

## Understanding and Addressing Selection Criteria

You're thinking of applying for a job at a government department, with a private sector organisation or for a graduate recruitment program. The advertisement advises you to address all selection criteria. What does this mean, and what do you do?

The Careers Counsellors at UWS Careers & Employment have written this article to help you to understand and address selection criteria. Being able to address selection criteria effectively will assist you in putting together your application, which may include a statement of claims addressing the selection criteria, as well as your resume and cover letter. The situations you choose to demonstrate your effective addressing of selection criteria will also help to prepare you for interviews.

This article covers the following:

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This article refers briefly to resumes, cover letters and interviews; however, there's more information on these areas in UWS Careers and Employment articles dedicated to these subjects. You'll find a list of resources at the end of this article.

## What are selection criteria, and why do employers ask you to address them?

### What are selection criteria?

Selection criteria are the important elements or requirements of a role that employers consider when they're recruiting for that position. Selection criteria describe the level of knowledge, skills, attitudes and experience required to perform a particular role well and are often listed in job advertisements and related documentation. So when you apply for a job, your application is measured against the selection criteria for that job. Examples of selection criteria include 'effective teamwork skills', 'highly-developed time management proficiency', 'a high level of computer literacy', and 'awareness of Occupational Health & Safety requirements'. Selection criteria are particularly obvious in advertisements for government jobs, but you'll also see them in advertisements for private sector roles.

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. The addressing of selection criteria is also often required for many graduate recruitment program applications. With more and more organisations asking applicants to meet the conditions of selection criteria, it's in your interests to know how to do this well. This means tailoring your response to the role you are applying for. Being able to supply an organised and targeted response to an advertised position can certainly reap rewards, even if you have not been asked to formally address list of selection criteria. This is because you have made it easier for a prospective employer to understand your capabilities.

Some organisations (eg government departments) distinguish between 'essential' and 'desirable' criteria. Essential criteria are those elements or conditions of a job that the employer considers are 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 address all the essential criteria.

When addressing selection criteria you need to choose *specific situations* that demonstrate your ability to meet the conditions of the particular role. More will be said about these situations and how to address them under the sections 'The **STAR** model for addressing selection criteria', 'Examples of selection criteria and possible responses using the **STAR** Model' and 'An alternative to the STAR model for the addressing of selection criteria'.

### Why do employers ask you to address selection criteria?

The use of selection criteria helps employers to compare job applications for the same role in as equitable 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. Selection criteria also help employers compare your application with those of other applicants and to choose which applicants will be interviewed. *It is therefore very important that you choose your own authentic situations that demonstrate your ability to meet the employer's requirements.*

So what are the benefits to you in effectively addressing selection criteria? As selection criteria describe the employer's requirements for a particular position, you'll improve your chances of an interview if you show you can meet these requirements. Spending the time to do this will also help you to appreciate what you have to offer the employer and assist your interview preparation.

## Selection criteria listed in the job advertisement

In public sector advertisements selection criteria are openly and 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 those 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.

Some of the many selection criteria encountered in advertisements include:

- Effective communication skills, both verbal and written
- Ability to work as a team member (and team leader)
- Demonstrated proficiency in the Microsoft Office suite
- The ability to manage conflicting priorities and meet deadlines
- A high degree of customer focus for both internal and external customers

Some selection criteria relate to an applicant's background. Many roles are open to all applicants; however, a minority of (usually government) jobs are for restricted groups, such as those from rural and isolated destinations, people with a disability, or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants. These selection criteria are clearly stated in the advertisement. Other positions are open only to Australian Citizens or Permanent Residents. There are also selection criteria specific to particular occupational groups such as 'current registration as a Certified Practising Accountant' or 'possessing Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training'.

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 selection criteria are often found on government departments' websites, and a list of web addresses is included at the end of this article.

A very important criterion in public sector advertisements, but not included in the essential or desirable criteria lists, is the closing date for applications. It is very important that your application is received by the closing date, so make sure you leave plenty of time to work on it. Late applications may not be considered.

Further examples of selection criteria and sample responses will be found later in this article, particularly under the heading 'Examples of selection criteria and possible responses using the **STAR** model' and 'An alternative to the STAR model for the addressing of selection criteria'.

## The enquiry phone call or e-mail

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. The advertisement may provide a name and phone number and/or e-mail address of a contact person for further information but if not, you could always contact the organisation to find this out.

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 information pack**

It is likely that the information pack will include a list of documentation to include in your application. Examples of this documentation include a statement of claims addressing the selection criteria (sometimes referred to as evidence in support of the selection criteria), your resume and cover letter. Sometimes you'll be asked to include other items, for example a copy of your current driver's licence. Read instructions thoroughly so your application includes exactly what has been asked for. If you don't follow the instructions correctly, your application might not proceed to the next stage of the recruitment process. Remember that the ability to follow instructions is often a 'hidden' criterion.

The information pack may also include a position description, a statement of claims form, information about the organisation including its contact details, a street map etc. Please note that the contents of information packs may vary depending on the organisation and the advertised position.

## **What to do next**

Before you can begin your application, read the advertisement several times and add to the notes you've made on how you meet the selection criteria. Try to consider the perspective of the employing organisation – how will the organisation benefit by employing you? Sometimes people are overly modest and leave out important 'selling points' because they're afraid they'll seem boastful. You are not boasting if you compare your experience and skills to the selection criteria that the employer has highlighted. How will employers know that you can do the job if you don't demonstrate how you meet the criteria? If you're not sure about your skills, ask someone you know and trust to give you some ideas.

## **The application**

This will include your statement of claims addressing the selection criteria, resume, cover letter, and *any other documentation you've been asked to provide* such as a list of referees, a copy of a citizenship certificate etc.

When writing the application refer to the advertisement, the contents of the information pack, any further information received from your contact with the employer, and your own career-related information and research (including information from the organisation's website) to ensure you are addressing the selection criteria and following instructions.

Before submitting your application, read the advertisement and the application again to ensure you've provided all the requested information. Advertisements will usually state specifically how to submit the application, for example via e-mail or by mail. Your responses should be free of spelling and grammatical errors. Before sending it, check your application and ask a friend or colleague to read it in plenty of time before the closing date so that you can make necessary changes. Other people sometimes see errors or omissions you don't notice. If you would like the assistance of a UWS Careers Consultant, make sure you book and attend your consultation well before the closing date to give you time to consider possible improvements.

## **The statement of claims addressing the selection criteria**

A statement of claims addressing the selection criteria is commonly required for public sector positions; however more private organisations are also asking that you formally address selection criteria. Please note that for government positions the statement of claims is often considered to be more important than the cover letter and resume. This, however, does not mean that you can neglect your cover letter and resume. A statement of claims requires you to demonstrate that you adequately

comply with each of the requirements of the advertised position. Please note that a statement of claims 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. When addressing selection criteria make sure you use genuine and relevant experiences. These include situations from your work (including unpaid work experience and placements), your university studies, your community involvement and other interests.*

In providing your answers you might be asked to type or print your answers to the selection criteria onto a statement of claims form created by the employer. Alternatively and more commonly, you'll type the information into a new word processing document. 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 name and the reference number of the position (if there is one) on each page of the document.

Sometimes a criterion has several sections, so read it as you would an exam question. Break it up into categories and issues and make sure you address each section.

It is very important to use specific situations with positive results. Quantifying your success (by using figures, dollars or percentages) is useful, as employers generally like tangible evidence or outcomes. 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 for addressing selection criteria

When addressing selection criteria you must be specific. A good way to address selection criterion well is to provide a *specific situation* where you have performed a particular task, list the actions you took in performing that task, and summarise the result. By outlining a specific situation from task through to result you're providing an example of how you meet a particular selection criterion. This is important, as it means that employers can see how your skills could be applied to their organisation if you were the successful candidate. For instance, if you've provided a specific and positive example of how you've previously met the selection criterion 'effective spoken communication skills', the employer is able to see how you might use those skills again in a new role. The **STAR** model outlined below will help you to address selection criteria using specific situations and examples.

- **Situation** – briefly explain the context eg 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.

## Examples of selection criteria and possible responses using the STAR model

The following examples will assist you to address specific selection criteria. You will also find useful the CareerHub article called 'Behavioural Interviews', which you'll find at ([www.uws.edu.au/careers](http://www.uws.edu.au/careers)). At the end of this article is a list of resources to assist you to find more information.

It's very important to base your responses on real examples from your own experience; however, the following examples will give you an idea of what to do.

So, how long could your answers be? If employer guidelines include length of answer, make sure you follow instructions. If you have been provided with a form or template, it is okay to use all of it, as long as the information is relevant. It is also important that all parts of the criterion are addressed. For example the selection criterion 'Effective written and verbal communication skills' has two parts to address. The examples given below would be considered to be of a suitable length for junior and mid-level positions; however, be aware that 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 to help structure my talk, and handouts for my lecturer and fellow students. 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. I would be happy to provide further examples of my effective communication skills at an interview.

### 2. *Highly-developed time management proficiency*

Last semester I took the initiative to enhance my studies of Accounting Theory by obtaining two days' work experience a week at ABC Accounting Pty Limited. My voluntary work at ABC was not a requirement of my course, but undertaken to build on the knowledge gained during my studies.

As preparation for the work experience it was necessary for me to reschedule my classes and reorganise my study timetable. In order to handle the additional workload, I decided to get up half an hour earlier each weekday and to study for an additional two hours each Saturday and Sunday. I listed each study period as a diary appointment, which made it easier for me to arrange commitments around these times. I also ensured that I continued with my work experience even during examination time by negotiating my work schedule with my manager at ABC.

As a result of my effective time management skills I successfully integrated the work experience into my timetable. The voluntary work gave me valuable practical skills to complement the theoretical knowledge gained in my course. This enabled me to increase my GPA from 5 to 5.5. Restructuring my study schedule also enabled me to deal with conflicting priorities whilst ensuring I completed all assignment deadlines to schedule. I believe my highly-developed time management proficiency would serve me well in the role I am applying for.

### 3. *Effective teamwork skills*

During my studies at UWS I supported myself through part-time employment at the local fast food chain, 'The Chicken Shop'. My task was to work quickly, effectively and courteously in a team environment at the counter, cleaning tables and preparing food.

I made a point of communicating clearly, even when under pressure, and sharing tasks with my colleagues. 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.

4. *High-level customer service skills, both external and internal*

I have sound experience in the effective provision of both external and internal customer service.

External: As a project for one of my final year Psychology units I trained as a telephone counsellor. I worked as a part-time volunteer for three months, providing service to clients seeking telephone counselling in areas such as suicide prevention, grief counselling and alcohol abuse. When clients called they were often distressed, so it was important to reassure them that someone was listening and cared about them.

One particular client was very worried that I would be passing on information about our conversation to his manager. I used active listening techniques to gain the client's trust and to assure him that our conversation was confidential. He then felt more comfortable in talking through the issues that were causing him concern, which enabled him to benefit from the services the organisation provided.

As a result of the abilities in this situation, I was told by my team leader (who was coaching me at the time) that I had dealt with this client as effectively as a counsellor with many more years' experience.

Internal: In addition to providing external customer service, I also provided excellent internal customer service at the telephone counselling service by volunteering to assist the administration staff with typing, photocopying and project work.

One example of my additional work was the creation of a new administration procedures manual, something the permanent staff had wanted for some time.

I created the manual by collating material used for various procedures within the organisation. I made a list of suggestions for improvement and circulated the information to my internal customers for further feedback. In collaboration with the IT staff I then collated the information into an easy-to-access online document.

As a result of my high-level customer services skills my Team Manager offered to be one of my referees.

5. *Awareness of occupational health & safety legislation in the workplace*

As part of my first year chemistry class at UWS I received comprehensive training in effective laboratory procedures such as the wearing of laboratory coats and other protective clothing.

I was required to show understanding of safety in the laboratory, was informed about the implications of handling and storing chemicals safely, and tested on OH&S legislation.

The procedures I undertook to gain knowledge, experience and skills in this area included participation in lectures, completion of set written and practical assignments and the passing of a very challenging examination. Part of the practical assignments included the demonstration to my fellow students of a session on laboratory safety and security.

As a result, I am not only aware of the importance of Occupational Health & Safety Issues, but I have also trained others in safe and effective laboratory procedures.

**Some words to use and avoid**

When addressing selection criteria it is important to use specific, results-oriented words that demonstrate exactly what you have done to meet a particular selection criterion. Just a few of the past tense verbs listed in Dr Ann D Villiers' 2001 book, 'How to Address Selection Criteria', include:

Analysed, controlled, distributed, initiated, maintained, negotiated, operated, presented, quantified, recorded, sold, trained, won.

The websites mentioned on the last page of this article give further examples of appropriate wording to use.

So what do you avoid? Don't use words such as 'never', and 'always' in your application. Nobody's perfect, and you leave yourself no room for error if you use them.

It's also important that you don't address criteria along the lines of, '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. You may be judged as arrogant if you compare yourself to others.

### **Alternatives to the STAR model for the addressing of selection criteria**

A popular alternative to the STAR model for addressing selection criteria is a list of short, relevant, bullet pointed examples of how a criterion has been met. Rather than taking one 'story' through the STAR model, you can use several short 'dot-pointed' examples to demonstrate your ability to meet a particular criterion. Two examples of this method follow.

#### *1. High-level organisational skills*

My sound organisational abilities are demonstrated by:

- Three years as Executive Assistant to the Marketing Manager XYZ Limited, a large multinational organisation;
- Four years as Relocations 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. Ability to work effectively under pressure*

My ability to work effectively under pressure is illustrated by the following examples:

- 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;
- Five years' experience as a Court Reporter in the NSW Supreme Court;
- 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.

*Please note that it is important to be consistent in the way you address selection criteria. Do not chop and change between methods.*

### **If you don't meet all the selection criteria**

Employers are looking for a good match between the candidate and the responsibilities of the advertised position. An ideal candidate is usually someone who meets each requirement of the essential selection criteria. If you believe that you have the ability to do the job and you meet nearly all of the essential criteria it may be worth applying; however, remember that government organisations in particular can insist that all essential criteria are met. Some positions are sometimes even readvertised due to the lack of applicants meeting every essential criterion.

As mentioned earlier in this article, if you don't meet all the desirable criteria it is certainly worthwhile applying; however, just be aware that you may be in competition with applicants who meet every desirable criterion.

When considering your answers and whether you meet essential and desirable criteria it's important to think outside the square. It can be easy to leave the answer to an important question blank because nothing immediately comes to mind. As a student you have many experiences on which to base a response. The benefits of leaving plenty of time to complete your application include having the time for lateral thinking and being able to ask other people for their thoughts on your ability to satisfy a particular criterion. Sometimes friends and relatives are able to offer useful 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 resume and cover letter**

The statement of claims, resume and cover letter are all separate documents; however, each has a purpose and they form a package for jobs where the addressing of selection criteria is required.

You need to tailor your resume and cover letter to the advertised position; however, do not expect these documents to do all the work. In public sector organisations in particular the statement of claims addressing the selection criteria is extremely important.

Apart from including information relating to educational and work history, your resume is a document to 'sell' your skills; however, don't think that public sector employers will take time trying to find formal selection criteria responses in your resume. The statement of claims must be included as a separate document, and it is in your best interests that you follow instructions. As mentioned earlier in this article, don't ever use the answer 'please see resume' in your statement of claims. The resume gives details about your educational and work history and is tailored to the particular role, but the statement of claims answers specific questions that the employer asks about the role.

In your cover letter you may refer to your resume and responses to the selection criteria, but keep your letter short – no more than one page is required.

For further information on resumes and cover letters please refer to CareerHub ([www.uws.edu.au/careers](http://www.uws.edu.au/careers)) for resume templates and the articles 'Developing a Professional Resume', and 'Writing Your Cover Letter'.

So how do you know what to include in the cover letter? It's not enough to just say you're submitting your application for a particular role. Dr Ann D Villiers, in How to Address Selection Criteria, mentions that there may be information in the job description that has not been included in the selection criteria and that you have experience in and can comment on. Perhaps you could also state how you could contribute to the organisation. If you've taken time to consider the job/organisation and done some research, you may be able to add something relevant in your letter that isn't included in the selection criteria. Even if you can't add further information, be positive, enthusiastic and thank the reader(s) for considering your application.

## **Advertisements not requiring the formal addressing of selection criteria**

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.

## The next step

What do you do if you believe you've submitted a good application but are not invited to an interview? Some organisations will provide feedback, but not all. So you need to look at your application objectively and think carefully about how you could have improved it in preparation for the next position you apply for. You also need to realise that sometimes many other, more experienced candidates have also applied for the position, and that applying for jobs can be 'a numbers game'. It's important not to take rejection personally. It's your application that's been rejected, not you, so keep trying.

If you're offered an opportunity to attend an interview, the interviewer/s believe that your application fulfils (or almost fulfils) the selection criteria for the position. So congratulate yourself and start preparing for the next step – the interview.

## Interview preparation and selection criteria

Continue building on the information you've already collated so far on how you meet the selection criteria, continue to research the employer and practise answering possible interview questions.

Remember to practise answering questions using the **STAR** model outlined in this article. It's worthwhile doing this to prepare for both public and private sector interviews.

For further information on interview skills including common interview questions and questions you might ask, please refer to CareerHub ([www.uws.edu.au/careers](http://www.uws.edu.au/careers)) for the articles entitled: 'Guide to Successful Interviews' and 'Behavioural Interviews'.

## The interview

Many interviews use questions based on the selection criteria to ensure applicants meet specific critical components of the advertised position and to maximise equity in the recruitment process. Interview questions are often behavioural in nature (asking about your behaviour or actions in specific situations) and you'll be interviewed by a panel, rather than just one person.

Use the **STAR** model to answer questions based on the selection criteria. You will find that if you've prepared your application properly and done your research well, you will already have the answers to many interview questions.

One of the things you can do after an interview is to evaluate your answers against the selection criteria. This will assist you in knowing where you went well and where further practice may be required.

## Conclusion

This article was written to help you to understand what selection criteria are and how to address them. Being able to do this will assist you not only with your statement of claims addressing the selection criteria for a particular role, but with all aspects of the recruitment process. It is certainly worthwhile taking plenty of time to prepare and complete your application, so now's the time to start!

## Useful resources

*UWS Articles*

Behavioural Interviews  
Developing a Professional Resume  
Guide to Successful Interviews  
Writing Your Cover Letter

**Websites:**

<http://www.uws.edu.au/careers>

<http://www.graduatecareers.com.au/content/search>

[www.eeo.nsw.gov.au/jobs.htm](http://www.eeo.nsw.gov.au/jobs.htm)

<https://jobs.nsw.gov.au/content/CommonSelectionCriteria.html>

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

**Book:**

Villiers, Ann D, 2001 (3<sup>rd</sup> edition), How to Address Selection Criteria, dm press, Canberra