

## Addressing selection criteria

*Selection criteria refer to personal attributes (knowledge, skills, and experience) deemed to be essential or desirable in an applicant to successfully undertake the duties involved in a position.*

Criteria are normally written in statements like 'Excellent oral and written communication skills'; 'Capacity to work under pressure and meet deadlines' (etc) and are usually associated with applications for positions in the public sector.

Selection criteria are usually determined by the selection panel some time prior to the process of recruitment. Applying for a position frequently (but not always) involves addressing selection criteria in writing and usually there is a clear indication about which criteria are considered *Essential* and which are *Desirable*.

### Why are they used?

With the emphasis in more recent times on equity, accountability, and equal employment opportunity, selection criteria have assumed considerable importance. *Equity* demands that the only attributes considered are those significant to successful performance in the position. *Accountability* means that panels are anxious to prove they can show why one applicant was chosen ahead of another - based on relative merits as measured against the selection criteria.

### How to address selection criteria

Your impulse when confronted with selection criteria maybe to say, "Yes, I can do that ... and that ... that too...." and proceed to write accordingly! The key to successfully responding to selection criteria is to support your claims by **citing the evidence**.

Supporting your claims can be successfully achieved in three ways:

- By referring to situations where you obtained or successfully used the knowledge/skill/attribute, or to situations where you obtained the relevant experience. This is usually the most powerful way of supporting your claims. You need to be quite specific in referring to the situation or situations.
- By proving that you are familiar with the knowledge or discipline by outlining the key points of what you know or have learned. This may be important where specific knowledge of a particular discipline is required or where there is no other way for you to demonstrate that you have the required knowledge.
- By referring to your attitude, philosophy or practice in relation to the criterion (eg for a criterion referring to the importance of 'written communication skills' you might refer to the fact that you believe strongly in the importance of editing your work).

### A step-by-step approach

Here is one way of going about getting your responses to selection criteria on paper.

- **Read respective selection criteria for the position, underlining each area of skill or experience required in each criterion.**

This is helpful because sometimes a number of different requirements are to be found in one criterion statement. A simple example is in the common criterion '*Demonstrated oral and written communication skills*'. Both oral and written skills need to be addressed and will usually be

Supported using different evidence.

- **Review each of the selection criteria in turn, noting the experiences you have had that support your claims.**

You may end up with notes for each point similar to the list in the example provided later in this article. It is a good idea to jot down the evidence for all criteria before attempting to answer any one. You will often find the tendency to call on the same piece of evidence in supporting different criteria. This is not necessarily a negative; however knowing just how many times you will use each piece of evidence helps to structure your paragraphs so the repetition is not emphasised in successive statements.

- **Write a first draft.**

At its simplest this task involves **(1) stating that you meet the criterion** and **(2) writing sentences citing the evidence you have already noted that proves or demonstrates you meet the criterion**. Use simple and straightforward sentences to support your claims. You can always re-model sentences in second and subsequent drafts. It's also helpful for the person reviewing your application if you write the actual words of the criterion you're addressing above each response.

- **When you have finished your draft, polish the result.**

This may involve substituting one word for three or four words (succinctness is important), cutting back on the length of sentences, re-modelling sentences, moving phrases and sentences to different parts of the section all in the name of clarifying your expression and creating balance. 'Polishing' may also mean having someone else review your document before considering it a final version.

## An example

This example has been written specifically to illustrate some of the points made above.

### Selection criterion:

*Excellent written communication skills in particular the ability to write agendas and minutes, and experience in the formulation of policies.*

Notes (the ones you do beforehand)

- Good results in Years 11 and 12 English
- The Steele Rudd Memorial Competition for Creative Writing (+ number of applicants)
- Writing of uni assignments and reports
- Excellent results in assignments (nearly always Credits and Distinctions)
- Tutor in course 'Report Writing' - 2 years (paid)
- "I try to edit everything - especially if important"
- Actual experience writing minutes and agendas (Interact; uni debating)
- Shorthand and typing (although not a requirement in the selection criterion, you might add this, realising it would be useful)

### Applicant's response

*I have been systematically trained in the art of writing assignments and reports during secondary and tertiary education. As a result I have excellent written communication skills. My claims here are supported by consistently good results in university assignments - grades achieved have been mostly Credits and Distinctions. Further, I have been invited by the coordinator of first year courses to tutor students in the year-long foundation subject, 'Report Writing'. This is a paid tutoring position.*

*My writing skills were acknowledged well before embarking on university studies. At the end of Year 12, I was runner-up in a State-wide essay writing competition, The Steele Rudd Memorial Competition for Creative Writing. This is an annual competition and attracts Year 12 writers from all over Queensland. I also received the award of 'Very High Achievement' for high school English in both Year 10 and Year 12.*

*As I believe part the art of good writing is a commitment to the discipline of editing, I have adopted the routine of rigorously editing all my written work, especially items of particular importance. This practice has further enhanced my writing ability by cultivating a greater consciousness of my strengths and weaknesses in written communication.*

*As indicated in responses to earlier criteria, I am experienced in the written aspects of meeting procedures. At school I held the post of President of the Interact Club and I was Secretary of The Debating Society in my*

*second year at university. As a result I have experience with the preparation of agendas and the writing of minutes. I also have some shorthand skills (from Year 10) and sound keyboard skills.*

## Point form

It can also be appropriate to write your responses in point form rather than in sentences and paragraphs. It is easy to see how the ideas you list before commencing this task may be further illustrated using points.

There are advantages in both approaches. Sentences can provide a good medium for persuasive writing. Furthermore responding in sentences and paragraphs will be easier for some because it is what they're used to. On the other hand, paragraphs of information take longer to read and keeping the person reviewing your responses 'on side' is important! There is no doubt that points can make easier reading which makes writing in point form worth considering.

The way you choose to respond will ultimately be a matter of personal preference. Perhaps try writing a response to one criterion in both forms, and review the result; then decide which way is best for you.

## Transferable skills

When you respond to selection criteria, you frequently need to assert that you have a skill on the basis of having developed that skill elsewhere.

Transferable skills are skills you obtain in a particular job or area of employment that are useful (can be transferred) to other unrelated areas of employment.

## Communication skills

The student checkout operator who learns and maintains good communication with grocery customers, may on that basis claim the 'good communication skills' required for a graduate position.

## Working under pressure

A dispatch clerk who works under pressure keeping up the flow of outgoing goods may ultimately use this skill in the high pressure environment of the stock exchange floor.

## Supervision of staff

The experience of supervising staff in any role is transferable to any other role where supervisory skills are required.

## Staff training

If you (even informally) train new staff on how to do the job, this skill is transferable to other positions where you need to coach staff in the duties of a position.

Understanding the notion of transferable skills is useful when responding to selection criteria.

## Resources

For an in-depth look at this subject, the books 'How to Address Selection Criteria' by Ann Villiers and 'Write a Winning Job Application' by Lloyd White.

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