



A GUIDE ON ADDRESSING SELECTION CRITERIA FOR APPLICANTS

Acknowledgement

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INTRODUCTION

If you apply for a role in the Australian Public Service, you are likely to be required to lodge an application that addresses specific selection criteria. Applicants are short-listed based on their ability to convince the Selection Team that they have the capabilities required to perform the role-capabilities which are articulated in the selection criteria.

WHAT ARE SELECTION CRITERIA AND HOW ARE THEY USED?

Selection criteria describe the personal qualities, skills, abilities, knowledge and qualifications (if any) a person needs to perform the role effectively. They are used to identify the right person for the role.

Selection criteria are sometimes divided into:

- **IMPORTANT** criteria
- **LESS IMPORTANT** criteria

Important criteria are weighted equally (unless explicitly stated otherwise).

Less Important criteria are rated equally and have a lower weighting than Important criteria. However, your chances of progressing through the selection process (e.g. being short-listed) will be greater if you meet all the selection criteria, as you may be competing against many applicants.

Selection criteria can also be divided into:

- **Essential** criteria ('must have' criteria)
- **Desirable** criteria ('nice to have' criteria).

The selection advisory committee will rate applicants against the criteria in order to select the right applicant.

You must meet all of the 'essential' criteria in order to be seriously considered for a role. It is not necessary for you to have the qualifications, skills and knowledge outlined in 'desirable' criteria. However, your chances of progressing through the selection process (e.g. being short-listed) will be greater if you meet all the selection criteria, as you may be competing against many applicants.

HOW DO APPLICANTS ADDRESS SELECTION CRITERIA?

The key is to:

- demonstrate capability by providing evidence of how you meet the selection criteria;
- provide specific details; and
- where possible, include an indicator of success or a result.

An easy way to do this is to use the **STAR** model – that is:

Situation – provide a brief outline of the situation or setting

Task – outline what you did

Approach or action – outline how you did it

Result – describe the outcomes.

Step one – Understanding the selection criteria

As an example, take the capability written communication skills. The associated selection criterion could be;

Well developed written communication skills. This includes the ability to:

- structure written communications such as reports to meet the needs and understanding of the intended audience;
- express opinions, information and key points of an argument clearly and concisely; and to
- write convincingly in an engaging and expressive manner’.

It is important that you clearly understand what is meant by each selection criterion before putting pen to paper.

Step two – Opening sentence

When addressing each selection criterion, you should begin with an opening sentence that clearly states your claim to this criterion. For example:

I possess strong written communication skills, which I have developed over the course of my career’.

This opening statement needs to be supported by detailed examples of where you demonstrated these skills in the workplace (or other context if workplace examples are not possible). The following steps will help you to provide a structured, easy-to-understand response.

Step three – Brainstorm ideas for each criterion

For each selection criterion, brainstorm ideas from your recent work life. Ideally, you should confine your examples to the last two or three years of employment. Where you do not have relevant work examples, situations from different aspects of your life (e.g. university, clubs or the community) may also demonstrate relevant strengths. For instance, acting as the secretary for a large club may be an appropriate example for the selection criterion described above.

Let’s take an example of a Senior Project Officer (APS6) role, which includes ‘well developed written communication skills’ as one of the selection criteria. An applicant may come up with the following situations which could illustrate their written communication skills:

- Project Officer at Department of XYZ – needed to write report on project planning methodologies
- when Research Support Officer at Department of XYZ – designed and compiled a monthly newsletter
- research project when at GBL Company – needed to collate diverse sets of data, organise the information into topic areas, and synthesise into a paper for senior management.

At this stage, it is useful to generate as many examples as possible.

Step four – Expand on your brainstorming ideas – provide the evidence

You should then expand upon the points that you have noted as part of the brainstorming activity in step three. Go back to each specific criterion and make your final choice on which examples to use, by matching

them against the wording of the criterion.

Once you have finalised your examples, you need to demonstrate how they meet the different aspects of the criterion. In doing so, it is important that you are very specific and describe exactly what you did, including the outcome. This is to demonstrate convincingly that you have met the requirements of each criterion.

Here, the **STAR** method described earlier can be used.

For example:

- Situation – Role as Research Support Officer at Department of XYZ
- Task – Needed to ensure that managers were kept informed of policies and procedures
- Action or approach – Initiated monthly newsletter, which was emailed to each manager. Took responsibility for writing the main articles. This involved obtaining ideas and input from other stakeholders to ensure that the articles reflected managers' needs (in terms of content and language)
- Result – Feedback was consistently excellent. Received divisional achievement award for newsletter quality. Led to improved lines of communication between managers and the Research Support Unit.

Once this has been achieved, the applicant can then write the draft paragraph in full. For example:

'As Research Support Officer at the Department of XYZ, I needed to ensure that managers were kept informed of policies and procedures. To do this, I initiated a monthly newsletter, which was emailed to each manager. I took responsibility for writing the main articles in each publication. This involved obtaining ideas and input from other stakeholders to ensure that the articles reflected the needs of managers, both in terms of content and language. I received consistently excellent feedback in relation to this newsletter from these internal clients and my own manager. I received a divisional achievement award for the quality of this newsletter from management. Importantly, this initiative resulted in improved lines of communication between managers and the Research Support Unit'.

Step five – Checking work

At this stage, you should read through your application, and check the following points:

- **Have I used positive and specific language?**
- It is important that you avoid ambiguous or unclear expressions such as 'involved in' or 'assisted'. These expressions make it difficult for the reader to understand exactly what you did. For example, instead of 'I assisted the process through a monthly newsletter', this idea has been phrased as 'I initiated a monthly newsletter'.

Words and phrases which could reduce credibility should also be avoided (e.g. some, a little, limited, somewhat).

- **Have I used strong action (doing) words?**

Avoid using passive language when describing your experience. For example, 'I received consistently excellent feedback in relation to this newsletter from these internal clients and my own manager', is better than simply stating, 'Feedback in relation to this newsletter was consistently excellent'.

- **Have I avoided unsupported claims about my capabilities?**

For example, rather than simply saying, 'The newsletter was received well by others', this assertion is substantiated in the following way:

'I received a divisional achievement award from management for the quality of this newsletter'.

- **Have I addressed all aspects of the criterion?**

At this stage, it is important that you go back to the wording of the particular selection criterion. As mentioned earlier, 'Well developed written communication skills' includes the following components:

- structure written communications such as reports to meet the needs and understanding of the intended audience;
- express opinions, information and key points of an argument clearly and concisely; and to
- write convincingly in an engaging and expressive manner.

In reading the paragraph written earlier, it is clear that its content refers mainly to the first descriptor, that is, 'Structure written communications to meet the needs and understanding of the intended audience'.

Therefore, it will be important that the applicant addresses the remaining two descriptors in additional paragraphs which will comprise the full statement for the criterion 'well developed written communication skills'.

- **Have I paid attention to the language of the criterion?**

For example, writing a paragraph around an example which demonstrates 'Well developed written communication skills' requires the applicant to focus on actual experiences which show the extent of their skills in this area. However, if the criterion was phrased as 'Knowledge of effective written communication skills and techniques', this would require different examples which do not necessarily rely on the applicant describing their actual performance in the workplace.

STRUCTURE OF THE DOCUMENT

Layout

Where appropriate, dot points should be used, rather than using long paragraphs of text. This ensures that the statement is as easy as possible for the selection team to read (and also demonstrates written communication skills in the document itself).

Length

Conciseness is important in a document of this type. About 250 words is generally an appropriate length for each criterion. However, this may depend upon factors such as the role being applied for.

Presentation

You should ensure that:

- there are no errors anywhere in the document;
- the document is formatted neatly; and
- the sentences are grammatically correct and concise.