

**Bonus Guide to
"How to GET IN and GET PROMOTED
in the public service sector"**

Selection Criteria Secrets Exposed

GUIDE TO THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

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The Legal Stuff

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Some links and information presented in this manual may change.

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Chapter 1 – The public sector interview

Congratulations on securing an interview in the public service sector. To get through to interview, you were short-listed on the basis that you met the selection panel members' requirements and now you will move onto the next stage of the application process, which will involve an interview with selection panel members, as well as other selection processes, such as work tests and psychometric testing.

This guideline provides a brief overview of the interview process in the public service sector and how you can ensure you improve your performance to finally secure that role.

Busting the myths about Interviews

Let's face it, there are few things that make a person more nervous than a job interview, let alone a job interview, that is very formal and in which you will be scrutinised by an entire panel.

However, contrary to popular belief, selection panel members are not looking for ways to trip job candidates up in an interview. In fact, it is a formalised process, in which each candidate is marked and scored, in order to provide an assessment in which the selection panel can appoint the best person to fill the position/or positions.

The other key myth is that people fall into 2 categories. Those that breeze through interviews with confidence, the other lot of candidates fail dismally, no matter what. While it is true some people are particularly gifted at marketing themselves, for the rest of us, it is possible to perform well at interview, but it does require careful preparation.

There are also a whole lot of assumptions about the interviews that are blatantly wrong and those related to the public service sector include:

Selection panel members are skilled interviewers

While some members are skilled, the majority of panel members are not and the extent of their preparation, their rapport building, and expertise will vary significantly. Also keep in mind that some panel members are equally anxious about the process, so their nerves might be on both sides of the table. As a result, the interview will not be a perfect process and in the same way you might encounter poorly constructed selection criteria when addressing selection criteria, at an interview, you will encounter poorly constructed interview questions.

There are right answers and wrong answers

Apart from the black and white answers relating to public service values, common selection criteria, or specific technical questions, most questions, in particular scenario based questions, there are no right or wrong answer.

It is vital to memorize your application

While preparation will mean that you have practiced appropriate answers to interview questions, it is unnecessary to memorize your entire application and provide scripted answers to each question. To prompt your memory, simply take in any notes, any examples, copy of your résumé and selection criteria and then refer to them, if required.

What you need to know about the interview process

Below are the key things you need to know about the public sector interview, so you don't arrive unprepared.

- ~ You will be interviewed by a panel that will usually consist of the same panel members that assessed your written application and selection criteria. The panel will usually **comprise of 2 and usually 3 panel members** and will normally include the immediate manager / supervisor to the role in question.
- ~ Some agencies provide questions ½ hour prior to the interview, which will allow you time to prepare your answers before you meet with the selection criteria panel.
- ~ Each agency will conduct its own selection process, which could include an initial telephone interview, which is used as a screening process.
- ~ Public service sector interviews are always very formal processes and each candidate will be assessed and scored against a set of questions, in the same way that your responses to your written application were scored and ranked.
- ~ The questions will usually always relate to the role in question, in particular the selection criteria and your claims, or additional claims against these selection criteria. Additional questions may be asked, and these will usually be behaviour-based questions.
- ~ There are normally no big surprises, but depending on the classification level, role or agency, you might also be required to undergo additional testing, such as psychometric testing.
- ~ A scribe may be used in the process, namely a person that records detailed notes of what you and other candidates say at interview. These notes will be used during the assessment process, as well as provide recorded notes to ensure that the decision making process was fair and transparent.
- ~ Depending on the agency, you will usually be able to take in notes and your selection criteria and on occasion read directly from your notes. (Check with the agency in question, before reading directly from your notes.)
- ~ The selection process will be based on the principles of competitive merit, in the same way that your written application was based on the principles of competitive merit.
- ~ Make sure that you make eye contact with everyone on the panel (although this is sometimes difficult when panel members are taking detailed notes during the process).

Chapter 2 – Preparation & Practice

Understand the meeting's purpose

You got to the interview, as you managed to convince that panel through your selection criteria that you'll bring something to the organisation. The interview is simply selling what was on paper in person, and your potential contributions you could make for the agency. To be convincing and to project the image of a 'can't-do-without' candidate comes with **preparation** and **practice**.

Research on the Agency

Research is a CRITICAL part of preparing for not only your application, but your interview. Prior to interview, refresh yourself on the following:

- 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 the website)
- Relevant publications, including annual reports and policy statements
- Legislation the agency administers (if the job entails administration and interpretation of legislation or selection criteria refers to legislation). I confess to only ever quickly scanning legislation and a great short cut to understanding the purpose, is to either undertake a quick search under Google, or quickly scan the legislation, by going straight to the Purpose and Index.

As outlined in the manual, how much research you need to undertake will depend entirely on the position and classification level and your level of knowledge relating to the agency.

As a general rule of thumb at the lower level you will just simply understand the overall responsibility of the agency and work area, including mission, vision and values, any client service charters / codes of conduct, along with a general understanding of common selection criteria (Occupational Health & Safety, Workplace Diversity, EEO and Anti-Discrimination).

At a higher classification level or for professional roles, you should arm yourself with as much information as possible if you are not familiar with the agency. This would involve scanning through annual reports and understanding policy statements related to the position. Since senior management roles and professional positions contribute and translate broad strategies, it will be vital that you understand the position within the context of the agency's goals and strategies.

Once you are armed with this knowledge, then you are in the position to use this information to help shape your answers to the interview questions.

Understand the position

The public service sector can sometimes take weeks, if not months to assess applications, so by the time you get an interview, you might have forgotten what the responsibilities of the position entailed.

To ensure that you provide relevant answers and position your experience, competencies and value in a way that meets the needs of selection panel and agency, it is vital to go back to your initial research on the role, as well as your responses to the selection criteria. Keep in mind the following when researching and preparing for the interview:

- ~ It is essential to understand the most important aspects of the position and functional area, so you can relate your experience to the key requirements of the position
- ~ As with the selection criteria, panel members might assign a weighting as your various responses to interview questions. With this in mind, focus on areas that are deemed to be essential, or are assigned a higher weighting, when addressing various questions at interview.

Overlay your accomplishments on the agency needs

Once you have a detailed overview of the agency and the position, now it is time to spend time thinking about how your experience and skills relate to the job. This exercise prepares you to talk about your accomplishments and strengths in the context of the specific job you're interviewing for.

If you have addressed the selection criteria well, then you already have a good framework, from which to talk about how your accomplishments and strengths meet the needs of the position. Go back to your résumé and selection criteria and study them intently, so you know these documents inside out.

You also might find it useful to draw a line down the middle of a page and one side, list the employer's needs and on the other side of the line, list your skills and accomplishments that prove you can do the job. This exercise will help you to pin point your assets that the agency requires.

The agency Needs	The experience and skills I have

T-Account – Guerrilla Marketing for Job Hunters, Jay Conrad Levinson and David E Perry

Strengths and weaknesses

You know that it is highly likely you will ask about your strengths and weaknesses, yet most people give scant regard to preparing for these questions. Before you go to interview, prepare a list of your weaknesses and strengths.

Weaknesses

When talking about your weaknesses, don't state that you have none. You will come across as arrogant and conceited, so much so, that you could blow the interview. The key to addressing questions relating to weaknesses is to show that you acknowledge that you have a weakness and that you have used this to look for an opportunity to enhance your own skills, translate negative feedback into actions for improvement and have learnt from mistakes, including seeking assistance, clarification or input.

For example:

I was particularly weak in the area of budgeting as my background was in learning and development, so I'm currently undertaking a range of external training courses relating to finance management, budgeting and procurement to improve my performance in the area. I have also sought advice from the Finance Manager, who is currently mentoring me in this area and as a result, I have improved significantly in this area.

The key is to show that you are open to feedback and constructive criticism and that you are prepared to take personal accountability for your performance and own professional development.

Strengths

If your application is written well, then you should already have a good outline of what you can bring to the role, in terms of knowledge, experience and key strengths, in particular achievements and contributions. The key to making the most of your strengths is to relate these to the identified needs of the agency, which is where your T-Account comes into play.

You should also **compile a career portfolio**, if you did not previously prepare one, while preparing your application. This is a great way to chronicle how your experience and knowledge, which can be used in your T-Account.

Information you should include for your career portfolio is as follows:

- ~ **Education & Qualifications**
 - University / TAFE / Secondary School, (only include details as to your Secondary Schooling if you have recently left school)
- ~ **Seminars and conferences relevant to your career**
- ~ **Language Skills**
 - Fluent and business vocabulary
- ~ **Personal Profile / Management style**
- ~ **Expertise, strengths, specialisations**
- ~ **Technical Skills / Computer Competencies**
- ~ **Professional Experience**

- Profile of company, including distinguishing characteristics, (e.g. largest manufacturer of steel in Australia)
- Job title and scope of accountability (list ALL areas of responsibility)
- Contributions / achievements (list all areas in which you helped the organisation solve problems, improve systems, save money,

~ **Community Involvement / Voluntary Roles**

- Profile of organisation, including distinguishing characteristics
- Role title and scope of accountability (list ALL areas of responsibility)
- Contributions / achievements (list all areas in which you helped the organisation solve problems, improve systems,

~ **Professional Memberships**

- List all current professional memberships

~ **Evidence of High Performance**

- Performance Appraisals
- Written Reference Reports
- Emails/Letters and other documentation received by a third party complimenting you on your performance – e.g. email or letter from client thanking you for the service performed
- Awards Received

~ **Publications and Presentations**

Chapter 3 – Performing at the Interview

Getting the basics right

This is the obvious stuff, but you need to get these things right, to ensure that you are not eliminated from the process.

Arrive on Time

It is imperative that you arrive on time – or rather never arrive late. If an emergency comes up and you cannot get there in time, call the agency as soon as possible to make them aware of the situation. However don't arrive so early, that you are sitting in the corridor or reception area more than 15 minutes. Arriving 5 minutes early is more than sufficient, besides, who wants to get more nervous sitting in unfamiliar surroundings.

To ensure that you do arrive on time and that the process of getting to the interview is not too stressful, do some research and learn where the agency or interview building is located, the nearest parking, or public transport drop off point, as well ascertain how accessible the building is.

Dress Appropriately

First impressions are essential. Are you dressed appropriately? Is your hairstyle, appropriate, your fingernails clean and trimmed? Are your shoes clean and not scuffed? Have you shaved? Although the whole process is based on merit, first impressions do count.

As a general rule of thumb, it is best to be too formal, rather than informal, and get rid of the junky jewellery, overpowering perfume, or aftershave, and body piercing. While the panel should not be judging you on your appearance, the reality is, they consciously or sub-consciously do, which could be detrimental overall to you securing the role if you don't dress the part.

Be Professional

Professionalism is highly valued at all levels and everything you do will be judged in some form by the selection panel. Omit behaviour that might exclude you from further consideration, such as chewing gum, smoking, tapping your pen on your portfolio, using slang, or light swearing, no matter how comfortable you feel during the interview. I also strongly recommend that you switch off your mobile.

Body language

A significant amount of communication is nonverbal and although it is unlikely that you will be interviewed by a trained professional, that will be able to tell that you are lying when you tug on your ear, or fail to make good eye contact, you still need to be aware of your body language in the interview room.

- ~ Offer a firm handshake, but don't squeeze the hand so tight that it is knuckle breaker.
- ~ Maintain eye contact when you're talking, but don't stare. When speaking to the panel, direct your eye contact across to all panel members, (apart from the person or scribe, taking the notes)
- ~ Sit facing the interviewer, not off to the side
- ~ Lean slightly forward, so you look attentive and interested in the process

- ~ Keep your hand out of your pockets and avoid excessive gesticulation (remember how annoying it is when people gesticulate widely, when being interviewed on television)

Stress Reduction

Some people breeze through interviews with calm confidence, but if you are like the majority of candidates, you will have some jitters, particularly if you are not experienced in presenting in public forums, or are not skilled in the art of 'self promotion/'. Below I have listed my top four tips in reducing stress.

Bach Rescue Remedy

Some of my clients 'swear' by Bach's Rescue Remedy, which is a homeopathic formula designed to calm the most frazzled person. Whether it is placebo, or it genuinely works, I cannot comment, but I know that it has got some of my clients through some very stressful interview situations.

Positive Affirmations

Affirmations are based on the theory that every thought has an impact on actions. If you believe you are going to 'stuff the interview up', then this becomes a reality. If you believe you are going to be successful, then this too becomes a reality. Obviously it is far more complex than this and there are countless books and research papers on the subject area, based on how the mind works consciously and subconsciously.

Put simply, affirmations are a way to help re-program the mind, in which you start to believe in yourself, through positive statements and putting your intentions in writing to help you to focus on a goal. "Affirmations imprint thought upon the subconscious mind" says behavioural psychologist and educator Gene Schirmer. "By nature the subconscious mind accepts everything it's told by the conscious mind and services as an automatic pilot in guiding our conscious behaviour, sharpening focus and reinforcing commitment".

As a candidate you can use affirmation statements to help you achieve your goal. Prior to your job interview, write an affirmation statement to bring your objective into focus. For example:

- ~ 'My unique qualifications and solid experience have prepared me to be the new Team Leader at DIAC'
- ~ 'I will perform like a star in the interview'
- ~ 'I'm the perfect person for the role and I will get this job'

Challenge irrational thoughts

Sometimes we get so worked up about the interview that it becomes a 'do or die experience', where we get so nervous and stressed about the process and the need to succeed that we become almost irrational. Yes this interview is important, (today and perhaps this week) but keep it in perspective. It might be emotionally difficult, but if you don't get the job, you won't starve, there will be other opportunities around the corner, and the more pragmatic you are about the process, the more likely it is that you will perform better in the interview.

Reduce anxiety by being prepared

If you are prepared, you are more likely to perform better at interview and in turn this will reduce stress during the interview.

Types of interview questions

The four major types of interviewing questions that interviewers use are:

Closed ended questions, which are used to confirm or verify information:

~ *You have a Bachelor of Business Degree from the University of New South Wales. Is that correct?*

Open ended questions

~ *What kind of work environment do you prefer?*

Theoretical questions, which provide hypothetical situations

~ *How would you react if you saw co-worker disagreeing?*

Behavioural questions, which focus on your past experience and behaviours:

~ *Describe a time when you were under pressure to make a decision. Did you react immediately or take time in deciding what to do?*

Behavioural based questions are becoming increasingly popular, as the interview can be structured to concentrate on areas that are important to the interviewer; instead of allowing you to concentrate on areas that you think are important. When addressing these questions, the T-Account you prepared, will give you sufficient background to address the needs of the selection panel.

You can also successfully utilise STAR or CAR when providing an example:

~ *Give me some examples of how you have used motivational techniques to mentor staff. What results did you get?*

C – Circumstances

As Project Manager with DIAC, I was instrumental in the implementation of new job descriptions, as a performance management tool, along with a staff training and development.

A – Actions

During this role, I successfully implemented ITIL and a new software development life cycle methodology, namely Microsoft Solutions Framework (MSF), providing a new direction for the ICT section within DIAC. During implementation, I facilitated bi-weekly staff meetings and successfully introduced a staff training and development program, as well as staff satisfaction survey.

R – Results

This enabled me to address areas of performance, including helping allowing staff to take an active role in the process, as well as their own development, and knowing when it was appropriate to confront staff relating to their performance. Within this role, there was a measurable increase in staff satisfaction, resulting in an overall improvement in motivation and performance of staff, including a 100% increase in productivity.

A list of possible interview questions

This list is not exhaustive, but it does give you an overview of questions you might encounter during the interview, depending on the classification level and position. (These questions can also be applied to interviews within the private sector)

Remember, it is usually the easy questions that trip people up, so ensure that you have answers to relating to the selection criteria and why you want to do this job.

- ~ *What are your long term career objectives?*
- ~ *Why do you want this job?*
- ~ *What do you consider to be the attributes of a good leader?*
- ~ *Have you ever had difficulty with a member of staff? How did you resolve this conflict?*
- ~ *How long do you think it would take for you to make a meaningful contribution?*
- ~ *What do you consider to be your greatest strengths, or conversely your great weaknesses?*
- ~ *How do you manage conflict?*
- ~ *How do you react to unwarranted criticism by your manager?*
- ~ *How do you work under pressure?*
- ~ *What are the most important attributes of a good manager?*
- ~ *What are the most important elements to managing change? How would you manage change?*
- ~ *How do you delegate tasks?*
- ~ *How do you adapt to new situations?*
- ~ *How do you deal with difficult people?*
- ~ *What qualities or traits do you feel could be improved upon?*
- ~ *Where do you see yourself in 5 years time?*
- ~ *List the two most important things that you would like to accomplish in this role?*
- ~ *What sort of environment do you enjoy working in?*
- ~ *Why did you choose to apply for this particular role?*
- ~ *How do you work within a team environment?*
- ~ *How would you describe your management style?*
- ~ *Do you have any plans to study in the future?*
- ~ *How do you adapt to new situations?*
- ~ *Can you describe a situation when you did not meet your manager's expectations? What did you do?*
- ~ *Are you a member of a committee/professional organisation? What contributions have you made to these groups?*
- ~ *How would you characterise your working style?*
- ~ *What do you believe is the most challenging area in supervising / managing people?*
- ~ *How would you describe your 3 major accomplishments?*

- ~ *What were some of the problems you encountered in your current/previous job and how did you handle these?*
- ~ *What do you feel most confident in doing?*
- ~ *What aspects of your current position could be better performed and what kind of improvements could you make?*
- ~ *What are the three things you would most like to change about yourself to improve your overall effectiveness and why?*
- ~ *What have been your last three performance evaluation ratings?*
- ~ *What basic values and beliefs do you feel are important to this role?*
- ~ *If you caught one of your most valued employees doing something dishonest, what would you do?*

Telling stories at an interview

The purpose of telling stories at the interview is to be able to illustrate your skills and abilities to the selection panel. Stories show the employer what you are capable of, rather than simply telling them what you have done in the past.

Employers are looking for people who **demonstrate results** and that can make a positive impact on the bottom line. If you can show them how you are one of those individuals, then you will perform better at the interview. (Yes I know – back on the achievements mantra).

Take these 2 responses to the question “Have you ever been in a situation when you have had to soothe an irritated client?”

Candidate 1 – *Yes, I have, I managed escalated calls on a daily basis at ATO, including really irritated clients.*

Candidate 2 – *Yes, as a Funeral Director I deal with difficult people on a daily basis, including people who are distraught, abusive, inconsolable or unreasonable.*

An example was when a widow wanted to see her husband’s body immediately and in the clothes he had died in. The deceased in question had died due to a motor bike accident. Due to the circumstances of the death, the coroner was involved and a post mortem examination was necessary before the body could be released. Upon telling the client that a post mortem examination had to be conducted, before seeing the body, she became very aggressive. In order to calm her down, and win her confidence, it was necessary to exhibit very strong interpersonal skills. This included treating her with respect and courtesy, building rapport, managing my emotions, by not taking the abuse as a personal attack, being empathetic, so she understood that I was on her side and providing her with accurate information as to the coroner’s proceedings.

As a result, I was able to win her confidence and arrange proceedings so that as soon as the body was released, she was able to view the deceased in the clothes that he had died in.

Candidate 2, as a storyteller will be remembered, because not only does the story have impact, but it highlights her skills in managing clients, including rapport building under extreme circumstances.

Dos and Don'ts at interview

DO:

- ~ Do be enthusiastic, but don't go overboard
- ~ Do be prepared to qualify and or give reasoning behind your answers
- ~ Do practice and prepare responses in front of family and friends – even the mirror
- ~ Do listen carefully to what the interviewer is saying and if uncertain, get the interviewer to reiterate, or rephrase the question
- ~ Do provide a sound response to the question, but don't ramble on with a long, repetitive and boring response
- ~ Do focus on the needs of the agency, utilising the T-Account
- ~ Do refer to your notes, if necessary
- ~ Do pitch your examples and talk at the appropriate level

DON'T:

- ~ Don't put yourself down, or minimise your experience
- ~ Don't speak ill of former employers or colleagues
- ~ Don't come unprepared
- ~ Don't exaggerate or lie about your experience
- ~ Don't ask about working conditions that could be established beforehand
- ~ Don't assume known panel members will be an advocate on your behalf

Further reading

10 Key Steps to Ace that Interview – Cutting edge techniques exposed -
<http://www.1shoppingcart.com/app/?Clk=1958737>

Chapter Five – After the interview

If you are not engaged, or promoted, then as a candidate **you have the right to receive feedback on your application.** You will only receive feedback if you request it and it will be provided in writing or verbally by the selection panel chairperson.

Getting feedback is always useful in terms of learning what you can do to improve next time. Sometimes it might be something relatively minor, other times it was simply someone had more to offer on the day, or the person acting in the position was promoted to the position.

Whatever the feedback, keep an open mind, as it will assist you so you can improve your preparation and performance next time.

When seeking feedback, try not to get defensive, or demanding. When the chairperson sees how genuine you are, or that you are not being difficult, it is more likely that you will be provided with useful information and feedback.

Appeals in the Australian public service

If you are already in the Australian public service, (federal government) you can lodge an appeal, but you will need to demonstrate that you are better than the successful applicant, not just equal.

This appeal process can be quite difficult and you will need to lodge an application. This appeal process is NOT available for candidates applying at a current or lower level, nor is it available for candidates outside of the Australian public service.

For further information: – <http://www.apsc.gov.au/merit/index.html>.

Coping with rejection

If Christopher Columbus had turned back, no one would have blamed him. Of course, no one would have remembered him either. Unknown Author

Let's face it – job hunting is a pain in the neck and it is especially irritating if you need to address complex selection criteria or write 'war and peace' just to secure an interview.

But it is more painful, when you get a rejection letter after spending hours putting your application together, and preparing for an interview only to be ignored and relegated to the 'not interview list'. Yet the reality is that rejection is a fact of life when you are job-hunting. You can either take it all very personally, or you can develop that critical 'can-do' attitude, in which you accept the setback as only temporary and part of the process of securing your dream role. To stay motivated after rejection:

Surround yourself with support

Surround yourself with positive people. Get rid of people who zap your energy and self-esteem and gather support from people that will give you the encouragement and the critical feedback required to stay on track. You want people that remind you of your strengths and help improve your weaknesses, as opposed to people who commiserate with you, but only focus on the negative, not the positive.

Stay focused

It is easy to lose focus on the task of job hunting, in particular when working full time or when you receive rejection letters. But you need to stay on track, by developing your own personal action plan. Job hunting is like any campaign, you need to choose specific actions and take and perform them on a daily basis. These actions might include researching industries or employers, looking on job boards every day, networking, contacting industry contacts, cold or warm calls to employers, follow up calls, applying for specific vacancies, obtaining feedback from job interviews, sending follow up letters, role playing a job interview twice per week, practice negotiating a job offer, getting feedback on written applications and extensively repackaging yourself in your current marketing documents (resume, cover letter, selection criteria).

Think positive

A positive attitude is vital to your success. Most successful people fail, more than they succeed, but the difference is that they realise their own self worth, so always end up succeeding spectacularly.

Stay healthy and be social

Get enough sleep. Eat well and exercise. Go out and see your friends and don't talk about your job hunt all the time, but enjoy yourself.

By staying motivated and positive after rejection and accepting rejection as a fact of life when job hunting, you will be able to regard **every 'no' as a 'not today' and a step closer** to success.

CONGRATULATIONS, YOU COMPLETED THE MANUAL AND BONUS GUIDE!

What's next?

There is a lot in this manual and bonus guide and I'm willing to bet you've only scratched the surface.

Here are a few things I recommend you do to take advantage of this manual

Go over each chapter carefully. Slow down and think carefully before you start, but don't get too bogged down. The more practice you have, the better you will get.

Get feedback. Talk to colleagues, talk to the chairperson and get feedback on your application and performance at interview, so you can constantly improve.

Don't give up on yourself. You're just as smart, just as able and just as creative as the next person. Sooner or later you'll find the most effective way to address applications and perform at interview, so you will start attracting the jobs you've always been hoping for.

I wish you the best of success in your career and life!

Take care and all the very best

Carolyn F Smith