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## Back to Basics

### Why is it so hard to write a job application?

It is natural to see your career as tightly connected to your personal identify. Therefore, searching for a new job is bound to bring about all kinds of anxieties, whether it is your dream job, or just a change.

Add to that the fact that writing a job application requires you to essentially brag about yourself and your achievements, when society in general tells us that talking yourself up is not socially acceptable, and you are bound to have some difficulties when it comes to preparing a job application. It is not a natural process or even one that we have been taught to navigate. In fact, when you are applying for a job you are often expected to behave in the opposite manner that you have been conditioned to behave in the workplace.

The four best ways to overcome any hesitance or anxiety are:

1. Remind yourself that "selling yourself" is a normal and expected behaviour when applying for a job.
2. Target each application to the job that you are applying for. As you address each individual job's requirements you can be confident that you are increasing your chances of being selected for an

interview. This is a much better approach than the "scatter gun" approach (where you send the same application out for multiple jobs).

3. Remain employer centric. Rather than focussing on why you want the job, focus on what you can do for your new employer.
4. Ask for help! You can get help from colleagues, friends, family and professionals. Even if you have to pay for help, it will be a worthwhile investment in the long run if you end up winning the job.

## Feature Article

### Selection Criteria Example: How to Address the "Prioritising" Selection Criteria

Almost every position advertised these days will have a selection criteria that wants you to demonstrate skills in prioritizing your work. Even if the selection criteria is all about organisation, prioritizing is an important sub-set of this skill. This article will help you to address these criteria more effectively.

The first step in addressing one of these selection criteria is determining what kind of selection criteria it is. There are five kinds of selection criteria, and in this case, we are dealing with a skills and abilities selection criteria.

Skills and abilities selection criteria can include skills which are quantitative (or measurable) such as engineering skills, computer skills, mathematical abilities etc. It can also include more conceptual skills (which are harder to measure) such as interpersonal and negotiation skills, strategic planning abilities etc. If a criterion asks about your ability to do something, you should describe your skills and give an example of your level of ability. For example:

- How can you prove your skill/ability?
- How have you improved your skill/ability?
- How much experience do you have in this area?
- What skills do you have that are transferable to the position and would support your ability?
- Provide a few examples of your skills/abilities in action.



Selection Criteria Example	
High level of organisational skills and the ability to prioritise work to meet strict deadlines	
Areas to cover when responding to this selection criterion	Some questions you can ask yourself when writing your responses to the selection criterion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Converts objectives into achievable tasks</li> <li>• Follows work schedules</li> <li>• Sets work goals</li> <li>• Prioritises tasks</li> <li>• Is able to determine the relative importance of tasks</li> <li>• Has resources and tools available to complete work tasks (e.g. uses a to do list, calendar etc)</li> <li>• Develops systems to organise work and time</li> <li>• Plans tasks appropriately and realistically</li> <li>• Tracks the progress of tasks</li> <li>• Works effectively under tight deadlines</li> <li>• Monitors progress and re-prioritises as necessary</li> <li>• Meets deadlines</li> <li>• Meets job responsibilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you plan your work on a daily basis, and when there is an extra important or special task to complete?</li> <li>• What tools do you use to organise your workload?</li> <li>• How do you determine your priorities?</li> <li>• What issues do you take into consideration when prioritising or reprioritising your workload?</li> </ul>
Example Response	
<p>My current position is extremely autonomous. I am responsible for identifying customers, developing business, completing customer requirements, and associated reporting. I have performance indicators and expected hours to complete. I face tight timeframes to complete my work as per response timelines that are stated in Company A policy.</p> <p>My position requires high level organisational skills. I am currently in the office approximately two days per week; the other three days I consult at various sites around New South Wales. This requires forward planning abilities, excellent time management skills, and a solid work ethic. I often start early, work late, work through lunch breaks, and travel intrastate at short notice. In order to accommodate the various issues and deadlines, I structure each day according to the workload and issues at the time. My office is generally my laptop and mobile phone, and such an unstructured work environment requires almost unlimited flexibility, and I find that I thrive in such an environment.</p> <p>I use various tools to organise and prioritise my work including the Outlook diary, Outlook reminders, and the Outlook to-do list. I spend time each morning planning the day ahead of me and prioritising tasks in order of importance and due date; however I remain aware of the need to re-prioritise these tasks as the day progresses and work flow changes. If I am unsure of the urgency of a task I will clarify it with a colleague or supervisor, and I often discuss my workload with my supervisor in order to receive feedback on my plan of attack. If faced with conflicting deadlines I will confirm the importance of each task. While I realise that various stakeholders may insist their task is the most important, this is not always the case. I have excellent negotiation abilities and am able to re-negotiate deadlines where possible. I have also asked for assistance from others and worked late in extreme circumstances where deadlines were not possible to meet on my own and the workload was excessive.</p> <p>One example that demonstrates my flexibility and dedication when meeting strict deadlines would be when I was working for a Chief of Staff organising staffing for a new division. This manager required immediate assistance with a critical recruitment exercise; however there were no HR staff available in Canberra to assist. My division only covers New South Wales, but since I had worked for this manager previously in New South Wales and he had specifically requested my services, I negotiated with my manager due to the critical nature of the issue. With approval, I flew to Canberra at short notice and worked overnight to complete the associated report for submission. I received much positive feedback, and have been requested back to Canberra by this manager and his colleagues on numerous occasions.</p> <p>This is not an isolated event. While working within the Company A environment, I have been exposed to many deadlines that are not flexible due to Company A's activities overseas, and in a more general sense, I understand the importance of ensuring immediate attention to critical issues in order to smooth the operation of the organisation.</p>	



## Interview Tip:

Without meaning to, interviewees who lack confidence usually speak in a monotone and appear to lack interest in what they're talking about. Use an enthusiastic and positive tone of voice regardless of how you feel. You may actually find that the more positive you present yourself, the more positive you feel.

## Reader Questions

**Q. I applied for a job where the person acting in the position was successful, but I really believe I am better qualified. Is there anything I can do?**

A. There is nothing worse than putting in a lot of time and effort into your application, preparing for an interview and taking the time to attend an interview, and then hearing that someone else got the job. Even worse is hearing that the job went to someone who was acting in the job who doesn't really appear to be very well qualified for the position. Unfortunately we hear a lot of complaints of exactly this, where it appears that the person acting in the position has received preferential treatment either because they know more about the position or the selection panel want to take a safe bet on someone they already know. It is our opinion that too many people do nothing when they think that this has happened, and selection panels are not often enough held accountable for their actions.

The first thing you should do if you believe this has happened to you, is to talk to the selection panel and get some feedback on your own application and why you were not successful.

If after receiving this feedback you are still not satisfied, you should ask for a copy of the selection report. This report will have all information regarding the other applicants and their applications deleted, and only the information regarding you and your application will be included. But, if you attended an interview the report will, in most cases, contain information on your overall application for the position, the panel's assessment of your application, and referee reports if they were sought

and may give you more information about why you were not selected.

If you are still not satisfied after reading the selection report, you should discuss your concerns informally with the selection panel and seek an explanation for the outcome. If this informal course of action is not fruitful you have the right to see what formal processes you can follow to object to the selection exercise. All government bodies have a review of actions process. It is likely to be labelled or titled differently depending upon the organization and the processes will differ depending upon if a complaint is regarding the selection process, or the successful applicant. If the selection panel members are not forthcoming, contact the recruitment section or human resources section to find out what you need to do to request a formal review.

Before lodging an application or a request for a review of the recruitment exercise, think about the outcome that you want to achieve. You should ensure you have appropriate evidence to support your claims, particularly if you are about to make any allegations against a specific person or group of people.

You should consider the implications your allegations will have for the person, group of people, work area, and any successful applicant. While it is important that unfair or improper actions do not go undetected or unchallenged, there is a right and a wrong way to approach unfair or improper actions. It is important to know that an investigation that pursues may not result in a specific decision or action. Sometimes the only result is a recommendation for a change in a process in the future, or an apology.

Above all, it is important to remain positive and cooperative, and not to resort to being vexatious or vengeful.

## Application tip:

Assume that all applicants are well qualified for the job and make your application the marketing document that describes:

- why your skills are the most relevant;
- why your experience is the most beneficial;
- why your understanding is the most developed;
- why you have the best personal qualities for the position.



## Product Spotlight – Get That Job! 50% off!

The **fourth edition** of **Get That Job! The Best Guide to Applying for a Government Job** was released at the beginning of May and we would like to offer our subscribers a special 50% the purchase price for the month of May only.

To take up this offer, visit the website [www.selection-criteria.com.au/newsletterspecial.html](http://www.selection-criteria.com.au/newsletterspecial.html) and enter the discount code "newsletter" (without the quotation marks). Customers should note that this

publication is an e-book and is not available in hard copy.

### Features:

- Written by a government recruiter who gives you the inside story on what selection panels really want
- Cover letter examples and template
- How to address key accountabilities and requirements in a cover letter
- What type of resume to use (and what not to use!) and examples of these
- How to write your selection criteria in five easy steps – your criteria will virtually write themselves!
- 29 selection criteria explained with over 500 prompters and things the selection panel want to hear
- Top complaints about selection criteria surveyed from government selection panels – you might be surprised!
- How to answer government interview questions and use body language to influence the panel
- How to influence your referees for a great reference check

Read more about Get That Job [here](#)

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## Government & Recruitment News

SEEK's latest **employment index** is available from [www.selection-criteria.com.au](http://www.selection-criteria.com.au). It shows that the job market is continuing to tighten which suggests **greater competition for jobs**.

A new **Ethics Advisory Service** is available to all Australian Public Service (Commonwealth Government) employees who want advice on ethical issues in the workplace. Got to the the Ethics Advisory Service website at [www.apsc.gov.au/ethics/index.html](http://www.apsc.gov.au/ethics/index.html)

**Queensland** State Government released **new recruitment and selection guidelines** in March, they are available for viewing [here](#).

**New South Wales** State Government has a new **Capability Framework** that is planned to go live in October 2009. This Capability Framework will be used for all recruitment activities. More information is available from [www.dpc.nsw.gov.au](http://www.dpc.nsw.gov.au)

Do you know someone that you can nominate for the **Executive PA Awards**? The categories include PA of the Year, Boss of the Year, Employer of the Year, Best Organised Event and Up and Coming PA. Entry is open to permanent or temporary employees from any organisation, private, government or non-profit. Entries can be made at [www.executivepa.com.au/award.php](http://www.executivepa.com.au/award.php)

The **Commonwealth Budget** will be released at 7:30pm on Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> May 2009. More information, and the detailed budget can be viewed at [www.budget.gov.au](http://www.budget.gov.au)



## Coming Next Newsletter...

Smart tips for smart selection criteria, how to effectively address selection criteria in short page limits, how to love your job, why there is more competition for government jobs and what you can do about it...

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