# addressing selection criteria



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#### 1. INTRODUCTION

This booklet is about how to respond effectively to selection criteria. Selection criteria are a set of benchmarks against which you are measured in order to achieve merit-based selection. Each listed criterion provides you with an opportunity to market your skills to an employer using specific examples. Your overall application will also demonstrate the effectiveness of your written communication skills.

**NOTE:** This booklet contains examples of phrases and full responses to criteria, and you will find more examples in the Appendices. Use them to give you an idea of how to go about organising your answer, but don't just copy them. Your answer will be created out of your unique set of experiences. Also you want to stand out as an individual (not as one of the many other students who have read this booklet!)

We have other booklets available covering all aspects of graduate job search. You may wish to obtain your free copies of our booklets from the Careers and Employer Liaison Centre, or download them from our website.

- Writing Your Application CV and cover letters
- Winning Graduate Applications
- Creative Job Search
- Assessment Centers & Selection Tests
- At the Interview
- The booklet, 'Networking going proactive' is also available from our website

"I also read many of their (Careers & Employer Liaison Centre) information booklets; one of them that I found particularly useful was 'Addressing Selection Criteria'. This booklet was so useful because addressing selection criteria when applying for jobs was one of the hardest and most time-consuming aspects when I started to look for jobs. This booklet helped me think of what I was good at and how I should go about describing it to my possible future employers. Once I did this, writing selection criteria became more and more easy!" Jean, Medical Science Graduate, Technical Assistant in the Department of Medicine, Gastroenterology, at Flinders University.

#### 2. FLINDERS UNIVERSITY GRADUATE QUALITIES

As a result of successfully pursuing your studies at Flinders University, you will have developed program-specific professional competencies as well as being able to demonstrate a range of qualities.

Flinders University's Bachelor degree programs aim to produce graduates who:

- are knowledgeable
- can apply their knowledge
- communicate effectively
- can work independently
- are collaborative
- value ethical behaviour
- connect across boundaries.

More information about the Graduate Qualities, including descriptions is available at: www.flinders.edu.au/graduate-qualities/.

As you conduct your self-assessment and review your educational experiences, consider how you may both demonstrate and draw on these qualities as you embark on the next step in your career.

We are proud that so many Flinders graduates identify with, and can be distinguished by, these distinctive academic, professional and cultural characteristics." (Flinders University Graduate Qualities statement www.flinders.edu.au/graduate-qualities\_home.cfm)

#### 3. WHAT ARE SELECTION CRITERIA?

They refer to a highly formal and structured written application process. Selection criteria are used by: the Australian Public Service, State Government (including some Hospitals), Local Government, educational institutions (for example, universities and some Independent Schools), the community sector, and non-government organisations; to short list applicants for the next stage of the selection process.

In the job advertisement you will usually be invited to visit the organisation's web site to obtain a copy of the Selection Criteria/Job and Person Specification (JPS) or to email the contact person for this documentation.

- "Applicants should obtain a copy of the Job and Person Specification (JPS) and an "information package" prior to submitting their application. These are available from (name)." OR
- "Further information, including the Duty Statement and Selection Criteria may be obtained from (name)" OR
- "Candidates must address the Selection Criteria."

# **Employer Guidelines**

It is very important to check whether the organisation has guidelines available on writing applications and, in particular, if they have a preferred format for you to follow when addressing the selection criteria. Be aware that there are variations in the format and requirements for these applications across organisations and across different States and that these change over time. Their requirements could range from addressing each selection criterion separately (usually a fairly lengthy application) to addressing all the selection criteria in a cover letter (which can vary in length, in some cases 2 pages).

For an example of such guidelines, check this link to Primary Industries and Resources SA: http://outernode.pir.sa.gov.au/pirsa/about\_pirsa/careers (Guidelines to help you apply for a position within PIRSA).

When in doubt, ensure you speak to the Contact Person mentioned in the job advertisement.

# **Examples of Selection Criteria Instructions**

The following are excerpts from instructions to applicants from a range of South Australian Government organisations, illustrating the diverse nature of their requirements, as well as the very different application formats to which you will respond. It is up to you to determine what is required.

"Your Application should: Address all Person Specification criteria/duties/responsibilities."

"Application response – addressing ONLY the Application Criteria requested. Please do not address additional criteria, as only your responses to those requested will be assessed. Ensure your responses demonstrate your experience or ability to meet the criteria and are succinct (no more than a page per criteria) and relevant to the position. Your experience can be from non work-related activities."

"Job & Person Specification: Your written statement will be the basis for short listing: List all the Person Specification items in order; Provide supporting claims of your qualifications/skills/abilities/under each item; Make sure to support your claims including examples of previous and current work; Include skills, knowledge, experience gained outside the workplace, which may assist your case; Please note – your application addressing the Skills/Knowledge/Experience Profile should be no more than five (5) pages."

"A covering letter of up to 2 pages introducing yourself to the selection panel and describing your skills, abilities, knowledge, qualifications and experience in relation to the position. The covering letter should clearly state the job vacancy number, position title, your name and your contact details."

"As a minimum, your application should consist of a covering letter and an up-to-date resume. You may want to include in the covering letter or separately, information about your skills, experience and knowledge relating to the essential and desirable requirements as detailed in the Person Specification. However, you do not have to provide separate paragraphs on each criterion. ... While you are not required to

address each of the essential and desirable criteria separately, please ensure that your application covers the necessary attributes and criteria relative to the position you are applying for."

This booklet will focus for the most part on the process of addressing <u>each selection</u> <u>criterion separately</u>, however, we will also provide an example of an expanded letter format. In Appendix Two we provide an example of a dot-pointed response.

"An applicant who cannot show in their written application how they meet each of the nominated selection criteria will be culled in the first round of consideration." The Aussie Résumés Employer Survey, www.aussieresumes.com/selection-criteria.htm

# What is the Job description?

The Job Description (or Duty Statement) provides a summary of the position, a description of reporting relationships, any special conditions (such as out of hours work), and statements indicating key outcomes and associated tasks.

# What is the Person Specification/Selection Criteria?

The terminology varies across Australian, State and Local Government – you may be referred to an application kit, the person specification, selection criteria, capabilities profile, competencies profile and so on. Generally speaking, these terms refer to a list of the qualifications, knowledge, skills, abilities, and experience a person requires in order to perform the target role effectively. They represent the criteria to which you are required to respond. They vary considerably across settings, and may range from a set of 5-7 criteria to two pages of them. They are often divided into:

- · essential criteria
- desirable criteria.

#### How are selection criteria used?

Each applicant is rated on how well or closely they meet each of the criteria and then ranked against the other applicants. You must meet the essential criteria to be considered for a position. Without having the relevant qualifications, knowledge, skills or experience you would not be able to do the job. If you do not meet the essential criteria, you may not be shortlisted for interview.

You don't have to have the qualifications, knowledge, skills, and experience described by the desirable criteria; but you have a stronger chance of being shortlisted if you do. Where there are several applicants who meet the essential criteria, the selection panel will then shortlist on the basis of the desirable criteria.

Remember that the onus is on you to demonstrate your value against the selection criteria - it is not up to the selection panel (who may have anywhere from dozens to hundreds of applications to read through) to work this out from your resume.

# What if it isn't clear what I need to respond to or the required format?

If you are in any doubt, always ring the contact person in the advertisement to clarify exactly what they want you to respond to - you'll be making both your job and the panel's job easier! Likewise if you have any further queries about the position, the organisation, preferred background (etc), speak to the Contact Officer stated on the advertisement.

Be aware, that even at this stage of the recruitment process, you need to make a professional and positive impression. Plan your questions before you pick up the telephone and take notes of what you are advised.

When you are applying to a position that refers to a Job and Person Specification Package, you MUST always refer to the criteria AND FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS for addressing the JPS/selection criteria.

**Tip:** You must address the Person Specification/ Selection Criteria NOT the Job description/ specification. This usually means that each point in the Person Specification/ Selection Criteria needs to be addressed individually, that is all points in the essential minimum and desirable criteria.

# What will my application consist of?

There are usually THREE parts to the application:

- The covering letter, which expresses your desire to apply for the vacancy.
- A separate document that details your claims against the selection criteria (this is the most important part of the application).
- Your curriculum vitae (CV).

You may also need to provide your academic transcript or other documents if requested.

#### 4. EXAMPLES OF CRITERIA

The Selection Criteria used by the Department for Families and Communities (see box) for their Graduate Program 2009, illustrates the general criteria that you may encounter when applying for Graduate programs.

- Ability to organise tasks, work effectively and meet deadlines
- Ability to analyse problems and devise appropriate solutions
- · Clear written and verbal communication skills
- Demonstrated strong commitment to client service
- Initiative, drive and flexibility to achieve results
- Good interpersonal and liaison skills that indicate the ability to foster trust and cooperation of others
- Knowledge of the Microsoft Office suite of products

For advertised vacancies such as Scientific Officer, Tourism Development Officer, Social Worker, Psychologist, Environmental Policy Officer, and so on; the documentation will outline key technical criteria as well:

- Experience in visitor management in the natural environment
- Proven skills in molecular biology
- An understanding of the principles of communication and swallowing rehabilitation methodology
- Knowledge of the Department's Anti-Poverty and other programs
- Sound understanding of biodiversity and ecological principles.

For each criterion you should provide evidence that you have the skills required for the position for which you are applying. Evidence is an example, or several examples, of specific times when you have demonstrated each criterion.

"Job and Person specifications take many hours to prepare so my advice is start them as soon the job is advertised. Once you have done a couple they will become much easier." Natalie, Bachelor of Nutrition and Dietetics, Dietitian, Riverland Community Health Service Inc.

# What do the Criteria Really Mean?

What are 'Key Words' and what do they mean?

"Demonstrated" or "proven ability" mean that you should have successfully performed the duty or used the skill in the past. Actual experience, rather than potential to perform the duty is required.

"An ability to rapidly acquire" means that if you do not already have the skills, knowledge and abilities indicated, you may demonstrate your potential to acquire these by comparing them to relevant tasks or responsibilities you have undertaken in previous positions or through study.

The words: "thorough", "sound", or "a high-level" indicate that advanced skill or knowledge is required.

# 5. IDENTIFY YOUR SKILLS USING THE STAR METHOD

The Star Method is sometimes referred to in 'Guidelines for Applicants' packages as a way to assist you to structure your responses.

**ST-Situation/Task:** What was the situation/ task? Who was involved? What was your role? Use a specific example - don't be too vague or general. Give enough detail to explain the context.

**A-Action:** What did you do? How? Describe the steps you took to handle the situation/ resolve the problem, and any obstacles you had to overcome. Be clear and concise, and focus on what you did. Show how your actions demonstrate workplace skills-don't just list what you have done.

**R-Result**: What was the end result? What did you achieve? What did you learn? Quantify the results if you can.

# **Example: Team Work**

#### Situation

Group project for Marketing topic at University with 5 students in the team

#### Task

• To develop a business marketing plan and present our plan to the class

#### **Action**

• My role was to ... (your project tasks, responsibilities and processes)

#### Result

- Grade and presentation to audience of 40
- Learning about marketing plans, and also team planning and processes
- Consider how your role in the team contributed to the result.

In some contexts, the extra step of 'Evaluation – Summary of what you learned' may also be suggested (so STAR becomes STARE). Employers may use other (but similar) models, for example CARE (Context – Action – Result – Evaluation) and SHARE (Situation - Hindrances – Actions – Results – Evaluation).

# 6. THE PROCESS FROM START TO FINISH

"I spent three full days writing the application and asked one of my referees to go over it with me to make my skills stand out when answering all the selection criteria." Nicoline, Commerce (Accounting) Graduate, Graduate Officer, Department of Treasury and Finance.

# **Stage One: Gathering Information**

As soon as possible after you have seen the advertisement, obtain the information package from the web site or request it from the contact person. These applications take time to prepare and are lengthy compared to an application involving just a

cover letter and resume. They can go up to 6 pages, or even more (just when you thought assignments were over!). Give yourself enough time to draft and refine your application.

Read all the information you have about the job: the advertisement, the entire job description – what is involved in this position? Plus find the selection criteria/person specification and information about the employer (from the job advertisement, the Internet, brochures, annual reports, corporate plans etc). Follow all instructions/guidelines for writing applications exactly (for example, a page limit, word limit or even character limit may be specified or a preferred writing style indicated – See Appendices One and Two).

# Stage Two: Match The Criteria To Your Skills Set

Read each criterion carefully and highlight or underline the skills it is asking for there may be more than one (see the example below) and you will need to respond to each component of the criterion.

<u>Experience</u> to <u>relate effectively</u> and <u>non-judgmentally</u>, <u>verbally</u> and in <u>writing</u> to <u>clients</u>, <u>staff</u>, <u>outside agencies</u> and with people of different <u>cultural backgrounds</u>.

Brainstorm specific examples that show how you meet the criterion. Refer to a variety of experiences, for example:

Placements/work experience Community activities

Sporting clubs/team activities Fundraisers
Previous employment Awards
Recreational activities Publications

Volunteer work Professional Development

Look for evidence of transferable skills and abilities. While you may not have carried out a particular duty, you may have performed similar work but in a different context (for example, working in customer service may give you transferable communication skills that relate to liaising with corporate clients).

## **Example of Skills Brainstorm!**

"Highly developed oral communication skills"

- Completed topic on communication skills at university
- Three years experience in retail sales
- Successfully managed staff of x number
- Delivered presentations to school assemblies/community groups on XYZ issues.

# What Do The Criteria Really Mean?

The following may assist you to identify the evidence that you need to match your skills and experiences to the criteria. (Adapted From: Hints and Tips for Writing Public Service Applications, Department of Defence.)

# Communication skills (both oral and written)

#### **Definition:**

The ability to express yourself clearly and logically both orally and in writing. Ability to communicate effectively with a wide range of individuals. Selectors will assess your written communication skills by the clarity and relevance of your response to selection criteria.

#### Areas To Draw on:

#### Oral

Public speaking, debating, tutorial discussions, presentations, asking questions, responding at public lectures or conferences, explaining solutions to convince audiences, facilitating discussions, customer service experience, placements.

#### Written

Research papers, written reports, essays, assignments, a thesis, story writing - if you have had work published it is important to cite this, case notes, business correspondence, minutes, or editing a newsletter/student magazine. Consider the variety of report formats - statistical, scientific/laboratory, business, use of graphs, presenting information in tables, or essay style. If you have been on a human services placement - program plans, assessment reports, lesson plans.

#### **Teamwork skills**

#### **Definition:**

Ability or potential to contribute effectively to a work team to achieve team goals. Ability to share information and work cooperatively with other team members where necessary. An understanding of team dynamics and factors that can affect team performance.

#### Areas to draw on:

Group work, supervision, leadership, goal setting, communication, listening, problem solving, participation, negotiation, maintenance, motivation, continual improvement, training, understanding and valuing of difference, using strengths of members, balancing weaknesses, sports, theatre, committee work, multidisciplinary team while on a placement, group assignments/presentations, organising an event, choir/ensemble.

It will also be helpful to demonstrate your understanding of roles within the team and to support this with examples of how you have effectively contributed as a team member.

## **Critical Self-Awareness**

#### **Definition:**

Ability to manage and evaluate your own performance. Awareness of personal capacity to contribute and a commitment to continuous professional development.

#### Areas to Draw on:

Being productive, honouring commitments, maintaining confidentiality, flexibility, ability to manage your own time, willingness to accept responsibility for work

allocated to you, ability to work with minimal supervision, ability to adapt to change, career aspirations, commitment to further development, and importantly, the ability to recognise your impact on others.

# **Problem-solving and innovation skills**

#### **Definition:**

Ability to analyse and synthesise information presented in a variety of forms (e.g., verbal and quantitative) to assist in problem solving. Ability to identify key issues, trends and interrelationships between issues. Ability to place information in a broader context and identify likely implications. Ability to generate new ideas and creative approaches to issues and practices.

#### Areas to draw on:

## Problem Solving

The capacity to understand and solve complex problems and provide analysis to use in informed decision making, the ability to research and analyse convincingly, identification of key issues, counter arguments, setting out ideas, ability to identify and collect information, use of internet, journals, books, research papers, reading and listening.

#### Innovation skills

Diversity of approach, open mindedness, the capacity to introduce new ideas and approaches into existing working practices, demonstration of original and lateral thinking, ability to adapt to change, going the extra step, making a difference, thinking on your feet, implementation of new ideas and activities, ability to adopt or devise new skills.

# Leadership and influencing skills

#### **Definition:**

Capacity or potential to lead and develop individuals and teams. Ability to provide direction and feedback to others. Ability to motivate, influence, and engage others in the achievement of goals.

#### Areas to draw on:

Cultivation of a productive working environment, supervision and coaching of others, providing leadership and direction, achievement of results, ability to shape strategic thinking, communicating with influence, illustrating personal drive and integrity, use of excitement and commitment to influence issues.

# A desire to work in the organisation/department/public sector Definition:

A genuine interest in, and commitment to work for the employer. An awareness of one's ability to make a contribution to the work of the organisation. A commitment to, and genuine interest in, for example, a public service career.

#### Areas to draw on:

Interested in the field of work the organisation is engaged in, knowledge of the broad goals, aims, objectives of the employer. How your studies apply, what contribution

you can make, what can the organisation do for you - i.e. training, career, etc (but don't appear selfish, also consider how you can contribute to the organisation's needs).

Additional information on the skills graduate employers are seeking is available from the Careers and Employer Liaison Centre website.

# Stage Three: Drafting And Writing - Making your selection criteria statement easy for the panel to read.

Start with a new document. You might like to use the heading: "Response to Selection Criteria" or "Evidence in Support of the Selection Criteria", "Responses to the Person Specification" or "Statement Addressing Selection Criteria". Also note the name of the position you are applying for, its reference number and include your name and contact details. You could number the criteria for easier reading.

Type out each of the criteria exactly as they are stated - you will need to address each criterion separately.

Start Drafting. Using each criterion as a separate heading write 1-3 paragraphs underneath it outlining how you meet it (this length is only a guideline and always check specific instructions from the employer). This helps the selection panel to know exactly to which criterion you are responding. Explain how your study, work, and other activities have given you the knowledge, skills and experience that meet the criteria and provide proof through examples. Sometimes the examples you use for the criteria may overlap, but try to provide a different slant in each case.

**Tip:** Do not limit your response simply to 'I can" or 'I have done' statements. For example "I have excellent problem solving skills." The Panel needs to shortlist applicants based on the merit principle. Anyone can say they 'have done this' or 'can do that'. That is why you need to provide examples to support your responses. For example, "My excellent problem solving skills are demonstrated by..."

Respond to the criteria in the exact order in which they appear.

NEVER LEAVE ANY POINTS BLANK - Be prepared to write something about your understanding of the relevance of the criterion. If you feel the criterion has been amply addressed earlier, then refer the reader to that specific section but do provide some comments relating to the criterion.

# When drafting and writing your responses, consider the following:

#### **VIEWPOINT**

The opening sentence should be a brief introductory statement that leads into the major content of your response. It is a short overview statement that clearly indicates that you meet the criterion. For certain criteria it could also reflect your understanding of the relevance/importance of that specific criterion.

#### **EXAMPLE/S**

Use the STAR Method to explain the major example/s you wish to provide and refer

to other supporting evidence as appropriate. Be specific - don't assume all panel members know what you are referring to. Give examples that demonstrate:

- your skills and abilities; and
- your potential to further develop relevant knowledge and skills.

Examples are not limited to work experience. Other areas of relevance for a graduate may include presentations, group assignments, voluntary work experience, participation in interest and community groups, etc. However, wherever possible, try to select the examples that are closest to the role that you are applying for.

#### **PROCESS**

Explain and detail any process that you undertook in the example/s you have provided. Examples of step-by-step processes could include:

- Steps taken to resolve a customer complaint.
- The steps involved in planning and managing a project effectively.
- The process used to negotiate with a client.

#### **SUCCESS**

Finish the example/s properly by concluding with a summary of how the example ended, such as: 'this resulted in...'; or 'I have improved...' The results or outcomes of your supporting statement will provide evidence of achievements.

Where possible, indicate how successfully you meet the criterion. You could do this by referring to feedback you've received from others, or things you've set up that are still being used. For example: 'A report I wrote about.... was well received by the.... Committee, and circulated as a discussion paper.'

# Finishing off the document

At the end of your selection criteria statement you may like to add any extra information that you believe is relevant to the job. Alternatively you could refer to it in your covering letter. Examples of things you could mention include:

- skills and abilities that you think are important and that haven't been mentioned in the selection criteria, e.g. 'flexibility', 'ability to maintain confidentiality'
- knowledge or experience you have which you believe is important to the job.

# **Stage Four: Polishing The Draft**

If you have time, leave it for a period, then come back to it with a fresh eye. Check for content - have you given the information that shows you are the best candidate for the job?

Finally, proof read and have someone else read it and give you feedback.

# Stage Five: Sending It Off

Send what documentation has been requested and provide requested photocopies (you may be asked to provide up to 4 copies of your application as well). Make sure you keep a copy for yourself!

Know the contents of your application. If you are called in for an interview you may be asked questions about the content of your application; thus reviewing your application is also good preparation for the interview.

**NOTE:** The good news is that certain criteria appear across most advertisements - e.g. team work, communication skills... so after awhile you will build up a set of responses to draw on and adapt to the specific needs of the employer and their organisation. So the time you invest now, will pay off in the longer term.

## 7. SELECTION CRITERIA FAQS

# How many examples should I use?

Depending on the criterion, it might be more appropriate to describe one major role or situation in some detail (for example, conflict resolution) using the STAR Method. Alternatively, you could provide a range of examples in which you have demonstrated the skills sought on a regular basis (for example, time management/organisational skills).

# How long should each Selection Criterion response be?

Always check if the employer has provided any instructions in their 'Guidelines for Applications' document – common guidelines can range from 2/3 page, 3/4 page, no more than 1/2 page, to 2-3 paragraphs! For Graduate recruitment online applications a word or character limit may be required: word limits can range from 150 words to 500 words.

# What if I don't have any evidence for a particular criterion?

If you don't directly meet the criterion, you can state your willingness to learn new things, your motivation, enthusiasm for challenges, initiative, etc; and you may want to provide examples of how you have done this previously. You could comment on the skills you can draw on from similar contexts. Convince the employer that you possess the potential to meet the criteria.

**Tip:** Try to avoid starting with a negative statement, for example: 'I don't have experience in XYZ database, but ...'. Instead, start with a positive statement, for example: "I have excellent computer knowledge and have demonstrated my ability to learn new software packages efficiently. This is evident through my current role where I had not previously used FileMaker Pro database and I am now proficient in its use. Although my experience is not directly with XYZ database, I am confident that I will rapidly develop competence in its usage."

## 8. PRESENTING YOUR CASE EFFECTIVELY

Writing in response to selection criteria is quite different to the writing you do for university assignments. This is a marketing document and you need to present yourself in the best possible light. Step into the shoes of the employer - they don't know you, they don't know about your experiences, and they may not know a lot about your course. You need to be explicit in showing how the nature of your experiences links with the employer's criteria.

When structuring your answer you may:

- Give details of one or two specific things you've done that are good examples to show how you obtained the relevant experience or knowledge required. For example: 'I was responsible for organising a conference attended by 180 delegates. This involved....'
- 2. Quantify your experience as appropriate: e.g. number of years of experience, number of staff supervised, etc. For example: 'I am responsible for supervising the day-to-day work of five staff....'; 'I delivered a presentation to a community audience of 80 people.'
- 3. Demonstrate your knowledge of a particular area by outlining key information you have learned.
- 4. Refer to you own attitude or philosophy in relation to a particular quality required, though it will be important to ensure that this is aligned to the organisation to which you are applying.

Here are some examples of phrasing that illustrate how you can sell the benefits of your experience:

- I gained experience in team work through the preparation and delivery of a presentation on ...
- Involvement in the ABC University Committee has enabled me to develop effective business meeting skills, the ability to confidently express views, work effectively with committee members to achieve (cite outcomes)...

- My report on Z Topic involved extensive community consultation, liaison with local council and (relevant) agencies. The project culminated with a presentation to the Community in which research results were presented, questions addressed, and ...
- As President of the (Name) Organisation, I have developed high level communication and leadership skills through activities such as ...
- My experiences as an orderly at Z Hospital have enabled me to develop effective team communication skills and an empathic manner with patients.

# Tip:

Language to avoid: 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 that could reduce credibility should also be avoided (e.g. some, a little, limited, somewhat, only, quite, unfortunately). Do not use passive language in your application for example; 'I believe', 'I was required to...', 'I had to...'

**Language to use:** Words such as: very, several, many, good/ excellent. Use active language for example; 'I am/ do/ performed ...', 'I did/ managed/ administered ...', 'I have experience in ...' 'My knowledge of ... includes ...'

#### 9. SHOWCASING THE PROCESS: AN EXAMPLE

Let's look at how you can go from your brainstormed notes to a STAR example then to your polished response.

# Well-developed written communication skills.

#### **NOTES**

- Volunteer Research Administration Officer at XYZ Organisation designed and compiled a monthly newsletter
- Writing of university assignments for Law/ Arts degree essays, reports legal, creative writing
- Excellent results in assignments (cite GPA or overall Credit average, etc)
- English Major, topics on Editing
- Try to edit everything especially if important
- Writers Club Committee.

#### STAR METHOD

Situation – Role as Research Administration 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. Led to improved lines of communication between managers and the Research Support Unit.

#### **RESPONSE**

The selection criterion response can now be drafted, working through the **Viewpoint** – **Example/s** – **Process** – **Success** structure. Note how this sample response integrates a range of examples where written communication skills have been demonstrated on a regular basis over the course of a degree, as well as an in-depth STAR example from a particular project undertaken for work experience.

# Well-developed written communication skills.

My ability to communicate effectively in writing has been demonstrated through completion of a combined Law/ Arts degree (with a major in English) and 3 month's experience as a Research Assistant at the XYZ Organisation.

University study has given me systematic training in communicating professionally in writing. The quality of my work is demonstrated by my consistent achievement of credits/distinctions for assignments across both legal and creative domains. Topics in 'Publishing and Editing' and 'Professional English in Law' have led to my strong commitment to rigorously editing all my written work prior to submission.

Through undertaking a volunteer work experience placement at the XYZ Organisation, I had the opportunity to further develop my written communication skills in a corporate setting. In my role as Research Administration Officer I was allocated a project designed 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. Importantly, this initiative resulted in enhanced communication and regular knowledge sharing between managers and the Research Support Unit.

In addition, through my role on the University Writers Club Committee, I have also developed skills in preparing succinct and accurate minutes on a monthly basis. As a

result of these diverse experiences, I can contribute the ability to communicate in writing at a very professional level to this role.

#### 10. EXAMPLES OF SELECTION CRITERIA RESPONSES

**Notes on the examples:** The important thing with the following examples is to look at how they have been structured, how the evidence is presented, and the phrasing that has been used to achieve this. Whether you are writing about communication or teamwork skills or more technical criteria, the same writing style applies to effectively present your claims and evidence. Note that in some cases, bullet points have been used to present lists of information.

#### Qualifications.

I will complete my three-year degree in Environmental Science at Flinders University in November 2009. To date I have maintained a grade point average of 5.5 out of 7 (see attached academic transcript). This degree has involved several key topics of relevance to this role including .... In addition, a major project within my degree has involved investigating the impact of introduced species on native flora and fauna in Greenhill Conservation Park. This project is contributing to the State Government's Indigenous Species initiative.

# Well-developed oral communication skills as evidenced by the ability to liaise with a range of clients at all levels.

I possess well-developed communication skills that I have gained throughout my working career. In particular, my role as Administration Support Officer at XZY Corporation involved liaising on a daily basis with senior managers, staff at all levels, recruitment agencies and members of the public. Most of the communication was face-to-face and by telephone and as I was the first point of contact for the organisation it was very important that I was professional, courteous and helpful in my interactions. I was frequently commended for the professional manner in which I carried out these duties.

For example, one of my key responsibilities was to recruit office support staff for various areas within XZY Corporation. Senior Managers would phone me to request a new staff member and I would personally meet with them to discuss their requirements. I would update the job description and brief the agency on all aspects of the job to ensure they understood our requirements.

This process required well-developed communication skills to ensure I acquired an accurate understanding of the job and clearly communicated this to the agency. As a result, highly suitable applicants were referred for interview. In recognition of my positive interpersonal skills my temporary position was extended for 6 months beyond my initial contract.

Adapted from: www.csiro.au/

# Experience.

Experience relevant to this role was developed through working as a Research Assistant at CSIRO in a voluntary capacity. In this position, I was involved in a project on quantifying the release of carbon from soils and organic amendments. As a consequence I have gained experience in:

- maintenance of laboratory incubation experiments
- soil physical measurements
- titrimetric measurements of CO2 in alkali
- various plant and soil analyses with a special emphasis on the use of mass spectrometry to measure N and C isotopes
- scintillation counting techniques for radioactive isotope analysis.

My responsibilities also included the maintenance of a growth cabinet system for the production of plants labelled with non-radioactive isotopes. This project enhanced my skills in performing accurate observations and note taking, along with generating and analysing data.

Further research experience has been developed through my Science degree, in particular, my major project on the level of salinity in the Lower River Murray. This involved regular water sampling and analysis. Sediment samples were also analysed. Data analysis was undertaken utilising ...... My final report was published on the web (www.website.com.au...) and a paper presented to the River Murray Catchment Water Management Board.

# Ability to prioritise workload to meet deadlines and achieve goals.

Using an organised and systematic approach, I have successfully met all deadlines for my academic work throughout the four years of my degree, whilst managing my time effectively across work and sporting commitments.

In particular, in my Honours year, it was essential to develop and manage a work plan for all activities within my project. This included defining a timeline for completion of each stage of my thesis whilst maintaining the flexibility needed to adjust these goals as necessary, for example, after delays in processing my ethics application. Allocating time to plan the project phases of my thesis ensured an efficient approach overall.

To achieve this I used Outlook Calendar and a paper diary as a backup to prioritise daily tasks and track monthly goals, and outcomes. I kept track of each thesis task in order of priority and project timeline. Starting with the tasks with the closest deadline and the highest priority, I scheduled times in my calendar for me to work on them to ensure I met my project goals. I remained focused on my goals by reviewing my calendar on a daily and weekly basis so I was clear about what I had achieved and what actions need to be prioritised next. I also used this calendar to record my twice weekly social netball commitments, as well as my work shifts at Subway.

This experience demonstrates my self-discipline, energy and enthusiasm towards my work and has provided me with the organisational ability needed to succeed in the public sector.

# Knowledge of statistics or quantitative social science, and research techniques, and ability to apply them in the fields of health or social services.

My knowledge of social research methods and statistical analysis has been developed to a high level through my degree in ...., where I achieved a Distinction Average. Specialised training was gained from 4 topics on statistics/ research methods. These involved undertaking (e.g. univariate, bivariate, multivariate) analyses using SPSS, interpreting the results of these analyses and preparing brief reports on the findings. For example, in one report I examined (the links between ageing and health status). This involved ... I am also familiar with (e.g. agestandardisation, factor analysis, logistic regression) techniques as a result of....

My degree also included relevant topics on (e.g. public health, population sampling, qualitative research methods, women's studies). These subjects enabled me to gain a general awareness of health and/ or welfare issues. In particular my work on (e.g. human behaviours in stressful situations) involved appraising the extent to which research evidence supported some of the major debates in literature. This was achieved through ... My ability to apply these skills in this sector is demonstrated by my experience in ... at ... organisation. As a result I am confident that I can competently apply my social research skills to your research endeavours in the areas of....

# Administrative and Computing Skills.

I have successfully worked in a number of administrative roles. In all of these roles I have performed general office duties such as handling telephone enquiries, greeting visitors, arranging meetings, filing, photocopying, sorting, and distributing mail. In my current role I have drawn on my administrative experience to suggest a number of improvements to increase office efficiency and professionalism to our client base. Each of these suggestions has been implemented, for example....

The majority of my work is conducted using a computer, and I am competent in the usage of a variety of software and hardware. This includes Office 2000 (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook Express), PageMaker and Filemaker Pro. I have over four years' experience using Microsoft Word on a daily basis to produce letters, memos, reports, and tables (my typing speed is 70 words per minute). I regularly use advanced features of the program, such as.... As my current position required me to attain a more advanced competency with computers, I recently undertook a computer course on....

# Responding to Criteria on Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare, Equal Opportunity etc

**Example:** 'Knowledge of the principles and practice of OHSW, Equal Opportunity, the PSM Act, employee conduct standards and diversity appropriate to the requirements of the position'.

To respond to these types of criteria consider the following:

- Read the job description to understand what these criteria mean in the context of the duties of the position that you are applying for.
- Visit the organisation's website to familiarise yourself with their policies and procedures.
- Remember that as a student at Flinders University, you are in an organisation that
  is "committed to achieving equality of opportunity in education and employment and
  has policies to ensure students and staff are not subjected to harassment or
  discrimination on the grounds of sex, sexuality, race, disability, age, marital status,
  pregnancy, political, or religious beliefs."
- Did your induction to any Course Placements or Volunteering cover such matters of organisational policy?
- In your casual work have you had any training, or even informal input on these practices?
- Have you had training in Occupational Health and Safety at Flinders University as it relates to fieldwork or scientific laboratory work?
- If you have been a tutor, science demonstrator, Residential Tutor etc, your training is likely to have included these aspects.
- Have you studied any topics on these areas?

#### In your response:

- Briefly reflect your understanding of what these criteria mean.
- Reflect on how you have respected and applied this understanding in various roles and contexts.
- Write about how you will respect this criterion in the workplace of your target employer.

# Knowledge of Occupational Health, Safety & and Welfare policies and procedures and their application in the workplace.

As an Assistant in Nursing at \_\_\_\_ Hospital I always observed the OH&S procedures and practices required to ensure a safe working environment. This included attending mandatory safety training programs on ... and .... On a daily basis I correctly used lifting equipment, safety devices and personal protective equipment such as:

- A;
- B;
- C; etc.

I also received positive feedback on my knowledge and application of these policies and procedures from my Clinical Supervisor when on placement at \_\_\_\_ Hospital. As a result, I am able to ...

#### A current SA Drivers License

Even a criterion such as this can provide you with an opportunity to market your skills and experience. This can be important for roles that will involve driving either in metropolitan areas, or in rural/remote regions.

# Rural/Remote example

My current South Australian (Class C) drivers licence was gained six years ago, in Loxton. As a country driver, my driving has included extensive experience on bitumen, metalled and unmetalled/dirt roads. The additional risk involved in country-based driving was fully covered in my drivers instruction training, and since holding my licence I have not been involved in any car accidents; either in country South Australia or the Adelaide metropolitan region. My mix of both country and metropolitan driving experience, with additional off-road exposure allows me to understand the importance of preparation and planning when driving in remote South Australia.

#### 11. THE TWO-PAGE FORMAT

As discussed earlier, a developing trend with some public sector organisations is to request candidates to provide in the covering letter information about your skills, experience and knowledge relating to the essential and desirable requirements as detailed in the Person Specification. In some cases it will be indicated that this cover letter should be up to 2 pages. This approach entails adapting and expanding on the usual 1 page Cover Letter (refer to the booklet: Writing Your CV/Resumes and Cover Letter). The cover letter should clearly state the job vacancy number, position title, your name and your contact details.

As with the more traditional approach of responding to each selection criterion separately, you will need to review the Job application documents, such as the job

description, person specification etc to develop an understanding of the role, and the application criteria.

In addition to your expanded letter, you will need to provide a very tailored resume, specific to the duties of this position, the necessary attributes and criteria and the organisation.

Always check and observe the specific instructions provided.

# **Example Person Specification (Qualifications / Experience / Skills):**

#### **Essential**

- Approved degree in Speech Pathology
- Eligibility for membership of Speech Pathology Association of Australia

#### Desirable

- Clinical competency and theoretical knowledge in the assessment and management of communication and swallowing disorders within the acute, rehabilitation and/or aged sectors
- Excellent written and verbal communication skills
- Excellent organisational and time management skills
- Demonstrated ability to work within a multidisciplinary team
- Knowledge of and participation in continuous quality improvement processes
- Commitment to continuing professional development and clinical research

# **Example of a 2 page Response Framework**

Having successfully completed my Degree in Speech Pathology and with eligibility for membership of the Speech Pathology Association of Australia, I am writing to apply for the position of Speech Pathologist advertised in the Advertiser on ....

Within my course I enjoyed the opportunity to ..., and to develop my clinical experience in ... This has enhanced my keen interest in pursuing a career ...

Through placements at ... I have had the opportunity to provide diagnostic and review assessment of ... in settings ranging from X to Y. In particular, at the ABC Agency I managed a caseload of X clients, ranging in age from X-Y who presented with clinical conditions such as ... Utilising assessment techniques such as ... I have ... In addition to designing and implementing suitable therapy programs for ... I have furthered my knowledge base (established through topics such as ABC) and clinical competency through ... In addition, placements at ... and ..., have enabled me to

further my experience working with  $\dots$  and responding to associated complications such as  $\dots$  My placement summaries note my  $\dots$ 

Throughout my Speech Pathology placements I have drawn upon my excellent written communication skills to..., in addition to preparing succinct assessment reports and discharge summaries. In liaising effectively with patients, other health professionals and family members my verbal communication skills (including ...), have been developed to a high level. My involvement in various community volunteering roles in the aged care sector and five years of customer service experience has also strengthened my ability to establish rapport and maintain a professional communication style.

Using an organised and systematic approach my workload, I have both successfully managed my time effectively in a clinical setting whilst also meeting all deadlines for my coursework, evidenced by .... To achieve this I use Outlook Calendar, and a paper diary as a backup, to prioritise daily tasks and track monthly goals, and outcomes. Through reviewing my calendar on a daily and weekly basis I am able to

My ability to work within a multidisciplinary team is demonstrated by ... In my placement at XYZ, I worked closely with other team members such as ... to ensure that ...A key example of my ability to provide of multidisciplinary management of patients is when I ...

Furthermore, I am keen to be involved in continuous quality improvement processes. While on placement with YYY clinic I worked with my supervisor to develop a client survey asking about satisfaction with, and efficiency of, our services. This involved ... As a result ... I am enthusiastic in my commitment to continuing professional development and have recently participated in professional development activities including ... I have found my regular meetings with placement supervisors invaluable for my clinical development. My commitment to improving and updating my knowledge through clinical research was recognised in my placement report from ABC Agency ... I have made it my practice to regularly refer to ... XYZ sources.

. . .

Don't forget to comment on why you would like to work for this particular organisation State your reasons for applying to this particular organisation and then proceed to your final paragraph.

## 12. WRITING TO A WORD LIMIT

As discussed on previously, you may have to conform to a word limit when responding to Selection Criteria. Your ability to present examples in concise form is paramount! Here are some examples:

# **Demonstrated Project Management Skills (150 words)**

My project management skills are well demonstrated through the completion of a major research project for my Honours Degree, and volunteering at CommunityCare where I developed a grant submission. The latter experience involved developing a project plan setting out the major milestones of the project and developing a GANT Chart to outline the time frames for each milestone. Phases in this 10-week project included: identifying the funding sources, background research (qualitative and quantitative data), budget preparation, and writing the proposal. I delivered 2 presentations to the CommunityCare team on my progress. The Fundraising Officer approved my proposal and as a result we were awarded \$5000 for new equipment to support community programs. My Honours project on community development practices in regional Australia involved the effective management of all project phases, from obtaining ethics approval to undertaking the literature review, conducting 30 semi-structured interviews and the analysis and reporting of results.

# The ability to work in a team to achieve project deadlines (150 words)

My project-based teamwork skills are demonstrated though participation in 12 group projects at university. For example, I worked in a team of 6 students with a timeline of 4 weeks to complete a project exploring the links between ageing and health. My role was to collate the research undertaken by the team and integrate this into the final report. This involved liaising with and supporting each team member, and reporting on progress at each meeting.

The effectiveness of this strategy was apparent when two team members left due to illness, as I could rapidly review the tasks remaining and reallocate these amongst the group. I used my negotiating skills and ability to foster enthusiasm to ensure we functioned cohesively to deliver the project report on time. I coordinated our project presentation and we achieved a credit grade. My community volunteering, employment and sporting involvements also demonstrate my team work skills.

# Application forms and selection criteria? What is the difference?

Graduate applications (including online applications) can involve either responding to selection criteria, or responding to specific questions about your skills (Describe a time when...). There are subtle differences in each form of application. For more information, refer to the booklet *Winning Graduate Applications*.

Compare the selection criterion - 'Demonstrated project management skills' and the application form question - 'Provide an example of a time when you had to manage a complex project'. In your response to the selection criterion, you may present a few examples, for the application form question, you will describe one example as requested, within the word limit.

#### 13. THE COVER LETTER

The cover letter is still an important part of your application, though the main focus of the panel will be on your responses to the Criteria. You can use your letter to highlight your interest in the position, why you want to work for the organisation, and what makes you a suitable candidate.

- State where and when you saw the position advertised; and other information about the position, such as its classification, position number, and the location of the position.
- List all attachments (for example; Responses to Selection Criteria, Referees, Resume, Academic Transcript).
- Finish with a positive close (e.g. "I look forward to the opportunity to expand on my written application at interview." Or "I look forward to discussing my application with you in more detail at an interview.")

## 14. CONCLUSION

Always keep the selector/s in mind and aim to make it easy for them to assess your application. Whatever the outcome of the recruitment process, ask for feedback on your application, and ways you might improve it in future.

#### 15. SOURCES

Graduate Opportunities 2009, Graduate Careers Australia, 2009; Unigrad graduate jobs guide 2009, Unimail, 2009; Hints and Tips for Writing Public Service Applications (Department of Defence); www.bom.gov.au/careers/guide2SC.shtml; www.osds.uwa.edu.au/about/publications/afip/section\_3/criteria; www.apsc.gov.au/publications07/crackingthecodefactsheet5.htm; www.pir.sa.gov.au/pirsa/about\_pirsa/employment; www.riverlandhealth.com.au; http://www.audit.sa.gov.au/recruitment.htm; www.aussieresumes.com/selection-criteria.htm;

http://www.quintcareers.com/interview\_question\_database/interview\_questions\_13.ht ml

#### APPENDIX ONE: SELECTION CRITERIA STATEMENT EXAMPLE

Note – The length and complexity of Selection Criteria responses varies with the level of the position. Graduate roles mayrequire more information, but this example illustrates the layout of the document.

Administrative Assistant, School of Business (Ref: 48/06)

Adapted from: The University of Western Australia, Organisational and Staff

**Development Services** 

URL: www.osds.uwa.edu.au/about/publications/afip/section 3/criteria

# **QUALIFICATIONS**

# Year 12 or equivalent competency

I successfully completed Year 12 in 1988. I am currently studying part-time towards a Diploma in Business Administration at TAFE.

## **Excellent verbal and interpersonal communication skills**

In the positions I have held over the past ten years I have been the first point of contact for internal and external clients, both on the phone and face-to-face. At present I liaise with staff at all levels in the University, including members of the Executive, deans, heads of school, academic and general staff members, and students. I answer general enquiries, provide information on the section's policies and procedures and welcome visitors to the centre. In 2008 I attended an interpersonal skills workshop that assisted me in dealing with sensitive situations. I have been complimented by clients and colleagues on my helpful manner and tactful handling of difficult situations.

# Relevant office experience

I have worked at the University for the past six years, and previously in administrative positions in the private sector. My experience working in a human resources department is particularly relevant to this position. I have effectively performed the full range of office duties, including handling enquiries, word processing, arranging meetings and venues, managing diaries, filing, photocopying, sorting mail, etc.

## **SELECTION CRITERIA**

# Good organisational skills

Good organisational ability is essential to my present position, as I frequently arrange meetings, seminars and presentations, as well as travel and accommodation for overseas visitors. I enjoy handling a wide range of tasks and meet daily and weekly deadlines, including payment of casual timesheets and invoices. In 2009 I was responsible for assisting in the organising of a conference attended by 200 delegates. My role involved arranging advertising, handling registrations, booking

venues, accommodation, catering and entertainment, and ensuring that the conference ran smoothly. The event was successful and several delegates commented on how well it had been organised. I have since been asked to organise another conference.

## Good written communication skills

In my current job I write and respond to emails from staff and students on a daily basis. I regularly produce letters and memos on behalf of my supervisor. I have also written two reports on the use of computers within the school. Last year I developed a leaflet about the school to help in the induction of new staff. Colleagues have said that they found the leaflet clear, concise and easy to read. I also assisted in writing a procedures manual for the school, which has been well received by staff. The one-day workshop I attended recently on 'Writing for Impact: How to write clearly, concisely and forcefully' has further enhanced my skills.

# Ability to use initiative

As my supervisor is required to be away from the office several times a week, I frequently work independently and use my initiative to handle situations in her absence. Examples of things I have initiated in the past include a new system for handling course enrolments, which has resulted in less paperwork and quicker processing of applications; and a spreadsheet system for monitoring expenditure of departmental accounts. Both systems have been operating successfully for the last two years.

# Ability to work as part of a team

I have worked in teams as large as 50 and others as small as three. I have always worked well with other team members and enjoyed a good rapport with them, both at work and socially. I work closely with other team members to ensure that seminars are organised effectively, that reports are distributed on time and that the office runs smoothly. I often volunteer to assist others in the team when there are deadlines to be met, and ensure that I keep others informed of issued that may be relevant to them.

# **Accounts experience**

I am currently responsible for the payment of all accounts in my school and have been for the past three years. This includes raising purchase orders and T Forms, payment of invoices, checking of monthly account printouts, and monitoring expenditure against the budget. I am familiar with *Peoplesoft*, the University's financial records system, which I access electronically on a weekly basis to monitor account transactions and to run reports.

# Proficiency in a range of computing skills

I have used computers, both at work and home for the past ten years and am able to use a wide range of software packages, including the full suite of Microsoft Office products. I use Microsoft Word on a daily basis to produce letters, reports, mail merge documents, and tables. I have set up spreadsheets in Microsoft Excel for budgets and can create formulas and pivot tables. I have set up two large databases

using Microsoft Access, and regularly create tables, queries and reports. I use Microsoft Outlook on a daily basis for all my email, calendar and diary needs. I regularly set up and maintain distribution lists and filters. I use Explorer to search for information, both within the University and beyond, and have experience of editing web pages using HTML editor and MySource. I recently attended a MySource workshop.

#### **Additional Information**

I regularly use a range of other University computer systems, including Alesco, TRIM, and the student records system. I am familiar with the University's policies and procedures in relation to safety and health, and equity and diversity, including family-friendly policies, workforce diversity, harassment and workplace bullying.

#### **APPENDIX TWO**

Note – Very occasionally, some employer's Guidelines for Applicants documentation may stipulate the style of the written response should be in 'dot-point' or 'bullet-point format'.

Use this format *only* if requested to do so by the employer, otherwise, use the prose form outlined in this booklet. Here is an example of responding to selection criteria using bullet points.

# Demonstrated high quality verbal and written communication skills

My high quality verbal communication skills have been demonstrated by:

- Consulting widely with members in my role as union delegate (from August 2003 to current) by speaking at union meetings, representing members' views at consultative meetings and briefing working parties on current issues;
- Chairing department section meetings and presenting staff issues to management;
- Successfully working with a range of medical, nursing and allied health staff at the Migrant Health Service that primarily caters for people of non-English speaking background.

My high quality written communication skills have been demonstrated by: In my role as a Policy Officer in the Department of Human Services from April 2004-December 2008:

- Collating research summaries for management
- Preparing monthly briefings for the Chief executive
- Drafting ministerial;
- Writing letters in response to requests from the public.

My written work receives little amendment from supervisors or peers.



# CAREERS AND EMPLOYER LIAISON CENTRE

Visit us at the Student Centre, Level 3 Tel: 8201 2832 Email: careers@flinders.edu.au www.flinders.edu.au/careers/student

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