How to Address Selection Criteria

Many people applying for government jobs for the first time may not be aware of the importance of selection criteria responses. It is a critical part of most government applications and essential to creating an outstanding application.

Even if you have a brilliant resume that shows you have excellent skills and qualifications to do the job and you have written an absolutely sensational cover letter, if you don’t address the selection criteria in a separate document that explains how well you fit each criterion, chances are you will be overlooked. Fulfilling the selection criteria to the satisfaction of the selection committee is the only way you can make it across the line to the next stage of the recruitment process – the interview.

Where to start?

The first thing you need to do is find out what the selection criteria are. You will find them either in the advertisement or on the government department’s website along with a downloadable job application kit. Then you need to create a new document and list all the criteria, word for word, as they appear in the job application kit.

Name the document and make sure you include your own name at the top of the page. You can use a heading such as:

- Statement addressing selection criteria
- Selection criteria summary
- Responses to selection criteria
- Statement of claims, selection criteria

FYI When it comes to naming documents, all your application documentation should have your name prominently displayed and it’s best to name the electronic documents with your name, not just ‘selection_criteria.doc’. This will make it easy for the receiver to identify your document from all the others that have also been submitted.

Give examples

When answering the selection criteria think about how you meet each selection criterion and list examples of relevant skills, experience, incidents, training and personal qualities. You need to make the link between what you can do, and have done in the past, and how it relates to the job. If you don’t have any actual work experience, use other relevant experience such as something you have done at university, for a voluntary organisation or a club to illustrate your capacity to undertake the work required.

In every answer to the criteria, you need to demonstrate that you have developed and practised these skills in your past experience/s. It’s not enough to just state that you can do ‘it’.

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Use keywords

Part of the trick of responding to selection criteria is identifying and understanding the keywords in each criterion and incorporating these into your response. These subtle differences and the way you word your response could be what sets you apart from the other applicants.

Know the difference between phrases such as ‘ability to’ (means having the skills), ‘knowledge of’ (familiarity gained from actual experience) and ‘understanding of’ (fully comprehend the matter). Incorporate your understanding of these terms into your response and you’re on the right track to submitting an outstanding statement.

Choose the right words

When writing a selection criterion response, find one excellent example from your past and demonstrate what and how you achieved a good outcome. Make sure that you use strong action words such as ‘demonstrated’, ‘reviewed’, ‘developed’, ‘initiated’ or ‘negotiated’ rather than less powerful words such as ‘involved in’ or ‘assisted’.

Always give examples and avoid unsubstantiated claims. You can use bullet points if there is a list of points you are making.

Address all the parts

More often than not, selection criteria will consist of several parts and are sometimes qualified as either essential (must-have skills and experience) or desirable (good to have and improve your chances of being highly regarded).

It is tempting to write a broad response focusing on just one part of the criterion and hope this will get you through. But if you want to hit the selection criteria nail on the head and guarantee yourself an interview, then this isn’t good enough.

For example, ‘Ability to contribute ideas and demonstrate initiative and flexibility’ actually has three components – ability to contribute ideas, demonstrate initiative and demonstrate flexibility. In order to respond to this correctly it is vital that you address all three of these skills, making sure to include the keywords in your response.

STAR approach

As mentioned above, the key to responding to selection criteria well is to address all parts of the criterion, to include the keywords and give specific examples. Many well-written statements follow what is known as the STAR method of response: Situation, Task, Action, Result.

The following example response is broken up into the STAR components, with each section labelled. This is for your benefit – don’t label the sections in your final statement!

*Ability to apply academic knowledge and concepts to practical situations.*
Situation: I have been involved with a local Community Justice Group for the last 12 months.

Task: This involves helping people prepare their cases for mediation.

Action: I regularly apply my academic knowledge in this capacity, assisting local residents to articulate their issues, encapsulate arguments and formulate desired resolutions.

Result: My efforts have received excellent feedback from my supervisors and I have received several letters of thanks from clients I have helped.

Another acceptable way of answering selection criteria is SAO: Situation, Action, Outcome. Whether you choose STAR or SAO, it is important that you show how you can meet each criterion.

The final touches

Some government departments and agencies do not want any more than three paragraphs per criterion (or about 250 words); others do not have any limit. As a general rule, try to be as concise as possible and at the maximum, write no more than one A4 page per criterion.

Once you have completed your statement of claims in relation to selection criteria, check over your responses and make sure there are no typographical errors and that the sentences read well.

Finally, make sure that the formatting of your selection criteria document matches the accompanying resume (or CV), cover letter and any other documentation you are submitting. By having a consistent formatting style with fonts and font sizes, your application will present as a cohesive whole. This alone shows that you have taken considerable care and attention to detail.

Get the selection criteria right and you’re on your way to an interview – and one step closer to the job!

Example Selection Criteria: Ability to apply academic knowledge and concepts to practical situations.

I have worked with a local Community Justice Centre as a volunteer client assistant for the past 12 months. In this capacity, my academic training has enabled me to help local residents articulate issues and formulate and present coherent arguments in conflict situations. My responsibilities include helping people prepare their cases for mediation, which require me to regularly apply my academic knowledge and undertake additional research when necessary.

An example of this situation was when a resident in a difficult situation approached me for information and advice. I researched recent changes to the Tenancy Act 2007 and informed her of her rights and responsibilities as a tenant. She was able to use the information to resolve the issue to her advantage.

The results of this situation and similar ones have been the empowerment of clients who previously struggled to understand their circumstances. I have received excellent feedback from my supervisors, who have told me that my work has made a considerable difference to their clients. In addition, I have received several letters of thanks from clients whom I have helped.