



7 Free Tips for Writing Winning Selection Criteria

Addressing Selection Criteria can be a frustrating and tedious process and the overwhelming majority of candidates fail to be selected for interview due to poorly written responses, or lack of suitability against the position.

Having worked with candidates at all levels from both the public and private sector, I see countless qualified job seekers disheartened by the process. Surprisingly many more are unaware of the basic principles of the selection process and what is involved in correctly addressing selection criteria. What's more, those that understand the process, **still** fail to produce quality applications by not addressing the criteria in full, not providing sufficient evidence and failing to talk about their accomplishments and achievements.

I believe the **core** of addressing selection criteria is about communicating the value of what you can offer to an agency, **by providing concrete evidence of your suitability against each criterion**. The key is to ensure you address all parts of selection criteria, to put your experience into context for the panel members and to focus on your **achievements and accomplishments**.

If you are new to the process, I'm afraid there are no short cuts to ensure your ultimate success. It takes countless hours of research, careful thought and preparation, and writing and re-writing to ensure that you construct high quality responses against criterion.

However, the good news is - that with just these 7 tips below, you will have a better understanding of the selection criteria process and will begin to understand the basic fundamentals of addressing selection criteria **that could double** your chances of being selected for an interview.

Take care and all the very best!

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**Author: How to GET IN and GET PROMOTED in the Public Service Sector
Selection criteria Secrets Exposed**

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For Team Leaders, Managers, Professionals and Executives wanting to attract better job opportunities, obtain an ideal role or promotion and get paid what they are worth!

Tip 1 - Make sure you are sufficiently qualified for the role

Although this has nothing to do with writing selection criteria, this is **one of the most important aspects to the process** – namely, ensuring that you are sufficiently qualified for the role in question, before dedicating endless hours in addressing the selection criteria.

To understand how essential this is, it is important to go back to the role of selection criteria, which is to assess and grade suitable candidates, based on **merit**, pursuant to *Public Service Act 1999 (and equivalent legislation at state level)*. That is - the process must be free from discrimination, should be carried out with impartiality and integrity and the selection criteria are designed to match the skills, qualities and knowledge that the agency requires in order for the candidate to effectively carry out the role.

What this means to you as the candidate, is that:

- ~ If you don't meet the agency's requirements' relating to knowledge, experience and qualifications, then it does not matter whether you think you could do the job blind folded, you simply don't meet their requirements, so you won't be selected for interview.
- ~ **The merit process is by its very nature competitive** and your application will be assessed against other candidates, many of who will be more suitably qualified than you. Depending on the position, panel members will assess anything from 1/2 a dozen candidates through to 1,600 candidates or more.

Now I have lost count of the number of borderline candidates I have got through to interview and I can even give a couple of concrete examples where a client is slightly under-qualified for the role, but I have still got them through to interview and into a job. However, even as an expert, with all the tricks of the trade, I still won't accept a client, when I strongly believe that my client has not got a 'chance in hell' of getting through, as they are clearly not qualified for the role.

In order to ensure that you are sufficiently qualified for the role, you need to understand:

- ~ The classification of the position
- ~ Your suitability against the selection criteria

Classification

All agency positions are **hierarchically organised from entry level all the way through to the agency head**. As you progress up the levels of government you will take on more responsibility with roles becoming increasingly more complex, challenging and demanding the higher you go.

All positions advertised are provided with a classification level, which in turn will determine the salary or remuneration for the role.

As a general summary, **lower level positions are operational roles** – that is they deal with day to day operational matters of the agency, such as administration processes and providing front line services to clients. These roles also include managing more junior operational staff and managing operational processes, such as the delivery of client services.

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High level positions deal with the 'big picture', and include overseeing and shaping the overall strategy of the agency. They can also involve direct contact with ministers and other senior stakeholders within government.

If you are already from the public sector, you would be aware of the hierarchical nature of recruitment. If you are applying for a position at a higher classification than your current position, it is important to pitch your application at a higher level and use examples relevant to the position in question.

If you are coming from the private to the public sector, you need to understand the various classifications, so that you apply for a role that is suited to your level of experience and qualifications. To assist you in this process, I have provided you with an overview of the classification level for the APS (federal Roles), which will help you to determine the appropriate level to apply for.

If the classification provided in the advertisement is not listed below, (state, territory and local government applications) another method to determine whether you are pitching at the right level is to review the salary. This method will give you a rough guideline of the level in question. But be warned:

- ~ What you receive by way of remuneration in the private sector, might be higher than what you will receive in the public sector for an equivalent role, so rather than focusing just on salary, take a close look at the level of responsibility of the position in question and obtain clarification from the contact officer.
- ~ To meet budget targets some organisations (in particular in the area of social work) will advertise a position at a lower classification level, even though the demands of the role are at a higher classification level.

Classification Levels for the Australian Public Sector (entry to agency head)

Australian Public Sector, (Federal Applications for Agencies such as Customs, Australian Federal Police, DIAC)

- ~ APS 1 – 2 (General entry level positions, cadetships and traineeships)
- ~ APS 3 – 4 (General administrative, technical, project & service positions / graduate positions)
- ~ APS 5 – 6 (Senior Administrators, technical, project and service positions)
- ~ Executive Level 1 – 2 (Senior management positions)
- ~ Senior Executive Level (Executive positions)
- ~ Agency Head

Suitability against the selection criteria

If you don't meet the **mandatory requirements** of the agency, such as possessing a relevant qualification, **you will not be selected for interview.**

You also need to gauge your suitability against the selection criteria.

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Ways to gauge your suitability include:

- ~ Have you got demonstrable experience and knowledge relating to the majority of duties and responsibilities listed in the position description?
- ~ If the selection criteria are specific, are you confident that you can meet all of them?
- ~ If you don't meet all the selection criteria, then do you have transferable skills at an equal or more senior level to the role in question?
- ~ If the selection criteria are generic, are you confident you can answer these within the context of the position in question?
- ~ Are you applying for a position far more senior than your present one?
- ~ Are you weak in more than one criterion?

If you answered NO to the first four points, and YES to the last two points, then before you spend countless hours preparing your application, make sure you get more clarification from the agency, to determine your suitability.

I would also recommend not applying for a position if you are weak in more than one selection criteria, as this will more than likely knock you out of contention. **Remember, the whole process is based on competitive merit based assessment and candidate's that meet all the selection criteria will probably be applying for the position in question.**

If you are not certain whether you are suitability qualified or not, you should touch base with the contact officer. Most agencies provide candidates with a contact person, and their name and contact details are usually listed in the application pack, or on the website. But be warned, the contact person listed cannot appear to be biased, nor will they necessarily discourage you from applying for the role, even if you are not qualified. What this means, is that the **onus is on you** to question the contact person and discover more about the position and from this conversation, determine whether you are qualified or not for the role in question.

I would also be **happy to provide an obligation free assessment as to your eligibility**, so long as you are not offended by my straight forward and honest assessment. Just email me direct at – carolyn.smith@impactwriting.com.au

Tip Number Two – Stick to the basic rules (or face elimination)

Before you get started on addressing selection criteria, **I have listed some basic rules you must adhere to.**

Rule One

You must address ALL the selection criteria, including desirables! This might seem like stating the 'bleeding obvious', but a significant number of candidates fail to address one or more selection criteria. By failing to address all the selection criteria, including desirables, it will make it difficult, if not impossible for the selection panel to assess your suitability against that criterion or criteria. That will make it unlikely you will be selected for interview.

Remember, the **onus is on you** to demonstrate your suitability against the selection criteria. It is not the responsibility of the panel members to second guess your suitability, or to refer to your other documents such as your résumé to check that your qualifications and experience meet their requirements.

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Rule Two

Do not refer the selection panel to your résumé, or any other part of the document when addressing criteria. Instead, treat every criterion as a separate short essay and if necessary, repeat information. Remember, each criterion is scored and weighted and a selection panel member won't have the time, or the inclination to search through your documents trying to locate the paragraph, or information you were referring to.

For example:

- ~ Instead of 'refer to résumé for list of relevant courses', insert a heading under the criterion and list the courses.
- ~ Don't state, 'refer to selection criterion 3' – simply repeat the relevant information contained in selection criteria. Alternatively develop another evidence-based example that can be utilised specifically for the criterion.

Rule Three

Make sure you address all part of the criterion, if the selection criterion is made up of several parts. Too often candidates, fail to address all parts of the criterion, hence significantly weakening their application.

Rule Four

Make sure you follow the agency's directions, relating to page limits, word counts, layout and presentation. Not all agencies list these requirements, but if they do, make sure you follow their directions **EXACTLY**.

Tip Number Three – The most important document in the selection process is the document addressing the Selection Criteria.

If you are coming from the private sector and want to move into the public sector, then your résumé, which was once your key to interview success, is now relegated to the position of the poor cousin in the process.

If full blown selection criteria need to be addressed, (as opposed to an EOI or 2 page document often used in Queensland) **then the document addressing these becomes the primary document in the selection process.** That is, you will more than likely be invited for the interview, if your responses to the selection criteria meet the organisation's requirements, even if your résumé would under normal circumstances be considered a liability.

But conversely, if you have a brilliant résumé, without adequate responses to the selection criteria, then your application will not be selected by panel members. (There are a few exceptions to this general rule, as a panel does have the discretion to accept an application, but it happens so infrequently, that it is vital for you to correctly address the selection criteria).

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However, while the résumé effectively plays a secondary role, it is still an important document in the selection process. As with résumés within the private sector, an effective résumé can get the panel's attention and generate interest. This is particularly true if competition is fierce, with popular positions receiving more than 1,600 candidates at a time. A résumé can also become an important document when panel members meet to discuss various candidates and the list needs to be narrowed to the top few candidates for interview purposes. At this stage in the process, your résumé can sometimes play an important role in the decision making process.

So you can develop a strong résumé, read my free report on résumé writing. This report provides you some of the critical tools required to develop a modern Australian résumé.

Tip Number Four – Use a Selection Criteria Model

The key to addressing selection criteria is to provide an **evidence-based response** to each of the selection criteria. Although it is evident to you that you possess these relevant skills and knowledge, you need to convince panel members that you actually possess them.

It is vital you avoid writing statements that claim that you meet the selection criteria, without providing any evidence.

Consider the following *Before* and *After* examples. The *Before* example simply makes a statement, without any examples to demonstrate the soft skill relating to communication and interpersonal skills. The *After* example provides tangible evidence of communication and interpersonal skills, and more importantly, how these soft skills contributed to the company.

Before

I have excellent communication and interpersonal skills, evidenced throughout my long career. At all times, I communicate appropriately, write clearly and ensure that I get on with people from all walks of life.

After

I have excellent communication and interpersonal skills, including communicating effectively with people from all walks of life, through positive lines of communication.

In my role as Markets & Purchasing Manager, I was responsible for sales and business development for new markets at S.A. McKenzie. Within this role, I nurtured a wide range of contacts and strategic alliances with clients and publishers. This included responding to feedback from clients to improve service delivery, taking the time to talk and listen to others, and communicating information in an effective and timely manner.

As a result, I successfully recorded the largest sales growth within the company, with up to 45 new customers within a 12 month period, including domestic and international institutions.

As Assistant Manager/Saturday Manager at Mart Books P/L, I was responsible for the day to day operation of the bookstore, including dealing effectively with a wide range of people – from senior managers, customers, through to the supervision of casual staff members. Within this role, I exhibited strong interpersonal skills by being willing to consult and listen, I ensured that staff valued team work, including treating all people

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For Team Leaders, Managers, Professionals and Executives wanting to attract better job opportunities, obtain an ideal role or promotion and get paid what they are worth! with respect and courtesy, and I provided constructive feedback to colleagues, as well as allocating sufficient time for training and instruction.

Within this position, I also liaised extensively with a diverse range of people from all walks of life. This involved resolving customer complaints, providing advice and recommendations and ensuring that colleagues, customers and other stakeholders received and understood the information communicated to them, including written reports and memorandums. At all times, I considered the sophistication and information needs of other and matched the level and complexity of communications to the skills, knowledge and experience of the particular individual or group..

As a result of my effective interpersonal skills, I was able to engage with people from all levels, and I established a very strong team, reflected in an extremely low turnover of casual staff members.

A large number of agencies suggest candidates use a selection criteria model when addressing selection criteria. The two major selection criteria models utilised across agencies in Australia at federal, state, territory and local level are **STAR** and **CAR**.

STAR is the acronym standing for:

- ~ **Situation**
- ~ **Task**
- ~ **Action**
- ~ **Results**

CAR is the acronym standing for:

- ~ **Circumstances**
- ~ **Action**
- ~ **Results**

When utilising a selection criteria model make sure you focus on **accomplishments and achievements**

It is a universal fact that the overwhelming majority of candidates find it difficult to talk about their accomplishments and achievements. I would go so far to say that 99% of the clients I work with don't think how they contribute to an employer.

Yet a major difference between an OK candidate and an outstanding candidate is accomplishments and achievements. WHY – because through accomplishments and achievements, YOU can demonstrate your worth to a potential employer, by driving an effective message to panel members that you can make a difference or contribute to the functional area and in turn the agency.

So make sure a large focus of your application relates to the 'R' of the CAR or STAR, namely the result.

Tip Number Five - Make every word count if there is a word limit

Many agencies restrict the number of words or characters if online, per selection criteria. These can range from as little as 80 words per criterion, through to 500 words per criterion.

I personally love working on an application where a word limit applies, as I know exactly what the agency requires, and it helps narrow the focus down to the bare essentials.

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However the downside is that producing a quality statement within a word limit means that **you must make every word count**. WHY? The internal marking criteria provided to selection panel members can sometimes run into several pages, even though you are restricted to 150 – 500 words.

When addressing selection criteria, where a word limit applies:

- ~ Delete concepts that repeat themselves or don't directly answer the criteria.
- ~ Use good English – just because a word limit applies, does not mean the use of good English should disappear.
- ~ It is not necessary to address each sub-criterion under a separate heading, unless specifically requested by the agency. Instead use one or two STARS, or CARS that highlights how you have met all the relevant sub-criterion.
- ~ Make sure you adhere to the word count (some agencies are very strict about this requirement and it is sometimes impossible to submit online applications, if you run over the character, or word count).

Tip Number Six – Understand the agency's requirements

Researching the agency, gives you a greater understanding of the agency's requirements, which you can utilise when addressing the selection criteria.

The great thing about researching various public agencies is that the bulk of the information you need is published online. Simply log onto the agency website and gain access to a range of relevant and useful information, relating to the role. Areas I usually review include:

- ~ Overall responsibility of the agency (role, structure, mission, vision and values)
- ~ Overall responsibility of the work area in which the position is located (I run a quick search, if an agency has a search function on their website)
- ~ Relevant publications, including annual reports and policy statements
- ~ Legislation the agency administers, (this is important if the job entails administration or interpretation of legislation and if the selection criteria refers to legislation).

Tip Number Seven – Make your document easy to read

Again, this tip might seem obvious, but I am continually staggered by the number of candidates who let themselves down, by poorly formatted and difficult to read documents. Remember Panel Members need to read dozens and up to a thousand or more applications, so make a lasting impression with a document that is visually appealing and easy to read.

- ~ Try to keep your paragraphs short and organised into logical pieces of information. Long paragraphs and thick blocks of text can be difficult to read
- ~

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- ~ Use the right font size, – no smaller than Arial 10, (or equivalent), or font size requested by the agency.
- ~ Use heading and sub-headings, so panel members can zoom in on relevant information.
- ~ **Highlight key words with bold type.** This one little secret is more powerful than you might realise. You see, when someone is quickly reading text the eye immediately wants to scan the content to get a big picture of what's on the page, before slowing down to commit reading an application in depth. By bolding key words, a reader will scan for meaning and will usually slow down and read in detail everything on the page.
- ~ Make liberal use of bullet points, when outlining your responsibilities and achievements.

The next Step...

This free report is the starting point for developing strong responses to selection criteria to ensure that you start securing interviews in the public service sector.

Your document addressing selection criteria is your **KEY** to success in getting in and getting promoted in the public service sector.

This free guide gives you a simple structure to work from and outlines the basic principles. However, if you want to take it to the next level and **guarantee that you secure that interview**, you need to have all the know how, including the powerful, yet simple strategies that I use to not only get my clients interviews, but ensure that they rank in the top 5% of candidates. That's why I wrote **How to GET IN and GET PROMOTED in the Public Service Sector**.

This 50,000 words plus e-manual (with loads of examples) is the most **complete guide** to the system available to the public (both online and offline) and is suitable for both entry level and senior candidates. I won't go into detail about everything it contains. You can read about that my website at:

<http://www.carolynsmith.com.au/products/selection-criteria-success-selection-criteria-book/>

Alternatively if you want to ensure that you have the **total competitive edge** and a **stress free experience**, why not get us to address your selection criteria. For an investment from as little as \$197 we can write an application with impact on your behalf that will help you get in, or secure that promotion in the public service sector.

If you have any questions or comments for me, you can contact me at:
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Happy selection criteria writing!