

Answering Questions

Structuring responses for applications and interviews

In both the written application and interview process you will be expected to articulate your understanding and level of experience to the employer. In written and online applications, you may be asked to respond to questions under a variety of headings including:

- Selection criteria
- Criteria
- Questions requesting a short response/open text field
- A request to complete a personal statement

Verbal and written responses, including Selection Criteria give applicants the opportunity to demonstrate their communication skills, exposure, depth of knowledge and understanding of how their unique skills and experiences may benefit themselves and the prospective employer.

If you are applying for an internship or graduate position online, the online questions should be answered using a similar format to selection criteria.

Applicants for public service positions usually need to provide a statement addressing a number of selection criteria as part of the application process.

4 easy steps to approach responding to employer questions

1. Analyse each question. Do you have the skills/knowledge?

- **Essential:** these are must-haves; without these, there may be an increased risk in not being shortlisted
- **Desirable:** these are would-be-great-if-you-have-them; increase chances of getting an interview; used to choose between candidates similar in skill/experience/ability

2. What are recruiters looking for?

There are particular phrases that will be used to qualify the amount of knowledge or skills required to perform the role competently, for example:

- **“Demonstrate” or “Proven”:** you must give examples from your own experience that demonstrates your skill ability or effectiveness
- **“Basic Understanding”:** you are required to know basic concepts, and your response need to show that you have this understanding
- **“High level”:** experienced and able to demonstrate an example relating to this
- **“Sound understanding/knowledge”:** in-depth knowledge and understanding of topic
- **“Ability to...”:** you must prove your capacity to learn something new quickly; TIP - think of your transferable skills and experience where you performed similar tasks or may have gained similar employability skills, for example, “ability to exercise judgement and make decisions”

3. Brainstorm each question

Sample question: Ability to exercise judgement and make decisions

- Were you ever required to exercise judgement and make decisions in any of your experiences, e.g. university group assignments, internships, casual jobs, clubs or societies?
- Did the judgement and/or decision making involve team members, work load or processes?

Did any of your decision making lead to any type of improvement or achievement, i.e. increased branding through new social media strategy or increased proficiency of a particular task due to a change in the existing process?

4. Finding a structure for your response

The **STAR principle** is a way to structure your response to keep your answers concise and give the interviewer a good indication if you have the skills from a previous experience that will transfer across to the new role.

As they say, “The best indicator of future behaviour is past behaviour.”

STAR

Example: Skills

S

Situation

Where were you?

While working as an office assistant in my previous role...

T

Task

What were you expected to do?

Some of my duties were to deal with all clients including those with complaints...

A

Action

What action did you take?

I continued to act in a professional and courteous manner and always endeavoured to assist all clients. After 6 months in the role, I developed a new method of dealing with complaints with the support of my manager. (Explain the new process)

R

Result

What did you achieve?

This resulted in a significantly lower level of formal complaints and a more positive work environment.

5. Preparing your responses

Sample question: Ability to exercise judgement and make decisions

Example response 1

Over the past four years, I have worked as a Customer Service Attendant at Kmart. I commenced in this role and within a 3 month period was promoted to a Senior in charge of the Layby division on weekends. Through my employment, it has provided me with the ability to exercise judgement and make decisions effectively in the workplace. This is clearly demonstrated through the following examples:

Being responsible for a minimum of 2 staff members on any one shift and ensuring customer service needs were met to meet company standards... etc.

Example response 2

My ability to exercise judgement and make decisions can be further demonstrated through the following:

As a member of the XYZ Student Association, I was responsible for the planning and organisation of the 2007 recruitment drive to increase student membership. As one of 6 initial members I was heavily involved in the decision making process. I was responsible for establishing the most effective way to undertake marketing through undertaking research via contacts in existing associations and reporting the findings to fellow members.

These actions as part of a team led to a 20% increase in memberships during the 2007 recruitment drive. With 100% of these new members still actively involved in the association, I am confident that the development of these judgement and decision making skills across such a broad range of situations will transfer well into the policy officer role and allow me to work both autonomously and as part of the team in the development unit.

Important Steps

- Individually address each selection criteria as a separate heading.
- Carefully read each question. Is it easier to perhaps break it down into parts and address each aspect separately?
- Give specific examples to address each question.
- If the same example applies under multiple questions include it under each one.
- Back up the examples with the result/outcome that can be measured, e.g. "Resulted in a 10% increase of sales for the division."
- Get someone to proofread your application before you submit it!



What are they looking for?

The Recruiter will rank applications according to how closely they meet the selection criteria in comparison to standards pre-determined to perform the role. As an applicant, you must ensure that you satisfactorily address each criterion to be considered for an interview.

Quick Tips

- Writing selection criteria over 2–7 hours is normal; you will improve each time.
- Check the application or contact person about the response length.
- Always complete the entire application and respond to each criteria to ensure your application is valid.
- Provide the fullest example possible.



For further details, please contact:

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