

Cracking the Code: How to apply for jobs in the Australian Public Service

#5

Fact sheet five: Addressing selection criteria

Get the facts

Most of the time, your CV alone will not be enough to get you an APS job. When applying for a position it is likely that you will be asked to address the selection criteria.

The duty statement or role description will help you understand the responsibilities and tasks required in the job. The selection criteria describes the personal qualities, skills, abilities, knowledge and qualifications (if any) a person needs to perform the role effectively.

The agency's selection team will assess the responses of all applicants to each criterion. From time-to-time this will be enough to identify the right person for the role. More commonly though, this process creates a shortlist of applicants suitable to move to the next stage—usually an interview.

Some common examples of selection criteria include:

- demonstrated capacity to communicate effectively
- good organisational and administrative skills
- proven ability to work as part of a team
- well developed customer service skills
- proven ability to manage projects.

It is essential to respond to each criterion, writing at least one to two paragraphs explaining how you have demonstrated the particular skill or quality. Provide relevant examples from your work, study or community roles. Be clear and to the point. If a word or page limit is set, make sure you stick to it, and edit your responses for grammar, spelling and punctuation.

It is important to provide evidence to back up your claims. Where possible use actual examples of what you have done, how well you did it, what you achieved, and how it relates to the requirements of the job. The **STAR model** can help you form your answer.

In the know...tips and hints

Some recruitment companies help prepare job applications. If you use one, it is your responsibility to ensure your application accurately reflects your skills, experiences and abilities.

In the know...tips and hints

Do

- address each criterion
- use relevant examples
- be clear and to the point
- be honest and factual

Don't

- write lengthy responses
- rely just on your CV

In the know...tips and hints

Your CV should:

- cover relevant work history
- list your work and education history in chronological order, starting with the most recent examples
- not include personal details such as age, marital status or religion (but do include contact details)
- only include interests / hobbies if they demonstrate personal achievements, or relate to the selection criteria.

Find out more

What is the STAR model?

The STAR model is one way of presenting information against selection criteria. For each criterion think about the following and use these points to form sentences:

Situation - Set the context by describing the circumstance where you used the skills or qualities and gained the experience.

Task - What was your role?

Actions - What did you do and how did you do it?

Results - What did you achieve? What was the end result and how does it relate to the job you are applying for?

Myth vs. reality

I'll have to sit the public service exam

The public service exam no longer exists. Centralised testing used by the APS closed in June 2000. Agencies are now responsible for their own recruitment.

Example of how to address selection criteria

How do I address the selection criteria?

The most important aspect of addressing selection criteria is to provide evidence through relevant examples. Support your claims with actual, specific examples of what you have done and how well you did it. The following steps provide guidance on how to address selection criteria.

Step one –Understanding the selection criteria

As an example, take *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*
- *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. Your application itself may also be used to assess this criterion.

Step two – Opening sentence

Begin each selection criteria 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'.

Support the statement with detailed examples of where you demonstrated these skills. 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, confine your examples to the last two or three years of employment, or other relevant examples (e.g. study, community participation). The following is an example response for a Senior Project Officer (APS6) role, which includes a selection criterion on *'well developed written communication skills'*. An applicant may come up with the following situations to illustrate their skills before they start to write their application:

- Project Officer at Department of XYZ – wrote 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 – collated diverse sets of data, organised the information into topic areas, and synthesised 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 and provide the evidence

Expand on these points from step three. Go back to each criterion and choose 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. Be specific and describe exactly what you did, including the outcome, 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 – led to improved lines of communication between managers and the Research Support Unit. Feedback was consistently excellent. Received divisional achievement award for newsletter quality.

Once this has been achieved, you 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.'

Remember to use only one or two of your strongest examples to respond to the selection criteria.

Step five – checking work

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

- Have I been honest? Your responses should reflect an accurate picture of your role and achievements.
- Have I used positive and specific language? Avoid ambiguous or unclear expressions such as *'involved in'* or *'assisted'* as it makes it difficult to understand exactly what you did. 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. 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? It is important that you go back to the wording of the particular selection criterion. In the example provided, it is clear that the content refers mainly to the first descriptor, *'structure written communications to meet the needs and understanding of the intended audience'*. To make a full statement against the criterion, *'well developed written communication skills'*, it would be necessary to address the remaining two descriptors in additional paragraphs.
- Have I paid attention to the language of the criterion? For example, writing a response to the criterion *'well developed written communication skills'* requires a focus on actual experiences and the degree of skill in this area. However, if the criterion was phrased *'knowledge of effective written communication skills and techniques'*, this would require different examples which do not necessarily rely on describing actual performance in the workplace.