

Addressing Selection Criteria

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This article and other articles in the series may be accessed from CareerHub

by registered students and staff of UWS.

www.uws.edu.au/careers

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You often find the job advertisement requesting that you 'address the selection criteria' in addition to sending your resume and a cover letter. This is particularly common if you are applying for a job with the government or for a graduate position.

Selection criteria are the important elements or requirements of a role. They describe the level of knowledge, skills, attitudes and experience required to perform a particular role well. They will be specific to the discipline and job advertised but some common selection criteria include:

- Effective teamwork skills
- Highly-developed time management
- Excellent communication skills
- High level of computer literacy

Why do employers ask you to address them?

The use of selection criteria helps employers to compare job applications for the same role in as equitable and objective a manner as possible because the requirements of the role and the way candidates will be assessed have been set out. Addressing selection criteria effectively will give an employer an idea of your past and present performance, and how well you might perform in the advertised role. *It is therefore very important that you choose your own authentic situations that demonstrate your ability to meet the employer's requirements.*

It was Government employers who originally placed the greatest emphasis on the formal addressing of a selection criteria list, but more and more private sector organisations have followed their lead.

Selection criteria listed in the job advertisement

In public sector advertisements selection criteria are clearly defined. In private sector advertisements selection criteria can be 'hidden' within the advertisement, so it is very important for you to read advertisements carefully and 'between the lines' to analyse what is required and how you can meet the requirements.

An example of a 'hidden' criterion is the ability to follow the instructions given in the advertisement; for example you may be asked to e-mail the relevant contact person for further information on the position. If you decide to send a letter instead, it may be interpreted that you can't or won't follow instructions and you may not get an interview.

Many job advertisements do not ask for the formal written addressing of selection criteria; however, if you analyse these advertisements you can list of the many selection criteria, provided that the advertisement contains sufficient detail. If you then make notes addressing the selection criteria using specific situations and the **STAR** method, you'll generate some useful information for your job application.

Essential and desirable criteria

Some organisations distinguish between 'essential' and 'desirable' criteria. Essential criteria are those elements or conditions of a job that the employer considers vital for successful performance in a particular role. Desirable criteria are the ones that are nice to have and may be of assistance in the role. In highly-competitive recruitment situations, being able to address all the desirable criteria may be necessary; however, don't be put off applying for a role if you can't address all the essential criteria.

The statement 'Common selection criteria also apply' refers to Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), Ethical Practice, Ethnic Affairs Priorities Statements (EAPS), and Occupational Health & Safety (OH&S). You're most likely to see these listed in advertisements for public sector jobs. Policies for these are usually found on the government departmental websites.

The enquiry phone call or e-mail for further information / the information pack

Public sector advertisements in particular will refer to an information pack, which includes more detailed information on the position, including selection criteria in perhaps more detail than what you would find in an advertisement. Some advertisements ask you to phone or e-mail to receive an information pack; others refer to a website for downloading the information.

Even if there is no information pack available for the position (as with many private sector roles), it is quite appropriate to ask for further information about the job.

In order to create a good first impression read the advertisement carefully, look for information on the organisation's website and make a list of possible questions to ask *before you make contact*. In addition, make notes from the advertisement as to how

you meet the selection criteria. If there is a reference number for the position, refer to it and the correct title of the position when you contact the organisation. It is important to note that the contact person (who may, or may not be one of the decision makers) could also ask *you* questions, so you need to be prepared. Preparation will make your telephone manner sound more confident. If you're e-mailing, carefully check the content, grammar and spelling of your message, before you hit the 'send' button.

The statement of claims addressing the selection criteria

A statement of claims requires you to demonstrate that you comply with each of the requirements of the advertised position. It is sometimes referred to as 'evidence in support of the selection criteria'. *For positions requiring the addressing of selection criteria, an excellent resume is insufficient if you haven't addressed the essential and desirable selection criteria on your statement of claims* so please take this seriously. In some cases it will state that unless you submit this you will not get an interview!

If your instructions are to create your own statement of claims document, type each criterion as a heading with answers underneath. Include your name and the reference number of the position (if there is one).

The STAR model for addressing selection criteria

When addressing selection criteria make sure you use genuine and relevant specific examples with positive results. These include situations from work (including work experience / placements), university studies and other interests.

Never address a criterion with 'please see resume'. If you do, your application may be discounted because you haven't followed instructions correctly.

The **STAR** model outlined below is a format you can use to address selection criteria using specific situations and examples:

- **Situation** – briefly explain the context (where you were working / what you were studying)
- **Task** – briefly mention a task you were required to perform in this situation
- **Action** – describe the steps you took in performing the task, but don't go on and on!
- **Result** – explain what happened as a result. Concentrate on positive outcomes and focus on the benefits to a future employer

The following examples would be considered to be of a suitable length for junior and mid-level positions; however you may be asked to write either a shorter or a more lengthy answer.

1. Effective Written and Verbal Communication Skills

My effective written and verbal communication skills were demonstrated when studying Organisational Behaviour at the University of Western Sydney. My task was to write a report on the Use and Impact of E-Mail as a Communication Tool, and to present the findings to my tutorial group.

I wrote the report using both quantitative and qualitative research techniques, then summarised the findings into a user-friendly format for the presentation. I also created overhead transparencies and handouts to help structure my talk. In preparation for this presentation I had considered possible questions and answers and invited the audience to ask questions throughout, and after my talk.

The presentation inspired lively discussion and debate. Both my written report and my presentation were awarded 'A' grades. The skills gained during this unit helped to prepare me for workplace situations such as one-to-one consultations, team meetings, and client presentations.

2. *Effective teamwork skills*

During my studies at the University of Western Sydney I supported myself with part-time employment at a local food shop 'The Chicken Shop'. My task was to work quickly, effectively and courteously with the team at the counter, cleaning tables and preparing food.

I made a point of communicating clearly, even when under pressure. I supported the team by ensuring that the premises remained clean, that food was prepared quickly, efficiently and safely and that customers were served courteously. This was particularly important during very busy times such as school holidays.

I also supported the team by assisting the team leader in rostering, cleaning, food preparation and front-of-house customer service so that everyone remained motivated and efficient during the shift. I also cheerfully nominated myself for many tasks considered undesirable such as garbage collection and oven cleaning.

As a result of my effective teamwork skills, I was named 'Employee of the Month' three times last year. I know that the teamwork skills acquired at 'The Chicken Shop' will be useful throughout my career.

Alternative to the STAR model

An alternative is to use bullet point format to list relevant examples of how a criterion has been met. Please note that it is important to be consistent in the way you address selection criteria. Do not chop and change between methods. Two examples of this method are:

1. *My sound organisational abilities are demonstrated by:*
 - Four years as a Relocation Consultant at We Move You Pty Limited sourcing accommodation for international executives posted to Australia;
 - Two years as President of Smithtown Rotary Club, an organisation with 75 members; and
 - The successful project management of my parents' Silver Wedding Anniversary party in 2003, to which 60 people were invited.

2. *My ability to work effectively under pressure is illustrated by:*

- The successful combination of full-time work as a Telephone Banking Representative with YourMoney Bank, part-time Law studies at the University of Western Sydney and volunteer work at the Children's Medical Research Institute;
- Three years as a Volunteer Fire Fighter for the NSW Rural Fire Service; and
- One year as Head Waiter at The Busy Bee, one of Sydney's busiest restaurants.

Words to avoid

- Words such as 'never', and 'always' in your application. Nobody's perfect, and you leave yourself no room for error if you use them.
- You may be judged as arrogant if you compare yourself to others using language such as 'I was better than everyone else in my class at....' It's not about being better than others; it's about comparing what you've done to the required criteria.

If you don't meet all the selection criteria

If you believe that you have the ability to do the job and you meet most of the essential criteria it may be worth applying. Some positions are even readvertised due to the lack of applicants meeting all essential criteria (although you should be aware that you may be in competition with applicants who meet every desirable criterion).

It can be easy to leave the answer blank because nothing immediately comes to mind but as a student you have many experiences on which to base a response. Ask other people for their thoughts, friends and relatives are often able to offer ideas that you haven't thought of. As a last resort, rather than leaving an answer blank, you could write about what you are planning to do to satisfy a particular criterion.

The next step

If you are invited for an interview the interviewer/s believe that you fulfil most of the selection criteria. Congratulate yourself and start preparing for the interview! You will find that if you have prepared your selection criteria well you will already have the answers to many interview questions. Refer to CareerHub for the info sheets 'Interview Guide' and 'Behavioural Interviews'.

If you believe your application was good but you are not invited to an interview try to get some feedback. Think objectively about where you need to improve and realise that sometimes more experienced candidates have applied for the position. It's important not to take it personally. It's your application that's been rejected, not you, so keep trying.

Useful resources

UWS Information Sheets - <http://www.uws.edu.au/careers>

<http://www.careerone.com.au>

<http://www.jobsearch.gov.au>