

CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

# STAND OUT SELECTION CRITERIA



“The secret of joy in work is contained in one word – excellence.  
To know how to do something well is to enjoy it.”

**Pearl Buck**

# SELECTION CRITERIA

## KEY SELECTION CRITERIA

If you are applying for government positions (and even private vacancies) you will come across selection criteria. Selection criteria can be very difficult to do - we recommend you attempt a draft then book an appointment to review with one of our team at the Career Development Centre.

Selection criteria are developed from the job description and are questions posed to the candidate where the goal is to display specific knowledge, skills, abilities and particular attributes the role requires. It is an opportunity to provide evidence of where you have used a particular skill/s and how this makes you a capable candidate. The great thing about selection criteria is that there are usually multiple roles you have had and skills you have used in one given experience - capitalise on that! For example, a common criterion that is relevant to many roles is: "Well developed oral and written communication skills." In this example, you may have had much experience you wish to evidence in different settings - study, work or community involvement, each with its own role, formal or informal.

In saying this, the process of applying and answering selection criteria is none the less challenging, lengthy and tedious as you do need to dedicate time to ensure that the answer is meaningful and relevant with the space you have. Here, we will provide you with some tips on how to approach answering criteria and a little background.

## HOW TO APPROACH ANSWERING SELECTION CRITERIA

### AN EXAM METHODOLOGY

Selection criteria can be approached with an exam methodology - that is a problem solving methodology. Just as in an exam, where you are asked to answer a question you need to present your case in a well thought out response. In relation to selection criteria, ask yourself:

- What does the employer want to know?
- Are the criteria asking for an example of a skill, knowledge, qualification or experience?
- How many skills have I used in this one question?
- Where have I used this before in the past? Was it an informal or formal role?
- Is my example the best possible example for this criterion?

### THINK REPORT LAYOUT

The formation of the selection criteria can take that of a report style layout. It needs to be structured, with an introduction, middle and end using clear language to answer the question. You can use dot points in your answer for ease of clarification for the reader. Place your name, position title and vacancy number and page number on each page as a header or footer and avoid using fancy fonts to highlight headings.

### PUTTING IT TOGETHER

Your answers to the selection criteria are a sample of your behaviour. The panel will make an assumption on your suitability for the role based on the information presented. The goal is to be able to guide the reader through your thinking and presentation of evidence, thus linking the answer effectively rather than just stating the situation and the corresponding skills as listed in the criteria assuming this is self evident for the employer.

It's like completing an algebra problem. If you only present the answer, even though it may be right, you are not showing how you worked out the problem to come to that conclusion and it's not primarily what the assessors want to see. The assessors are much more interested to see your ability to break the problem down and link your evidence to the answer. It is the same with selection criteria.

## SIX STEPS TO WRITING WINNING SELECTION CRITERIA

<b>STEP 1</b>	<p><b>Heading and opening statement</b> Here, start with the title of the position and your name. For example:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">STATEMENT ADDRESSING THE SELECTION CRITERIA FOR THE POSITION OF PROJECT MANAGER</p>
<b>STEP 2</b>	<p><b>Subheadings</b> If there are both essential and desirable criteria, use these as main headings. Beneath these headings list each criterion as it appears in the selection criteria document.</p>
<b>STEP 3</b>	<p><b>Identify what the organisation is looking for</b> Analyse each criterion and use markers for future reference. For example, highlight key skills and underline skills or attributes that deserve to be broken down further into specific facets. For example, communication skills can include meanings such as verbal, non verbal, negotiating, mediating, persuading and listening.</p>
<b>STEP 4</b>	<p><b>Match the criterion to your skills set</b> For each skill set as highlighted in step 3, brainstorm where you have used these skills from past experience to evidence your claims. Your experience does not need to be only work related it can be gathered from a variety of places including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study</li> <li>• Community involvement</li> <li>• Voluntary work</li> <li>• Work experience / Internships / Clerkships</li> <li>• Awards</li> <li>• Employment</li> <li>• Research and publications</li> <li>• On campus activities</li> </ul> <p>Things to consider here are that even though you may not have experience with a particular task, you may have performed similar work but in a different environment. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working in a voluntary capacity for Youth on the Street may give you transferable communication skills that relates to marketing and advertising to the youth.</li> <li>• Working as a food and beverage attendant in the hospitality industry may give you transferable skills in prioritising tasks, organisational skills, customer service and working in a fast paced environment that relates to being able to self manage in a corporate environment.</li> </ul>

<p><b>STEP 5</b></p>	<p><b>Expand on step 4 - provide evidence that supports what you say</b></p> <p>In this step you will need to elaborate on the skills you have brainstormed in Step 4. This means being very specific with the skills in order to support your statement and convincingly demonstrate you meet the criterion.</p> <p>Use an introductory sentence, asserting the skill.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For example: "I possess a high level of skill in..."</li> </ul> <p>Support the statement by indicating relevant skills and experience through describing your most predominant responsibilities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For example: "In my role of..., I have..."</li> </ul> <p>Indicate the extent of your experience if you have had a lot of it. This can be a number of years experience, amount of money saved for the organisation, number of staff supervised, or number of people catered for in an event.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For example: "As team leader of McDonald's I was responsible for the day to day work of 10 staff which involved..."</li> </ul> <p>Provide details for the above statement with what was involved in you undertaking a particular task thus guiding the reader through your actions and specific relevant skills that are linked back to the criteria.</p> <p>Where you are able, further support this statement with evidence, showing how you successfully meet the criterion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For example: "A report I wrote about _____ was well received by the _____ and circulated as a discussion paper."</li> </ul> <p>Mention any qualifications or training you have to further support your statement, especially if you don't have a lot of experience.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For example: "I have completed an advanced course in MS Excel in order to..."</li> </ul>
<p><b>STEP 6</b></p>	<p><b>Critique your work</b></p> <p>Have someone look over the answers to the criteria. Feel free to make an appointment with the Career Development Centre to do so.</p> <p>Things to look out for include:</p> <p>Have you used positive and specific language?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For example: "I developed, formatted and presented a PowerPoint presentation" rather than "I produced a PowerPoint presentation."</li> </ul> <p>Have you included an introduction acknowledging you meet the criterion?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For example: "I possess refined time management and organisational skills gained throughout my career."</li> </ul> <p>Have you included specific background information, linking it with relevant examples from experience, avoiding unsupported claims about your abilities?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For example: "I feel I have excellent interpersonal skills gained from experience, as my resume can substantiate, and I have no doubt about my ability to effectively communicate with all staff and management." This statement is based on personal opinion and leaves the reader wondering how and where you have gained these skills. Merely saying you are 'good' at it doesn't prove you have it! An alternative may be to state: "I have excellent interpersonal skills gained from diverse group projects at university where I was working with people from different cultures. This experience allowed me to refine my communication skills and build relationships with people from diverse backgrounds."</li> </ul> <p>Have you addressed all aspects of the criterion?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For example: "The ability to develop and manage administrative processes, and liaising with all staff to maintain a strong organisational awareness." Here, you will need to provide evidence of your ability to meet all elements: processes, liaising with staff and how you will ensure a strong organisational awareness.</li> </ul> <p>Finally, proof read for grammar and spelling.</p>

## THE LANGUAGE OF SELECTION CRITERIA

Selection criteria use specific phrases and categories to glean appropriate information from candidates. It is beneficial to know the subtle yet significant differences in each of them. Here are some examples:

### 1. 'A background in'

- This category is used to identify your education and qualifications as well as areas of specialisation. For example, a Bachelor of Arts majoring in Criminology.

### 2. 'Experience in' / 'Proven ability in' / 'Responsible for'

- 'Experience': This is actual practical experience that relates to the criteria. It does not mean training or study in this area.
- 'Proven ability': Means you need to substantiate any statements you make in relation to the skill and experience requested. Provide outcomes you have attained if possible.
- 'Responsible for': This relates to the level of accountability you have possessed in the past. If you have had a high degree of responsibility in your past experience, write what you have achieved as part of these duties.

### 3. 'Awareness of' / 'Knowledge of' / 'Understanding of' / 'Appreciation of'

- 'Awareness of': Here, the reader may be looking for a mere realisation with the subject, the least amount of familiarity about the situation at hand.
- 'Knowledge of': Knowledge in this instance can be gained from practical experience as well as training and means more than just a familiarity or awareness.
- 'Understanding of': This adds an additional element to 'knowledge' as it requires insight and comprehension of the situation / subject at hand and why it is significant. For example, "a sound understanding of the infrastructure development process" is different to possessing knowledge of it in the sense of how it was developed, who it affects and why it is important.
- 'Appreciation of': If you are asked about having an appreciation of a subject matter or situation, it means you have a deep understanding and knowledge of the subject. This can be through practical experience as well as training. For example, it implies you know particular issues surrounding the subject / situation, you know why they exist and the impact they have and you also have ideas about how to address them for an ideal outcome.

### 4. 'Capacity to' / 'Ability to'

- 'Capacity to': This relates to being competent with a skill or possessing a qualification that relates to performing that task. For example, having a Responsible Service of Alcohol to be a bar attendant. It may not mean that you have had ample opportunity to demonstrate the skill, but it is a great opportunity to link in transferable skills.
- 'Ability to': This means you have the know-how, and attitude to be able to undertake the task. It also means identifying and linking the appropriate skills desired (whether tangible or intangible) to this task. For example, if stating you have a "demonstrated ability to lead a multi-disciplinary team..." you would need to be able to show resource management skills with a focus on outcomes.





### PUTTING IT INTO ACTION:

Consider the following two responses to the same criterion. Can you note the difference between the two? From what you have read so far about selection criteria, which answer best demonstrates the skills required? Why?

#### Example 1:

I often come across competing client priorities in my work. For example, most clients have deadlines for the procurement of items for their organisation and require advice regarding procurement options and legislative requirements within a certain timeframe so they can complete their procurement. In these instances I have to make a well informed decision as to the priority of clients based on their deadlines and the importance of the procurement. For example, on one occasion the Department of Defence required advice regarding the procurement of an item for an overseas operation. My task was to provide this advice however I also had three other clients who had submitted requests before the Department of Defence. While these other departments thought that I should attend to their queries first I assessed that the operational requirements of the Department of Defence was considered a higher priority than the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade requiring advice about the procurement of a new photocopier. Once I made a determination regarding client priority, I informed all clients of my turnaround time, explained the delays and higher priority issues that may affect the timeliness of advice. I continued to research and provide advice to the Department of Defence which resulted in a successful procurement for their overseas operation. In this instance, all four clients received the advice they required within an adequate timeframe and I received praise for the assistance I provided.

#### Example 2:

I currently work for the Department of X, whose mandate is to provide procurement information services to other Commonwealth agencies. My customer contact comes primarily via phone but I also spend approximately 20 per cent of my time meeting with customers face-to-face to provide training or more comprehensive advice that isn't as effectively delivered over the phone. My customer contact is high volume and the Department's charter stipulates strict turnaround times that are documented and measured.

I often come across competing client priorities in my work. For example, most clients have deadlines for the procurement of items for their organisation and require advice regarding procurement options and legislative requirements within a certain timeframe so they can complete their procurement. In these instances I have to make a well informed decision as to the priority of clients based on their deadlines and the importance of the procurement. For example, if the Department of Defence require advice regarding the procurement of an item for an overseas operation, this would be considered a higher priority than the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade requiring advice about the procurement of a new photocopier. Once I have made a determination regarding client priority, I inform them of my turnaround time, explain any delays or higher priority issues that may affect the timeliness of advice, and then make an appointment with them at a later date to discuss the issue either over the phone or in person.

As a customer care consultant I recognise the importance of my role in business partnering, as I have access to a large cross-section of staff and agencies. I use this exposure to gain an awareness of current issues of importance and arising issues, and communicate this knowledge to my business unit so that we can prepare for effective future service delivery. When communicating with customers I focus on listening to their needs, and respond appropriately. I believe strongly in educating myself in the business of my customers, as I believe this individual approach assists in developing appropriate solutions, and I demonstrate to the customer that their needs are important and that they come first.

While partnering with current customers, I also form networks with potential customers. I believe this represents a tremendous opportunity to form solid working relationships, improve the image of my organisation, and present as an organisation with a high customer service focus. By discovering untapped areas, needs, and opportunities to deliver our products and services, not only are our image and perceived effectiveness improved, but outputs and deliverables across the organisation are maximised. I have had incredible success in this area of partnering and have high levels of customer satisfaction as measured by feedback surveys. I would be happy to provide copies of these surveys for your perusal at an interview.

(Taken from: "Why the STAR method doesn't work anymore - Vanessa Jordan")

## SELECTION CRITERIA FAQ'S

### **Why are selection criteria so tough to answer and how do I know what the employer is really asking?**

Selection criteria can send a lot of people into a panic when first reading them. There may be a few reasons for this. The position description is filled with complex language that generally people are not accustomed to seeing on a day to day basis and people lack experience in addressing the selection criteria. The position description can also be daunting to process as they can be quite lengthy. So, before you have even started to answer the criteria there could be an elevated level of anxiety.

Selection criteria require you to answer in a specialised writing style and this requires specific knowledge of what you have on offer, the specific skills, knowledge and attributes you can bring to the role and link as evidence in response to the criteria. (This is another example, where self assessments are very useful to undertake.) The example you use should tell a story that has a beginning, middle and end.

At first glance, you may not know what the employer is asking, but break down the question into manageable parts. Look back over the categories of questions to use as a guide. The position description is also a wealth of information, comb over it carefully and pick up any clues. Organisations provide ample information generally so you have as much detail as possible to link with your response. Always think in the back of your mind, your role is to demonstrate your suitability to the role rather than believe it is self evident from your resume.

### **Essential Vs Desirable criteria: Are they equally important?**

Yes! Although you may be tempted not to elaborate on the desirable criteria, do so! Treat it the same as an essential criteria. Use it as a point of differentiation. It could be the deciding factor between you and another applicant, especially if the panel sees you haven't just skimmed over the question. A well thought out response here can make all the difference and it is great practice!

### **Do I have to provide situational examples for each criterion and how far back can I go?**

Yes! Guiding the reader through your thoughts on a related situational example is a necessity if you want to maximise your chances of getting to interview stage. Talk about the context of the situation, what you specifically did, the skills you have used and what the outcome was. This makes it easier for the panel to evaluate your application.

We recommend describing situations that are as recent as possible. This means being aware when providing examples that date back some time especially if it was the only time you have used that skill or knowledge as the panel may ask the question whether you even have the skill. An example that reflects this in particular is computer applications, such as MS Office where updates and changes occur rapidly.

### **Should my examples be from a position that is very closely related to the position I am applying for?**

If you possess experience that is closely related to the position, then yes. However, more often than not, applicants don't have experience that is related. In these instances, you can draw on the experience you do possess and utilise your transferable skills. This is the challenge. You want to provide examples where the panel can see a direct link with the skills, knowledge or attributes needed even if the experience is from a completely different field.

If there are applicants who possess related experience, they may be considered more highly if they have effectively demonstrated they have the skills but not necessarily. The employers are also looking for organisational fit so where you can, let some of your personality steal a glance through your application too.

### **How long should the answers be for each criterion?**

If you are applying for a government position, it may stipulate the length in the position description, either through word count or pages per selection criteria. However, in general every person has a different opinion which can make it very ambiguous. A rule of thumb is to write between half to one page in length but ultimately you need to write enough information to convince the panel you have the skills, attributes and knowledge - it's up to you how you do this.

### **How do I best answer the criterion where there are two or more questions within that criterion?**

If you have a double or even triple barrel question in one criterion it will have multiple elements. A little bit of planning here will help. Break down the categories first and brainstorm examples where you have used these skills. You may wish to bullet point them separately making it easier for the reader to identify.

### **What should I do if I can't answer a question?**

There is always one criterion in the document that makes you feel particularly doomed. You may not have all the experience asked for however, answer it to the best of your ability. Don't skip the question. It's just like an exam question; if you missed it, zero marks. Here, try to link similar and related experience while remaining genuine and remember that an unanswered criterion is worth nothing!

### **What is 'weighting' of criteria?**

In government positions the selection panel decides on a rating of each criterion according to the level of time needed to be dedicated to each requirement from core functions of a role to functions that may be more infrequent. However, each criterion is important. You won't be told the weighting break down but if you look through the position description in the functions you will get a feel for what is important. Use this as a guide.

### **Should I prepare myself before answering selection criteria?**

Yes! This is especially the case if you have little experience with writing selection criteria. People have the tendency to under-sell themselves as they aren't sure about the selection process and even their own skills and how best to present them throughout the application. We encourage you to undertake a self assessment - start analysing yourself, research the position and the organisation you are applying to, utilise the services of the Career Development Centre especially throughout graduate recruitment season. Maximise your opportunities by planning here!

### **SUMMARY AND FURTHER TIPS**

- Show, don't just tell! Simply telling the employer you have the required skill/s will not get you the job. You need to show them what you can do by providing evidence of how you developed the skill and how you have applied it in the workplace, at university, or in any other activities.
- Build a hierarchy of evidence, starting with the strongest proof, work experience, then your university / educational qualifications and then other involvement such as community activities.
- Check and double check for correct spelling, grammar and consistent use of tense. Re-state each criterion then address the question in bullet point form for ease of reading and assessment by the panel.
- Use skill based language when talking about what action you took. For example, "As president of the law student association I: established... coordinated... delegated... initiated... enhanced." / "To solve this problem I: investigated... analysed... clarified"
- Don't feel pressured to provide the perfect response. Focus more on a genuine and authentic response connected to your experience and skills and why you want to work for the organisation.
- Don't copy and paste previous selection criteria responses even though they can be similar across the organisations - always personalise your answers.
- Most selection criteria are online now so type your response in Word and then cut and paste into the online forms.
- Don't leave them to the last minute, selection criteria can be tricky and often need time to perfect. We recommend you to review your application in advance, draft and edit. Finally, have someone proof read it and then submit.