedIn](#).