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SELECTION CRITERIA COMPLETE EXAMPLES

FAST TRACK ANSWERING YOUR SELECTION CRITERIA

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INTRODUCTION

Hello and welcome to this e-book, entitled: “Selection Criteria Complete Examples”.

It can be used when applying for Australian Government jobs.

The idea of this book is simple: to enable you to get to the interview stage in the job application process for a government job with the minimum of effort. You will still have to do some work in applying, but the ‘grunt work’ will be done for you by this book.

The material that follows is split up into three parts. In Part One, we introduce our topic, talk about the Australian Public Service and about selection criteria in general terms.

In Part Two, we move on to what makes up the bulk of the e-book: 45 separate examples, split into three pay grades, of how to address specific selection criteria that will come up for just about any Australian Public Service job.

In Part Three, we’ll address some selection criteria that weren’t covered in Part Two – some that are less critical than those in Part Two, but which are still common and important to cover.

PART ONE

THE AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC SERVICE

Introduction

It might be the case that you already know a lot about the Australian Public Service. Perhaps you've worked for the Australian Public Service; perhaps you're even currently working for the Australian Public Service. If that's the case, some of the material in this book, and particularly in this Part, will already be familiar to you, because for safety's sake this book assumes that you don't have any familiarity with it.

That's why it's appropriate to begin with a little background on the Australian Public Service itself.

Australia's federal civil service – the APS

The Australian Public Service, better known to almost everyone in its orbit as the 'APS', is Australia's federal civil service. The APS consists of the people variously employed by bodies such as government departments, government agencies and the courts to carry out Australia's public administration.

Collectively, the APS is a very large employer indeed. In June 2010, the APS had 164,596 employees (defined as people employed under the *Public Service Act 1999*). The number of employees grew every year between 2000 and 2010, but the rate of growth slowed between 2007 and 2010.

The 164,596 employees that the APS had in June 2010 were divided into 150,871 ongoing employees and 13,275 non-ongoing employees.

The three largest APS agencies in terms of employees have in recent decades have been Centrelink, the Australian Taxation Office, and the Department of Defence.

Most APS employees are women: in June 2010, 57.4% of ongoing employees and 61.4% of non-ongoing employees were women (57.7% overall).

More APS employees work in the Australian Capital Territory (36%) than in any one other state or territory.

The typical APS position is a desk job with a generic job title, but the APS also employs biologists, zoologists, oceanographers, fisheries scientists, economists, meteorologists, environmental scientists, designers, curators, city planners, meat inspectors and more.

APS grades

APS jobs are graded for seniority and responsibilities. The first block of grades are the six 'APS' grades, from APS 1 to APS 6. APS 1 is the most junior grade, APS 6 the most senior. Then there are the two 'Executive' grades, Executive Level 1 ('EL 1') and Executive Level 2 ('EL 2'). Finally there are the three 'Senior Executive Service' grades, from 1 to 3. Senior Executive Service 1 ('SES 1') is the lowest of these grades, and Senior Executive Service 3 ('SES 3') is at the very top of the whole tree.

The Senior Executive Service forms the senior leadership group of the Australian Public Service. The role of the SES is to provide professional expertise and policy advice within the APS, and so SES people are expected to have high level management and leadership skills.

APS salaries

Along with seniority and responsibility, the APS grades also determine relative salary levels. Salaries for each grade sit within a band; exactly how much an employee of a given grade is paid varies from agency to agency.

Below is a table expressing the average salary for each grade from APS 1 to EL 2. The figures are from June 2008.

GRADE	AVERAGE SALARY
APS 1	\$39,140
APS 2	\$44,506
APS 3	\$49,887
APS 4	\$55,610
APS 5	\$60,935
APS 6	\$70,910
EL 1	\$86,800
EL 2	\$106,895

The agencies that have typically paid their employees the most include the Australian Taxation Office; the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; the Office of National Assessments; the Australian Customs Service; the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet; and the Department of Defence.

Those paying the least include Defence Housing Australia; the Department of Education, Science and Training; the National Library of Australia; the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs; and the Australian War Memorial.

Government jobs outside of the APS

So far in this book we've talked only about the APS, which as we've said is Australia's civil service at the federal level. But the six states and two territories of Australia each have their own civil services as well. The Victorian Public Service (or, predictably, the 'VPS'), for example, is the group of people employed by the state government of Victoria.

The six states and the Northern Territory also have one further level of government: local government. Local governments aren't named consistently across Australia, and so local governments can have all sorts of names – cities, shires, towns, municipalities and so on – but whatever they're called they're local governments and are controlled in every case by the state or territory government above them.

(Note that the Australian Capital Territory is a special case, as the responsibilities usually handled by local government are administered by a department of the territory government there.)

Like the APS, state and local governments also employ lots of people. The total number of government employees counting all levels of government was in June 2008 a staggering 1,751,400 persons, or approximately 16% of the entire Australian workforce at that time.

However, this book focuses on the APS, and so the other levels of government won't be mentioned again. If it's a state or local government job that you want to apply for, don't worry, as you'll still find the examples and information in this book highly relevant. Just as for the APS, the process of applying for a job at the state or local government level will almost always involve selection criteria.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Introduction

You know that this book is about selection criteria, that's why you bought it! But what are they are?

What are selection criteria?

Simply put, selection criteria describe the personal qualities, skills, abilities, knowledge and qualifications that a person needs in order to perform a particular job effectively. Every job advertisement uses them: when Kmart advertises for a "bright, bubbly, HS student to staff the perfume counter", the selection criteria are that you be 1) bright, 2) bubbly and 3) a high school student.

Theoretically at least, the candidate who is the best fit for the selection criteria should be the best *at* the advertised job, and they should therefore *get* the job.

Basically, applicants are short-listed for an interview based on their ability to convince the Selection Team that they have the capabilities required to perform the role; capabilities which are articulated in the selection criteria.

They are used to identify the right person for the role.

Selection criteria in the APS

While selection criteria are used in the private sector, the APS takes it to a whole other level. Selection criteria are a crucial and integral part of the APS recruitment process, and that's why it's so important to really understand them and how to respond to them if you want to get a job in the APS.

As an aside, you should be aware that applying for a job in the APS is in general a much more involved and structured process than applying for a job in the private sector. Why is this? It's because the APS spends public money and wields a huge amount of power over people's lives. If the recruitment process for the APS was less involved then it might not weed out people who are unsuitable, and it also could leave the process more open to corruption and favouritism.

When applying for a job in the APS, the first stage of the process will be to lodge an application that addresses the specific selection criteria given in the job advertisement.

Essential vs. desirable selection criteria

Not all selection criteria were created equal. For some advertised positions in the APS you'll find that the selection criteria that are listed are split into 'essential' and 'desirable'.

You must meet all of the 'essential' criteria in order to be seriously considered for a role. It is not necessary for you to have the qualifications, skills and knowledge outlined in 'desirable' criteria. However, your chances of progressing through the selection process (e.g. being short-listed) will be greater if you meet all the selection criteria, as you may be competing against many applicants.

From the point of view of the applicant, it shouldn't make a lot of difference whether a particular selection criterion is listed as essential or desirable: the goal is to give the best possible response regardless.

Types of selection criteria and the Integrated Leadership System

If you've looked at even a small number of advertisements for APS jobs, you will have seen similar (or indeed the same) selection criteria used again and again. There is, however, an important split between those government departments and agencies that use the "older-style" selection criteria (such as those listed in Part Three of this book), and those who use selection criteria taken from the newer Integrated Leadership System. But what's that? Read on to find out.

The Integrated Leadership System or 'ILS' is something developed by the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC), which is an agency dedicated to contributing to "the future capability and sustainability" of the APS. The ILS contains descriptions and behaviours across a range of capabilities and grades. The idea is to identify what behaviours are expected at each of the APS levels.

The ILS was initially developed to provide a common language for leadership development in the APS, but now it is being used in the selection criteria process.

Let's take a look at what's in the ILS. At the top level it contains five 'core capability clusters'. They are:

- 1) "Supports strategic direction";
- 2) "Achieves results";
- 3) "Cultivates productive working relationships";
- 4) "Displays personal drive and integrity", and
- 5) "Communicates with influence".

Under each of these five core capability clusters sit a list of behaviours that exemplify the capability, and it is these lists of behaviours that are turned into selection criteria in some job listings. Taking each capability cluster in turn, they are:

- 1) Supports strategic direction
 - *Supports shared purpose and direction*
 - *Thinks strategically*
 - *Harnesses information and opportunities*
 - *Shows judgement, intelligence and commonsense*
- 2) Achieves results
 - *Identifies and uses resources wisely*
 - *Applies and builds professional expertise*
 - *Responds positively to change*
 - *Takes responsibility for managing projects to achieve results*
- 3) Cultivates productive working relationships
 - *Nurtures internal and external relationships*
 - *Listens to, understands and recognises the needs of others*
 - *Values individual difference and diversity*
 - *Shares learning and supports others*
- 4) Displays personal drive and integrity
 - *Demonstrates public service professionalism and probity*
 - *Engages with risk and shows personal courage*
 - *Commits to action*
 - *Promotes and adopts a positive and balanced approach to work*
 - *Demonstrates self-awareness and commitment to personal development*
- 5) Communicates with influence
 - *Communicates clearly*

- *Listens, understands and adapts to audience*
- *Negotiates confidently*

To find more information about the ILS capabilities, you can visit their web page on the Australian Public Service Commission website at www.apsc.gov.au/ils/index.html. There you'll be able to find information about what behaviours are expected at all of the APS levels. If you find the pages that discuss 'behavioural indicators' you'll be able to get ideas on what experiences you have had to prove your demonstration of these five capabilities if they are used as selection criteria for a role you want to apply for.

For example, for 'Shapes Strategic Thinking' you might ask yourself: Can I provide an example of where I've established the strategic goals for a business unit? Communicated the links between government policy, organisational goals and the work of a unit? Built a shared sense of purpose and direction? Focused on the future and pursued strategic alignment of action within a business unit? Identified critical information gaps? And so on.

That's all on the ILS for now, but stay tuned, because in Part Two of this book we'll come back to look at the ILS again in a big way. First though, we need to look at writing a Statement of Claim.

TOOLS AND STRATEGIES FOR WRITING A STATEMENT OF CLAIMS AGAINST SELECTION CRITERIA

Introduction

Now that we've identified what selection criteria are, why they exist and where to find them, it's time to tackle the central issue of this book: how they come up in the job application process and how you should respond.

The Statement of Claims

We've said that applicants for APS jobs have to lodge an application that addresses specific selection criteria. But how is this done? In a cover letter? By highlighting certain things in your résumé? No and no. Absolutely without exception, selection criteria must be addressed in what's officially called a 'Statement of Claims against Selection Criteria' (hereinafter 'SOC').

In terms of formatting, your SOC should be contained in a separate document to your résumé and cover letter, and it should be clearly headed 'Statement of Claims against Selection Criteria' and nothing else. You should type out each of the listed criteria and then write your response immediately below, so that the final document looks like this:

Statement of Claims Against Selection Criteria

Criteria #1

Statement against criteria #1

Criteria #2

Statement against criteria #2

...and so on.

In terms of word count, 300-350 words is a good target to aim for. At the high end, 450 words should be the absolute maximum you would need to write for any one selection criterion.

How should you address the selection criteria?

So that's what a SOC is. But how should you approach each of the responses?

There's a relatively simple formula for addressing selection criteria, regardless of what particular personal quality, skill, ability, piece of knowledge or qualification is referred to. The key is to do all of the following:

- Demonstrate your capability by providing evidence of how you meet the selection criteria;
- Provide specific details in the form of a short story about a real incident; and
- Where possible, include an indicator of success or a result to finish the response.

That's WHAT you must do. In terms of HOW to do it, an easy way to do this is to use the 'S.T.A.R.' model. That is:

1. First describe the *Situation*;
2. Then talk about the *Task* (what you were called upon to do);
3. Next say how you went about the task *Approach* or action, and
4. Finally state what the *Result* was.

Sounds simple? It is, but now let's see it in action with an example.

Addressing selection criteria – a step-by-step example

Take the capability "written communication skills". The associated selection criterion might be:

"Well developed written communication skills. This includes the ability to: structure written communications such as reports to meet the needs and understanding of the intended audience; express opinions, information and key points of an argument clearly and concisely; and to write convincingly in an engaging and expressive manner".

To begin addressing this criterion, you need to begin with an opening sentence that clearly states your claim to this criterion. For example:

"I possess strong written communication skills, which I have developed over the course of my career".

Inevitably these opening statements will be pretty generic, but that's fine; just try to vary them a little from criterion to criterion so that they're not too repetitious.

Next, the opening statement needs to be supported by detailed examples of where and when in the past you've demonstrated these skills in the workplace or other context. Sit down with a pen and paper and brainstorm ideas for examples from your recent working life. Try to generate as many examples as possible. Ideally it's best if the ideas come from the last two or three years of employment. If you can't think of anything relevant, try thinking about examples from different aspects of your life, like university, sport, clubs or volunteer work. Examples from longer ago than four or five years are best avoided unless they're highly relevant and impressive, as they make your skills look dated.

For the criterion above (“well developed written communication skills”), your brainstormed examples might look like this:

- When I was a Project Officer at the Department of XYZ I wrote a report on project planning methodologies;
- When I was a Research Support Officer at the Department of XYZ I designed and compiled a monthly newsletter, and
- When I worked at GBL Company I carried out a research project where I collated data, organised the information into topic areas, and synthesised it all into a paper for senior management.

When you’ve finished brainstorming, go back and think about each of your examples in the context of the exact wording of the selection criterion and choose the ones that you think match it best.

Now that you’ve chosen which examples to use it’s time to expand on them. What you need to do is explain how they show that you meet the different aspects of the criterion. You need to be very specific and describe exactly what you did, including the outcome. Here the S.T.A.R. method described earlier can be used.

For example:

Situation – “My role as Research Support Officer at the Department of XYZ”.

Task – “I needed to ensure that managers were kept informed of policies and procedures”.

Action (or approach) – “I initiated a monthly newsletter that was emailed to each of the managers. I took responsibility for writing the main articles, which involved obtaining ideas and input from the stakeholders so that the articles reflected the managers’ needs in terms of content and presentation”.

Result – “The feedback I received about the newsletter was consistently excellent. I received a divisional achievement award for the newsletter, and it led to much improved lines of communication between managers and the Research Support Unit”.

Pull this together into a draft paragraph or two, and the result might look like this:

“I possess strong written communication skills, which I have developed over the course of my career.

As Research Support Officer at the Department of XYZ, I needed to ensure that managers were kept informed of policies and procedures. To do this, I initiated a monthly newsletter which was emailed to each manager. I took responsibility for writing the main articles in each publication. This involved obtaining ideas and input from other

stakeholders to ensure that the articles reflected the needs of managers, both in terms of content and language.

I received consistently excellent feedback in relation to the newsletter from these internal clients and my own manager. I received a divisional achievement award for the quality of this newsletter from management. Most importantly of all, this initiative resulted in improved lines of communication between managers and the Research Support Unit”.

When you’re writing these paragraphs there are a number of things you should avoid. Let’s look at them each in turn.

Addressing selection criteria – things to avoid

Not addressing all aspects of the criterion

Some selection criteria include more than one component. In fact you would have noticed (if you were paying attention!) that the criterion in our example above – “Well developed written communication skills” – includes more than one component. Here are the components:

1. Structure written communications such as reports to meet the needs and understanding of the intended audience;
2. Express opinions, information and key points of an argument clearly and concisely; and to
3. Write convincingly in an engaging and expressive manner.

If you go back and read the paragraph we wrote in the previous section, it should be clear that its content refers mainly to the first component, that is, “Structure written communications to meet the needs and understanding of the intended audience”. It doesn’t address the other two components, and so additional paragraphs will have to be included that address the remaining two components. Only together will they comprise a full statement for the criterion.

Note that the additional paragraphs can refer to a different Situation at the same job as the first paragraphs, or to a different job altogether – your response to a particular criterion doesn’t have to be mined entirely from Situations arising while you were working at just one job.

Using ambiguous or unclear expressions

It’s very important thing to avoid using ambiguous or unclear expressions in your SOC. You should always use positive and specific language instead.

Examples of ambiguous/unclear expressions are “I was involved with...” and “I assisted in...” These expressions make it difficult for the reader to understand exactly what you did, and easy

for them to assume that you really didn't do that much. So instead of saying something like "I assisted the process through a monthly newsletter", it's much better to phrase it as above: "I initiated a monthly newsletter".

NB: You might have noticed that the real difference in the example above lies in the choice of verb; 'initiated' is much stronger than 'assisted'. Other good verbs to use are: analysed; controlled; distributed; maintained; negotiated; operated; presented; quantified; recorded; sold; trained, and won.

Failing to explain the Situation

Many, indeed most, of the Situations you'll be referring to in your S.T.A.R. answers will be pretty self-explanatory: "Research Support Officer at the Department of XYZ" really doesn't require further explanation. However, that won't always be the case, so where necessary, briefly explain what your job involved and/or what the organisation did. Don't go overboard, but you need to provide the necessary context. This information will probably also be in your résumé, but it's better not to require your reader to refer to another document in order to work out what you're talking about.

Of course if you refer to one job you've had in more than one of your responses, you only need to provide the explanation once (the first time you refer to it).

Not omitting names and personal details

While you should definitely include the names of the places where you worked in your responses, you definitely shouldn't include anyone's name. Titles and roles – "my manager", "senior management", "a co-worker" – are fine, "Tony Smith" is not.

This rule becomes critical if you need to say something negative about someone in one of your responses. This should come up infrequently, but one can imagine or example, "I was called upon to discipline a staff member who had been caught on tape stealing office supplies", or "I found my line manager very difficult to work with". It would of course be a very bad idea to use that person's name, or indeed any details that could easily identify them.

So why is this something to avoid? First of all simply because it looks unprofessional. Not only does using names make you look unprofessional, it could get back to the person in question, making enemies of them or even leaving you open to legal action.

Using credibility-reducing words and phrases

Along with expressions there are a group of words/phrases that tend to reduce the credibility of what you're saying. This group includes "some", "a little", "limited" and "somewhat", among others. Avoid these.

Using the passive voice

You should also avoid using the passive voice. The passive voice is where the subject of the sentence is neither a 'do-er' or a 'be-er', but is acted upon by some other agent or by something unnamed. For example, the sentence "feedback in relation to this newsletter was consistently excellent" uses the passive voice, and sounds wishy-washy and indirect as a result. Rephrasing it as "I received consistently excellent feedback in relation to this newsletter from these internal clients and my own manager" is a colossal improvement.

Including unspecific or unsubstantiated claims about your capabilities

Every claim you make in your responses must be backed up by specific evidence. For example, "the newsletter was received well by others" is an unsubstantiated claim. How do you *know* it was well received by others...did you read their minds? The point you want to make is that the newsletter you produced was very good, but this has to be backed up with evidence. A much better way (providing it's true of course) to claim that the newsletter was very good is to say "I received a divisional achievement award for the quality of this newsletter from management". We know that things have to be good in order to win awards, so the claim is both made and substantiated in this phrase.

Note that you might brainstorm an example where you know that you did something good but you can't think of specific evidence to support it. Regrettably, unless you can think of some evidence, these examples can't be included.

Not paying attention to the language of the criterion

Don't get so caught up in your examples that you forget what the selection criteria are actually asking for. Writing a paragraph about an example which demonstrates "well developed written communication skills" requires that you focus on actual experiences which show the extent of your skills in this area. But if the criterion instead asked for "*knowledge* of effective written communication skills", then different examples – which wouldn't necessarily rely on you describing actual performance in the workplace – would be required.

Sloppy presentation

This is basic, but it's important enough to labour the point: like your résumés and cover letters, your SOC must be immaculately presented. You should ensure that:

- There are no errors anywhere in the document;
- The document is formatted simply and neatly, and that
- The sentences are grammatically correct and concise.

Check and re-check your completed SOC to avoid making these mistakes. If you have time, put it aside for at least 24hrs before your final proof-read (this will make any mistakes more obvious), or alternatively get a friend to proof-read it for you

PART TWO

It's time now to give you the tools you need to write SOC's that will get you interviews. This Part of the book is dedicated to examples of great responses to selection criteria based on each of the five ILS core capability clusters.

(NB: In the vast majority of the examples just one job is referred to in the answer, but you shouldn't feel that you need to do this when you write your SOC – it's perfectly fine to refer to more than one job per selection criteria, and it will often lead to a better answer.)

“SUPPORTS STRATEGIC DIRECTION”

Supports shared purpose and direction.

Thinks strategically.

Harnesses information and opportunities.

Shows judgement, intelligence and commonsense.

APS1 to APS4 -Example Answer 1

“I’ve worked hard to support the strategic direction of my employer in each of my positions to date as I regard this as one of the most important responsibilities that an employee has.

An example of when I’ve done this is in my position as a part-time sales clerk at a local independent white-goods retailer. In this position I was given some flexibility to negotiate deals with customers in order to make sales, but at the same time I was encouraged to think carefully about the overall health and well-being of the business, and not negatively affect the bottom line by giving away unnecessary discounts.

Part of the job was responding to customer queries about the products. I had to use considerable judgement in responding to these questions, as I had to balance being informative, honest and helpful with trying to steer the customers towards decisions that would be good for the business, for example by ‘up-selling’ them to larger and/or better-featured models.

From the outset I applied myself to finding out everything I could about the products that we sold. I quickly became an expert in all of our products, and my ability to analyse and compare the products meant that I could make highly informed recommendations to the customers that I dealt with. My expertise with the characteristics of our products meant that I was also able to suggest to senior management the particular models that we should order more or less of when it came time to refresh our inventory.

After an initial training period I mastered the position quickly, and I went on to become a regular contributor at fortnightly sales team meetings where we discussed issues and strategies for trying to increase sales. I received a lot of good feedback about my contributions in this forum. Also, in one particular month I had the second-best sales figure of anyone in the team (there were five of us), and that included three senior sales people with many years of experience.”

APS1 to APS4 -Example Answer 2

“I feel that it was my performance during my time as a research assistant in the Department of Psychology at the University of Canberra that best illustrates my ability to always support the strategic direction of my employer.

There were three components to this role: 1) Conducting interviews with study participants; 2) Carrying out research into the literature, and 3) Managing the study data and designing and preparing tables and graphs to display data trends.

While performing all three of these tasks I was conscious of the overall goals of the study, and I used my judgement to do whatever I could to support and advance our progress towards those goals. This meant, for example, asking extra unplanned questions during interviews with participants to find out more information about things that I knew would be of interest to the professor I worked for.

Similarly, when carrying out research tasks, I focused on the specific information I had been asked to find, but I also took notes about what that research implied for the project as a whole, and I then fed that information back to the professor.

When preparing tables and graphs to display data, I tried to think about the project in overall terms and look for trends in the data that perhaps hadn't been considered yet, but would be of interest.

Sometimes the research project encountered problems which required creative thinking to resolve, and I'm proud to be able to say that I made a number of significant contributions in terms of ideas of how to refine and improve the project. I was given great feedback my professor and he said that he would be 'more than happy' to supervise me had I wanted to continue in academia with study for a PhD. While this wasn't an option I elected to take, it was reflective of my performance in this role that the offer was made.”

APS1 to APS4 -Example Answer 3

“I firmly believe that I demonstrated the skills referred to in this criterion when I worked as a Judge’s Associate in the District Court.

This job involved court work and preparation for court matters, research, proof reading, administrative tasks and travel. The purpose and direction of the Court was ‘to facilitate the just, quick and cheap resolution of the real issues in the proceedings,’ and I worked hard to share and support this goal at all times.

A key duty I had in this role was dealing with the Judge’s correspondence, of which there was a large volume. Doing so well involved a lot of communication with the Judge, as well as following his directions to the letter.

Above all, this role was about anticipating the needs of the Judge I worked for: it was imperative that I anticipate what me would need next and be ready to provide it quickly so that proceedings weren’t unduly delayed. In court for example, I thought strategically about the issues raised by counsel and I sought to ready to answer questions on those issues that I thought might come up.

In order to perform this job effectively I had to make myself available to work at irregular times and for extended periods as necessary. I was happy to do this as I understood that this contributed to the achievement of the goals of Court in resolving cases quickly and effectively.

The Judge I worked for regularly discussed legal matters with me and on occasion even asked for my opinion. I made sure that I gave the cases before him due forethought so that I could contribute something meaningful to the discussion. This approach was successful, and I was told by the Judge on a number of occasions that my legal analysis of the cases was sound and that he appreciated and valued my contributions. Coming from a person of his stature in the legal realm, this was a huge vote of confidence in my abilities.”

APS5 to EL1 -Example Answer 1

“I had an opportunity to demonstrate my capabilities at supporting the strategic direction of my employer while I worked for the Department of Transport, when for six months I ‘acted up’ in a manager position in the Case Assessment Team.

When I started in this position the volume of files that the team was dealing with was very high and causing considerable stress and tension. A big concern for senior management was that our team had one of the highest per-employee rates of sick leave, which was thought to be the result of stress.

Despite the problems, I was told by senior management that it’d be fine if I just kept things “in a holding pattern” until the manager position was filled on a permanent basis. However, I saw an opportunity to make my mark by improving our processes.

Thinking strategically, I thought that I could harness the information they gave me to devise faster and more efficient ways of handling our files. I spoke to every member of the team individually and asked for three ideas for how to better handle the caseload.

I then harnessed the information presented: my strategic judgement was that of the ideas presented, the best one was to create a series of template paragraphs that would apply to around 80% of our cases and make the process of drafting decision letters much faster. I allocated the coordination of this task to a junior staff member with a flair for drafting, as I judged that she had both the time and the best skill set to carry out this task.

This was a big success. Our speed at dealing with run-of-the-mill files improved dramatically, giving the team breathing room to allocate sufficient time to the more complex files. Crucially, our sick leave rates went down to below the Departmental average and have stayed that way to date.”

APS5 to EL1 -Example Answer 2

“Throughout my working life to date I’ve endeavoured to support the purpose and strategic direction of my employers.

I demonstrated this when I worked as a policy officer at the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. In my three years in this position I developed a highly nuanced understanding of our work environment and where it sat within the federal government. I exercised this understanding every fortnight, as I presented a fortnightly forum where current trends and issues within the Department were discussed.

In preparing for this forum I looked at information from a variety of sources including media services, departmental statistics and the results from focus groups and private polling, and I conceptualised how they would impact on our work. I looked for trends in the data and gave my impressions of the directions in which things were heading. I received consistently excellent feedback for my work in this capacity.

Another large part of my work was preparing briefing notes for senior staff during the policy review and implementation phases of our projects, and here too I took pains to harness information, to think strategically, and to communicate what I thought and the reasons for it effectively. For example, I was involved with the project that resulted in an important White Paper on Counter-Terrorism. In order to prepare monthly briefing notes for senior management I drew together reports and papers from all of Australia’s security agencies, state and federal, I analysed it, and I used my experience to determine what was most relevant and then highlighted it.

After my experience of working as a policy officer at the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet I’m very confident in my ability to support the strategic direction of my employer, and further, to play a role in shaping strategic thinking as well.”

APS5 to EL1 -Example Answer 3

“I believe that supporting the strategic direction of my employer is one of the most important things I do at work.

As a business analyst with Intel’s Human Resources Group, I was tasked with selling a suite of changes to our processes to internal stakeholders. This involved trying to get people who were experts in their fields to consider doing things differently, which was of course a huge challenge. However, I shared and supported senior management’s view that efficiency gains would arise from the changes.

I showed judgment and intelligence in the way that I sold the changes to staff members. For example, I had observed that a certain group of programmers looked up to a particular colleague. Though he wasn’t in a management position, he was clearly an opinion leader, and so I took the time to talk through the changes with him one-on-one. I worked on getting this person onside, and once I’d done so, the other programmers in his area quickly fell into line.

Also during my time at Intel I ran a project which aimed to review our candidate testing procedures. I systematically analysed how well success in testing correlated with long-term positive outcomes within the organisation, like remaining with the company for at least three years and getting promoted. I found that success in testing as a candidate didn’t always correlate well with long-term positive outcomes once the candidate became an Intel employee.

Clearly there was an opportunity here for the Human Resources Group to improve its work practices, so I authored a paper analysing the issue and canvassing current international best practice in this area to see whether we could learn anything from our competitors. This paper was received with great interest by my line manager and she asked me to develop and present my paper at the next in-house round of training seminars. I presented the paper, it generated a lot of attention among senior management, and as a result they set up a task force to take the matter forward.”

EL2 to SES3 -Example Answer 1

“Experience has taught me that strategic thinking is critical to one’s success in a senior role in almost any organisation, and this is certainly the case for my role as a hospital administrator at the Royal Melbourne Children’s Hospital.

It is my responsibility to understand the organisational goals of the hospital as determined by the Board of Trustees and to translate them into operational goals that could be tracked and benchmarked. A big part of my job is also liaising with interest groups, local politicians, industrial associations, the media and individual members of the community to both communicate and to invite input on our objectives.

I attend staff meetings where I monitor the organisational environment and gather information from staff about how the hospital is running and what problems are being encountered on a day-to-day basis. When I detect serious and/or recurrent problems I seek out specific members of staff and speak to them privately, asking questions in order to fill gaps in my understanding and get a clearer picture of the situation.

An example of my efforts to shape the strategic direction and thinking of the hospital was when I championed the introduction of a new database system that would greatly increase the ease with which medical staff would be able to access patient information. I was convinced that this was a good initiative as both statistics and anecdotal examples from medical staff had told me that mistakes were being made, and time lost, because doctors and nurses couldn’t get patient information as and when they needed it.

The system, initially installed on just one computer terminal, generated a lot of competing views within the organisation from the level of the Board of Trustees down. I was inundated with feedback and showed judgement and common sense in deciding which criticisms and suggestions for improvement had merit, and which were just ‘noise’ generated by a workplace full of opinionated and articulate people.

After an initial teething period and some relatively minor improvements, the system became a huge success and medical staff were forced to line up in order to use it. The Board of Trustees quickly approved its roll-out to terminals throughout the building, and queries by medical staff are now in the thousands per day. This innovative solution to an information sharing problem helps patients get better health outcomes on a daily basis, and consequently its implementation is an achievement I’m very proud of.”

EL2 to SES3 -Example Answer 2

“As my career has developed I’ve sought to build my strategic mind at work; I’m always looking to the future and to how we’ll meet the challenges which reside there.

I demonstrated this when for five years I managed a team of nine case workers who provided a social work service. ACT for Kids is a well-respected not-for-profit organisation that works with families and communities to keep children safe from harm.

Because the demand for our services was always so much greater than our available resources, I continually had to think strategically and consider long-term goals in determining our priorities. This was particularly important in striking the appropriate balance between the time-consuming family support work that was our core business and our community education and engagement program which had the potential to effect structural and long-term change.

Throughout my four years in this position I sought to harness as many sources of information as possible. The first such source was collectively the families, caregivers, children and young people that I visited in carrying my own caseload. As well as assisting them, I also got their feedback about the difficulties they were experiencing in their lives. A second source of information was the other professionals and agencies I dealt with on a weekly basis. The third source of information was the nine dedicated case workers that I worked with. The final source of information I harnessed was contacts interstate and overseas with whom I regularly communicated with a view to finding out what current ‘best practice’ was from their viewpoints.

The information that I gathered translated into effective action for the direction of the service. For example, through my contacts in the Northern Territory I learnt how to better engage families from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, which previously had been a critical gap in our information about how to serve our community.

Similarly, client stories and information from the medical community made me realise that an epidemic of methamphetamine addiction was just over the horizon. In response I explored the possibilities and decided that we should partner with a drug counselling agency and share information with them in order to put ourselves in a better position to weather the storm. This proved to be a highly effective strategy, and our partnership with Directions ACT was recognised by the Chief Minister of the ACT in a speech he gave to the Legislative Assembly.”

EL2 to SES3 -Example Answer 3

“I shaped the strategic thinking of my workplace when I was project manager for the mechanical engineering consultancy firm Packer Engineering.

One project that I oversaw was the design and implementation of a heating and cooling system in an office tower development in Adelaide’s CBD. The brief was to install a heating and cooling system that was world-class in terms of efficiency and power use.

This project was fraught with problems from the beginning. Our preferred heating and cooling system design could not be used due to the specific structure of the building, so a creative solution had to be found. I conducted a review of best-practice approaches used in similar buildings in similar climates around the world in the last three years, and then in conjunction with the rest of my management team, I analysed these approaches with a view to cherry-picking the best ideas and applying them to our project.

In the planning phase of any project I understand above all that my role is to bring out the best in other people, and I do this by engaging with them and encouraging their contribution. On many of the projects I’ve worked on, the problems that arise are too complex and multi-dimensional to be solved by one person alone. When I am responsible for setting work tasks for others, I do so on the basis that if completed well they will contribute with the project objectives, and I always communicate this to the people I manage.

This project was no exception, but with teamwork we developed a plan for a heating and cooling system that would fit the building perfectly. The final approach that we used was a highly innovative hybrid design which incorporated different elements in a way that to my knowledge had not been done before. This creative alternative, once tested, was actually *more* efficient than the heating and cooling system we had wanted to use in the first place.”

“ACHIEVES RESULTS”

Identifies and uses resources wisely:

Identifies key individuals who need to be involved; makes effective use of team and individual capabilities.

Monitors task progress against performance expectations to ensure deadlines are met; communicates outcomes to supervisor.

Reschedules and reorganises work to reflect changes in priority.

APS1 to APS4 -Example Answer 1

“My abilities at achieving results are well evidenced by the time I spend helping out at my local Community Legal Centre. I’ve been doing this work one night per week for approximately the last 12 months. This work, which I do on a volunteer basis, involves interviewing members of the public who drop-in to seek legal advice about their legal problems relating to housing and/or debt. My responsibility is to interview them, relay what they tell me to the duty solicitor, obtain instructions on what to advise the client from him or her, and then communicate that advice to the client.

Because the duty solicitor’s time is very limited, I do whatever I can to reduce the burden I put on them by being proactive and completing ‘ground work’ tasks myself. This might involve doing research, taking notes, photocopying, and drafting letters of advice for the duty solicitor to check and sign off on. Also, if I know that another volunteer has dealt with a certain client or issue before I seek them out to ask for their view and their advice before seeing the duty solicitor.

When doing this work I’m constantly applying my academic knowledge, and I’m also building my professional expertise in skills such as interviewing, giving advice, and drafting letters. It’s particularly satisfying that I’m given the freedom to deal with clients from the beginning until the end of their contact with us. I’m committed to providing a high-quality legal service to members of the public from the moment they walk in the door, and I feel that I’ve remained faithful to this commitment throughout my 12 months in this position to date.

The duty solicitors that I’ve worked with have given me great feedback about my work, as have our clients. A particular client was so happy with the assistance that I gave her (she was able to resolve her legal difficulties very quickly following the advice session) that she wrote me a letter to thank me for my work.”

APS1 to APS4 -Example Answer 2

“I possess the capability to achieve results, and this is amply demonstrated by my achievements in a previous position when I worked as a shift supervisor at a very busy KFC restaurant.

In this position I was responsible for a team of up to 12 people on a given night. I was responsible for the service they gave, the quality of the food that went out, and for the efficient and smooth running of the restaurant in general. While on occasion there was a more senior manager in the restaurant along with me and the rest of the team, they were often too busy with paperwork to be very involved in the running of things, and this meant that it was down to me to achieve the results that our customers expected.

When I started this position I had no experience of managing people. I had to develop this capability quickly and in an environment that during busy periods could be very high-pressure, but this was a challenge that I rose to.

During busy periods I had to constantly monitor the team’s performance to make sure that everyone was working well. When I saw that a team member wasn’t (for whatever reason) doing as good a job as was required, I made quick decisions to change around the responsibilities so that our speed and delivery of a good product wasn’t affected. I did this while also ensuring that I adhered strictly to all our procedures and protocols.

Another aspect of this job was putting together shift schedules, which involved choosing which of our staff members would be asked to work on which days. I paid a lot of attention to the personalities and capabilities of the staff on our casual roster, and when planning a shift I selected specific combinations of people that I thought would get along and do a great job.”

APS1 to APS4 -Example Answer 3

“I possess strong abilities at achieving results that I’ve worked hard to develop.

I achieve strong results in my part-time job, which is a one day per week position with a company called Living Simply. This company leases potted tropical plants to businesses and to government departments and agencies. My job as a ‘plant service technician’ is to go out and water, prune, clean and spray the plants for pests and disease. I monitor the health and appearance of the plants from week to week and feed this information back to my team leader at the end of the day.

This work is unsupervised, which puts a lot of responsibility on me to get it right and to deliver on intended results. If I was to forget to water a plant, or if I missed the fact that a plant was infested with bugs, it would likely be dead or dying by the next time I saw it. It’s a testament to my ability to achieve results that I’m yet to lose a plant due to inattention of this kind.

It’s almost entirely my decision as to when a plant has to be replaced because it has deteriorated too much and no longer looks healthy. This is a balancing act: if I call for plants to be replaced before it’s necessary, then that would waste company resources. If I leave them too long, then it could lead to a complaint from the customer or even to them deciding not to renew the contract.

Also, this job involves a lot of time and goal monitoring, as there’s always just one day to complete a run. If some locations take longer to service than normal then I have to reorganise the rest of the day to make sure that I get everything done.

Through careful monitoring and a focus on results, I’ve been able to maintain two of the most profitable service runs in the company while at the same time receiving zero complaints or negative feedback from customers in a two-year period”.

APS5 to EL1 -Example Answer 1

“I achieved consistently excellent results when I was a Senior Analyst at the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC).

In this role I planned and lead compliance ‘surveillances’ with up to four colleagues. Surveillances involved visiting financial services licensees at their offices, meeting senior executives and then reviewing their compliance documents (such as minutes of meetings and internal reports) and systems.

When planning surveillances, part of my job was to assign tasks to other team members. It’s my observation that not every manager of people does this particularly well. When I assigned tasks, I did so based on my assessment of their individual strengths and weaknesses, so that tasks played to their strengths. I always made an effort to learn the strengths and weaknesses of the people around me. Some team members were better at analysis for example, while others were better at interviewing executives.

The planning of surveillances required me to establish clear timeframes for how they would be implemented. However, plans could change. For example I led a compliance surveillance on a stockbroking firm during the onset of the global financial crisis. Although initially it looked like there was nothing of concern in their operations, the situation rapidly changed when it was reported in the media that the company was in danger of going into receivership. Overnight my and I team threw out our original surveillance plan and devised a new and much more in-depth one with an entirely new set of objectives. The implementation of this plan gave ASIC crucial information about the company and in the long run prevented a lot of people from losing their life savings.

At the conclusion of surveillance and after debriefing my superiors I received a personal telephone call from ASIC’s chairman thanking me for a job well done. I was extremely pleased with this result, but not altogether surprised, as I knew that my team and I had achieved the necessary results.”

APS5 to EL1 -Example Answer 2

“When it comes to achieving results I have a strong belief in my ability, and the track record to back it up.

One of the sternest tests of my ability to achieve results came when I worked for a time as a high school maths teacher. In my first year in this position I was asked by the head teacher to take on a class that was notorious as being difficult to control and also well behind where they should have been academically.

I knew that I would only be successful if I had a clear plan from the start. To this end, I talked to other teachers who had many of the same students in their classes, and asked for their professional advice on how to deal with them. On the basis of their advice I began to draw up a plan to engage the class, prevent lapses of discipline and bring them up to speed academically.

I also carried out some research into current best practice teaching methods for difficult classes in the teaching literature, and this led me to adjust and fine-tune my plan.

Another thing that I did was to commit myself to a high-quality outcome by telling colleagues, friends and my partner about the challenge I was to have in teaching this class. I did this to increase my personal stake in the challenge and thereby increase my motivation to do my very best. I have found this to be a highly effective way of ensuring that I see projects through to completion.

Getting this class to respond to my teaching methods and stay disciplined wasn't without hiccups along the way, and inevitably I had to respond and be flexible to change. However, my results speak for themselves: the class went from the worst to one of the best-performing classes academically, and a full third of the students graduated to a more advanced class. This was coupled with a massive improvement in their behaviour in the classroom and a much more harmonious atmosphere overall.”

APS5 to EL1 -Example Answer 3

“I had the opportunity to achieve results during the years I was a Psychologist with Navy Health based at HMAS Creswell. This was a challenging position with a lot of different aspects to it.

A big part of this job involved working as a psychological counsellor. Personnel came to see me (or were ordered to see me) and became my clients. After an initial consultation, if I felt they needed follow-up visits, I would establish a treatment plan for them with a timeframe for implementation. I would strongly encourage clients to come back to see me as many times as I felt it necessary in order to see their treatment through to completion.

Counselling people is all about responding in a positive way to change; but specifically, helping other people to respond positively to change in their lives. To do this I shared information with my clients (often to the effect of: ‘you’re not the only one who feels this way’) and assisted them in using it to adapt to change and its associated emotions.

A further important duty I had was carrying out psychological assessments of personnel and maintaining files and records so that I could provide psychological reports on personnel as requested by my superiors. In assessing personnel I discussed many issues confidentially with the other psychologists in my unit, and relied heavily on their expert knowledge and advice in arriving at the most accurate interpretations of test results. Similarly I assisted the other psychologists in my unit in the same way when they were doing psychological assessments.

Outside of my role as a psychological counsellor I also gave presentations to Navy personnel on a variety of psychological topics as requested by my superiors. Here I contributed my own expertise for the benefit of the organisation, and my presentations were without exception very well-received.”

EL2 to SES3 -Example Answer 1

“In terms of achieving results, my key achievements at the executive level have been achieved by identifying and harnessing resources, setting direction and implementing appropriate strategies.

When I first joined the Department of Education, one of our key delivery areas was not meeting its KPI and its deliverables were considerably below standard. My professional expertise told me that to address this underperformance a restructure of the staff of 20 people in this area was called for – nothing less would do.

After careful consideration I established a plan to divide the 20 staff members into four distinct teams, each with a team leader who was given an entirely new mandate: up-skill the staff in the team; champion the goals; motivate staff to achieve outcomes, and monitor their performance. The team leaders were selected on the basis of their expert skills in leadership, even if they didn't have a lot of experience (as two of them didn't) in management.

This plan represented a substantial deviation from the previous structure, and it was met with some scepticism by certain elements in the Department. I expected this, as change almost never comes easily, and didn't let the mutterings impede my momentum.

To cut a long story short, the plan I devised was carried out. One important effect of this new approach was that we (the team leaders, and I as their manager) were able to identify some staff members who required performance counselling, and some deficiencies in the processes that were being used to meet the targets. This required some adjustments to the strategy, but with some additional training and a change to work procedures through a process of collaboration with the staff, the KPIs rose to above the standard required within a three-month period – a great success for the Department and for me personally.”

EL2 to SES3 -Example Answer 2

“I can’t think of a better example of a time in my life when I’ve worked hard and achieved results than the time when I took a two year sabbatical from the workplace to embrace my lifelong passion for chocolate.

My goal was to develop my own boutique, artisanal chocolate bar. To this end I developed a two year plan in which I aimed to produce, market and sell my bar to retailers.

I had to make contacts in a wide variety of different industries in order to realise my goal. For example, I knew that the best cocoa beans in the world are grown in Venezuela, so I contacted the embassy in Caracas, then used Australian business contacts they gave me to meet local cocoa farmers.

I knew that a critical success factor was how my chocolate tasted, so I organised a focus group of people from whom I could seek feedback about it. I resisted the temptation to use friends and family, as I felt that they would be tempted to tell me what I wanted to hear rather than what I needed to.

As this was a self-directed project my deadlines were self-imposed, but that meant I had to monitor my progress extremely closely, as there was no else to tell me that I was falling behind. Hiccups and setbacks too numerous to mention meant that I had to reorganise and reschedule on an almost weekly basis. For example, when my packaging machine broke down just five days before I was due to deliver on my first contract, I contacted all of friends and family and a temp agency and organised thirty people to wrap the bars by hand, over two marathon 12-hour days.

The concrete result I achieved was that two years after a standing start, I had produced and marketed a new chocolate bar and seen it stocked by three chocolate shops and two IGA supermarkets.”

EL2 to SES3 -Example Answer 3

“Achieving results was a huge priority during the four years when I managed the Parramatta office of Centrelink.

I began in this role at a time when Centrelink was trying hard nation-wide to build closer community relationships in the districts where their offices were located. This was an identified strategic priority. An example of my efforts to drive this agenda forward is that I instigated regular open days where community organisations had the opportunity to interact one-on-one with Centrelink staff, swap information, and develop closer working relationships. These open days were hailed as a great success by all concerned.

I also did a lot of work to build the organisational capability and responsiveness of Centrelink Parramatta. For example, our customers came from a highly diverse range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and shortly after beginning in my role I recognised that we might have been providing those customers with a poor service and not really knowing it, and thereby remaining inflexible despite changing demands. To address this I set up a community liaison team to meet with customer groups and explore ways for us to improve our effectiveness. This process led to a lot of initiatives which feedback from the community told us were very successful in providing a better service to all of our customers.

A further personal priority of mine during my four years at Centrelink was to promote a culture of excellence among the front-line staff and to ensure that they had the tools and resources that would enable them to do a great job. I encouraged the various teams to take pride in their work and I instructed team leaders to build teams with complementary skill sets – this sometimes involved shuffling staff around, but the outcomes in terms of staff retention and performance were well worth it.

When I felt that it was time to move on from this role I was able to look at the organisation and see many improvements on where it had been four years previously, and know that I had unequivocally delivered strong results.”

“SUPPORTS PRODUCTIVE WORKING RELATIONSHIPS”

Values individual differences and diversity:

Recognises the positive benefits that can be gained from diversity.

Recognises the different working styles of individuals, and factors this into the management of tasks.

Tries to see things from different perspectives.

Treats people with respect and courtesy.

APS1 to APS4 -Example Answer 1

“I have strived to build productive working relationships throughout my career to date, and I’m pleased to say that I’ve achieved a great deal of success in this area.

A good example is when I worked as a Housing Adviser with a local council. In the main, this position involved interviewing people with housing problems and offering them advice and assistance. At the maximum, this could involve the council providing financial assistance so that they could be adequately housed, but resources had to be allocated sparingly.

The team I worked in at the council was very mixed in terms of just about every demographic, including age, sex, race, and cultural background. I hadn’t experienced this kind of diversity before, and I’m not ashamed to say that at first I found it challenging to relate to all of my workmates.

Over time however, I began to recognise that despite diverse appearances, we all shared a common spirit and common goals. The diversity in our team was also a real strength in our ability to do our jobs well; our clients were also a very diverse group, and I saw that the diversity of our team helped us to understand their needs and consistently assist them in the best way possible.

Also, despite outward appearances there was nobody so different that I couldn’t find a way to relate to them and from there build a great working relationship. My team-mates helped me when I had a difficult client or was having a bad day, and I did the same for them – a relationship of mutual benefit.

I left this job with a deep appreciation for diversity in a workplace, and I maintain several strong friendships with former workmates from the council even now, three years on. In my view this is the best evidence possible for someone’s ability to build productive relationships at work.”

APS1 to APS4 -Example Answer 2

“I had the opportunity to demonstrate my excellent abilities in building and maintaining productive working relationships when I worked as a trainee journalist with ABC radio in a rural area.

My work involved researching stories for the daily news bulletin, which I also presented. To this end I had to interview people in the local area, in person or by telephone. Doing so could involve asking about their press release, getting a quote or recording a sound bite, and often it was many things at once.

It was unusual for the people I contacted to be neutral parties in the issues I was interviewing them about. Inevitably they worked for, or were involved with, a certain organisation and wanted (to a greater or lesser degree) to push an agenda. As my job was of course to report the facts as objectively as possibly, this was no small source of potential conflict.

Also, because I was working in a rural area with a small population, I found myself contacting the same people again and again. This meant it was crucial to maintain a good working relationship with them. If I didn't, then I ran the risk that the next time I called they would refuse to speak with me, and that would have made my job very difficult to do. On the other hand if I didn't ask them the difficult questions that needed to be asked then I wouldn't have been doing my job.

This was an excellent lesson in the important of maintaining good, productive relationships in a work context, and one that I learned a lot from. My approach was to always give some thought to the needs of the person I was about to speak to before I picked up the phone. This meant that I treated them as collaborators rather than tools, and they reacted very positively to this.”

APS1 to APS4 -Example Answer 3

“The ability to build and support productive relationships at work is a key strength of mine. I honed this ability when I worked as a Customer Service Representative with a major bank in a country area.

We had a lot of elderly customers and we also had a lot of customers who were farmers with rural finance products. Both these customer groups put a lot of faith and trust in us to help them manage their affairs, and I was constantly responsive to their needs.

Sometimes it was tempting with these customer groups to tell them what they wanted to hear in terms of their financial position, but I always maintained a policy of being completely upfront and honest. This included clarifying deadlines, reminding customers of when payments would fall due, explaining how much interest they were paying on loans and so on.

I am required to determine customer needs and provide solutions. For example, an elderly customer enquired about her bank account as she felt that there was a discrepancy in the balance. After having a conversation with her in the privacy of my office, I discovered that what was really concerning her was the amount of her last pension payment. As she was not comfortable contacting Centrelink, I did so on her behalf and we were able to clarify the issue and resolve her confusion. She was most appreciative of my help and left my office with her problem solved.

Because it was a small town, many of our customers were people I would see on a regular basis in a social setting outside of work. However, at no time did I compromise my relationship with them by being anything other than courteous and professional at work.

My success at building and supporting productive relationships with customers and other staff in this position is demonstrated by the fact that I won ‘employee of the month’ awards on three occasions during the 13 months that I worked there.”

APS5 to EL1 -Example Answer 1

“My greatest achievement in supporting productive working relationships came when I worked as a Specialist Analyst Programmer at ANZ Bank.

This was obviously a technical role, but over time a significant part of my duties evolved into being a supervisor and a mentor for our many graduate programmers. Almost all of these graduate programmers were men, a large percentage of them did not speak English as a first language, and overall I think it was fair to say that they weren't the best communicators – though they were technically very skilled. There wasn't a lot of effective communication going on between this group and the rest of the section, and I took it upon myself to offer my assistance in order to build and maintain relationships with our graduates and between them and other people in the section. I encouraged more face-to-face communication and more communication in general.

To ensure that contributions were recognised and encouraged, I approached senior management with an idea to hand out a monthly prize to the graduate programmer judged best-performing by his or her workmates, with no one person able to win the prize twice in succession. As this idea was cheap and easy to implement it was green-lit, and was very successful at fostering a sense that effort would be rewarded.

Another initiative that I instituted was to identify learning opportunities for our graduate programmers where I could see that there were gaps in their skill-sets. This including training on topics like effective communication in the workplace and assertiveness as well as technical topics.

As a result of my actions in building and supporting productive working relationships with our graduate programmers, ANZ was better able to harness the benefits of their skills and knowledge of our graduates, and the graduates were empowered to successfully complete our graduate program and move on to more senior positions. I received an Outstanding Contribution award in recognition of this at one of our yearly awards ceremonies, and this is something that I'm very proud of.”

APS5 to EL1 -Example Answer 2

“My present position as a team leader in Global Executive Recruitment at the boutique recruitment company TXT International is all about supporting productive relationships, which has presented me with the opportunity to really build on and develop my skills in this arena.

At TXT International I manage a small of 4-5 people in a highly pressurized working environment. We target the top 5% of the recruitment market, seeking out exactly the right person for our clients and contacting them with an offer whether they're actively seeking a new position or not. We pride ourselves on our partnerships with some of the world's biggest and most respected companies, and on our network that can target senior executives in any industry and location. Productive relationships with our partner companies and with top senior executives are absolutely key to our continued success, and this is something that as team leader I put a lot of work into.

Regrettably when I started at TXT International I found that the atmosphere in the office was not so good; heated arguments were not uncommon and there had been a high turnover of junior staff, which is not good for our relationships with partner companies as it means a lack of continuity. I noted that those in senior management positions could be demanding and even volatile at times and quickly realised that I needed to act as a buffer between my team and senior management.

To deal with this unpleasant and destructive atmosphere in the workplace I began by listening to what my team members had to say, arranging half-hour one-on-one meetings with each member of my team over a coffee outside the office. This could be a forum for me to give feedback in a non-threatening way, but it was also an opportunity for team members to vent. I gave a guarantee that they could say anything they liked about senior management and that it would never be linked back to them. I kept this guarantee, but I also fed back the general comments to senior management, helping them to see that the different members of the team had to be treated with dignity and respect, and given praise for good work done as well as censure for mistakes.

Over time this approach payed real dividends in the office. Senior managers were better behaved, arguments ceased almost entirely, there was a much improved atmosphere, and staff turnover fell almost to zero.”

APS5 to EL1 -Example Answer 3

“There’s no doubt in my mind that supporting productive working relationships is something that, through experience, I have become very good at.

An example of my achievements in this area arises from when I worked as a Social Worker Team Leader at Benalla & District Memorial Hospital. In the period when I started there had been a freeze on new hires due to budget cutbacks but NO reduction in the amount of work we had coming in. It was my responsibility to delegate work to the team, but I had to be very careful in doing so as workloads were always high. To manage this, I actively listened to what members of my team told me about their capacity to take on more work, and I worked collaboratively with them to help them manage their caseloads, prioritise effectively, and work smarter to save time.

The environment at Benalla & District Memorial Hospital could also be quite political, with a rapidly changing landscape in terms of funding and management priorities. To protect and support my team, I gathered as much information as I could about these issue and I instituted weekly ‘What’s New’ chat sessions with them so that I could share information with them and listen to their feedback and concerns.

Further, I got actively involved in ensuring that my team members were progressing professionally by encouraging them to attend training sessions and regularly passing along information about new developments in our profession. On one occasion a team member badly wanted to attend a conference that was being held in Perth that was highly relevant to her career development, and I advocated strongly on her behalf with senior management to obtain funding for her to attend. After a few setbacks I was successful in this and the team member was able to attend, something which I felt contributed greatly to her value in the team.”

EL2 to SES3 -Example Answer 1

“As editor-in-chief for media, politics, society and culture magazine ‘The Monthly’, I’d estimate that as much as 80% of my time at work was spent cultivating productive working relationships. It was without question my main focus.

One big reason for this was that at The Monthly all of our articles were commissioned – we didn’t accept unsolicited submissions – and as such nurturing relationships with leading Australian thinkers and writers was of paramount importance to the success of the entire enterprise. To this end I frequently contacted our writers to offer assistance of some kind, to encourage and consult with them, and to give praise and recognition when articles were high quality, submitted on time, or received positive feedback from readers.

At the same time, an editor can’t be a friend to his contributing writers all of the time, and so I had to ensure that these were truly *productive* working relationships by sometimes telling writers that they had missed deadlines, that their contracts were in jeopardy, that there were problems with their manuscripts, and so on. In this way I gave prompt feedback and dealt with under-performance swiftly and decisively.

Cultivating productive working relationships with staff was also a big part of my job at The Monthly. For example, I noticed when I began in this position that some staff were inclined to ‘take it easy’ for the first two weeks after an edition went to press, which inevitably led to very long hours in the week before the next issue was due to go to press. Some staff felt that this was normal in the magazine industry. Other staff, particularly those with families, felt that the work could be spread more evenly over the available time so that there wasn’t as much of a last-minute rush. In response I began a consultation process to refine our production calendar and article status chart, and the end result was a production process which suited the different working styles of both of these group of staff members.”

EL2 to SES3 -Example Answer 2

“As Director Inspections at the Commonwealth Ombudsman I lead and managed a team who conducted compliance audits of enforcement agencies in relation to their use of statutory powers, and a key part of this job was to cultivate strong working relationships with relevant enforcement agencies.

Because of my position it was common for enforcement agency staff to be highly deferential when we were on-site conducting these audits. I saw this as unhelpful (though not entirely unpleasant!), as what was needed was a frank exchange of views, not empty platitudes. The other extreme, which I also encountered on some occasions, was when the enforcement agency was openly hostile to having their use of statutory powers brought into question.

To get around these two problems I built working relationships with enforcement agency staff. I went out of my way to explain that I saw our agendas as being shared: they wanted their staff to act professionally and within the law, and so did I. Our shared goal was improved compliance, and sanctions were unlikely to be imposed provided everyone was working towards this goal. Once this was properly understood I found that my relationships with enforcement agency staff were highly productive.

Also, to cultivate productive working relationships with my colleagues, I mentored two junior staff members under our mentoring program, delegated tasks and responsibility where I saw fit, and took pains to encourage people to feel that they could freely seek me out for support and guidance without being judged for it.

My experiences at work have taught me that strong working relationships don't just happen, they have to be worked at every day. As someone who has held senior management positions, I see my role as to facilitate cooperation as much as possible, so that the people around me at work are have their ability to quickly and easily form productive working relationships enhanced.”

EL2 to SES3 -Example Answer 3

“When I look back on my work history I realise that cultivating productive working relationships was a key part of what I did in a variety of different roles. However, it’s the time when I worked as a planning manager for the Development Planning Branch at Ipswich City Council that provides perhaps the best example of my strong capabilities in this realm.

This position required very high level communication skills on a daily basis as it is the nature of planning that disparate people and groups must be brought together to collaborate and cooperate. A particular challenge was presented by some highly vociferous residents groups in Ipswich who often opposed Council planning initiatives. Internally they were viewed as nothing more than an impediment to our processes, but I recognised that there were positive benefits to be gained from listening to them and engaging with their point of view.

One issue that I dealt with during my in this position concerned a lagoon which ran through some of the older parts of the city. Due to years of silt build-up the lagoon had become very shallow, and our engineering section were adamant that the lagoon had to be dredged in order to lower it by 1.5 meters to allow for adequate storm water runoff in the event of severe rain. However a local residents group were opposed to this as the lowering of the water level would cause the roots of old trees on the banks to become exposed, which could cause them harm.

To resolve this issue I brokered an informal meeting consisting of myself, the Chief Engineer, an arborist from the council, and two representatives from the residents group, and this lead to an outcome which satisfied all parties and did not damage the trees.

Also, on order to cultivate productive working relationships with my staff I instigated three-person mentoring groups. These consisted of one senior and two junior staff members who would meet informally once a fortnight for 30 minutes and simply chat about whatever was going on at work. These were a great success, leading to innumerable instances of things such as good ideas being fed back up to senior management. They also had a noticeable effect on staff retention rates.”

“DISPLAYS PERSONAL DRIVE AND INTEGRITY”

Commits to action

Takes personal responsibility for accurate completion of work and seeks guidance when required.

Shows initiative and does what is required.

Commits energy and drive to see that goals are achieved.

APS1 to APS4 -Example Answer 1

“I’ve displayed my personal drive and integrity over the past four months while I’ve worked part-time as an information processing officer at a company that specializes in litigation support, ‘Legal Data Co’.

While the work in this role is relatively simple, it requires concentration and a high degree of attention to detail. My approach is to work quickly and accurately, but to stop and immediately ask questions if I’m not sure about how to do something. I take responsibility for my work and if I make a mistake I admit to it immediately, which saves a lot of time in the long run.

At times I am called in to work on weekends or at night to assist in meeting tight deadlines. These situations can involve some pressure but I respond by maintaining a calm and positive attitude.

Where appropriate I’m not afraid to take the initiative and make suggestions in this role, which I think is particularly important given that Legal Data Co is a very young company that doesn’t have every procedure totally nailed down yet.

One day I was asked to begin work on a new data set and I quickly realised that there was a much faster way to enter a particular set of records into our database program. I took the initiative and told my supervisor what I had in mind, and though he was dismissive at first, I stuck to my guns and convinced him that my idea had merit. We implemented the method I’d thought of and sure enough, it led to a substantial productivity increase. At the end of my shift that day the managing director called me into her office to commend me personally on having the resourcefulness to think of and to share a helpful suggestion. It’s my firm intention to bring this level of drive and integrity to every job that I undertake.”

APS1 to APS4 -Example Answer 2

“I’m confident that I possess personal drive and integrity and I possess the work history to demonstrate this.

A previous job I had was as an trainee hairdresser. I worked in a salon in a suburban area and we struggled at times to attract enough customers to keep the business afloat. After I’d been working there for a couple of months my boss revealed that if we didn’t start getting more custom then the business was in jeopardy.

Because my role was very junior, it wasn’t really my responsibility to come up with ways to improve business, nor was this expected. Nonetheless, I took the initiative and suggested to my boss that we begin asking our customers for a contact telephone number so that we could call them the day after their appointment to ask for some feedback on the service that they had received.

I suggested this because I realised that it was very important for the business to attract repeat customers, as it was in an area without a lot of passing traffic. Also, our customers would rarely say anything negative about their experience with us at the end of their appointment, but a day later and over the telephone they were more inclined to answer with honesty, making it a valuable opportunity to get feedback that we could use to improve our practices.

As it was my idea I was given the responsibility of making the calls to customers. When they gave negative feedback, I relayed this to my boss and then as a team we discussed ways to improve in order to address the issues raised. After a couple of weeks of doing this I came up with the idea of offering customers who gave negative feedback incentives (such as \$10 off a cut and colour) if they would come back and try us again. This strategy was highly effective at retaining customers and getting their repeat business – so much so that six months later we had to take on another staff member to cope with the increased demand for appointments”.

APS1 to APS4 -Example Answer 3

“I showed integrity and a great deal of personal drive when for a period of time I worked weekends with a company that did landscape gardening. I’d never done anything like that in the past, and because I wasn’t as physically big or strong as my workmates, I found it to be initially quite challenging. I got tired quickly and I struggled to complete some of the tasks as fast as my team leader would have liked.

After a couple of shifts it seemed like I wouldn’t be able to continue in the job, and I was on the point of handing in my notice. However, I decided that before doing so I would try applying myself 100% to the work and seeing whether I could turn things around.

My strategy was first of all to seek out experienced members of the team to ask for their guidance on how to complete tasks without having to rely so much on strength. I was persistent, and with their advice and my own ideas I soon worked out how to do the necessary tasks in a way that wouldn’t cause me to get so tired.

This approach was a great success. Keeping up became less and less of a problem, I started to enjoy the work, and along the way I gained the respect of my workmates and of our team leader. I even invented a couple of new ways of doing things that were adopted as standard practice by the team as a whole.

This experience was a great lesson in the benefits of committing to action. It also taught me to take personal responsibility for my performance at work, as there are always ways of improving even if the situation seems impossible. I now know that whatever the challenge, I’ll be able to find a way to overcome it.”

APS5 to EL1 -Example Answer 1

“I know that I have a huge amount of personal drive and integrity, and I feel that I amply displayed it when at the age of 27 I started my own boutique Search Engine Optimization Company.

It was a massive challenge to get the company off the ground, particularly as economic were tough conditions, but I persisted in trying to achieve my objectives for the business and eventually I was rewarded.

Working with just one other full-time employee we created, marketed and slowly built our client list. The pressure was intense and it was tempting at times to abandon the company and go back to the stability and comfort of working for someone else, but I had the energy and drive to commit 100% and never doubt that the company would succeed.

The toughest point in the life of the company was at the two-year mark, when despite a lot of hard work it looked like the company had reached a plateau and business was not growing the way it needed to. I realised that we had to expand into the undeveloped Chinese market but that was a very daunting prospect. After a few tentative steps I realised that I had to take the initiative and commit myself and the company to doing what I thought was necessary. I immediately booked a flight to Shanghai and three weeks later I had an apartment there and was setting up meetings with companies based there.

Living in China was very difficult at times but I was so focused on my goals for the company that I was able to respond to problems positively and calmly. Looking back I made a lot of mistakes, but I always acknowledged and learnt from them, and I rarely made the same mistake twice.

My drive and persistency have paid off, and turnover for the company is now \$100k+ per annum. We have three full-time employees besides me and I’m looking to step back from the business and pursue other employment opportunities.”

APS5 to EL1 -Example Answer 2

“I display drive and integrity every day of my life, not just at work. The best example of this was when for 10 months I managed my family’s restaurant, as this was a personal challenge as well as a work one.

Without any prior management experience I was called to take on this role as my father become suddenly and seriously ill and my mother had to become his full-time carer. It was a very challenging prospect but I also saw it as in a way a great opportunity to help my parents and also to build my skills.

In the first couple of weeks that I managed the restaurant a key employee was caught stealing from the till, and shortly thereafter there was a fire in the kitchen that shut us down for two weeks, so my ‘trial by fire’ was unfortunately literal. Also, the larger problem was that the restaurant had been only breaking even for a couple of years, and business was not improving.

After dealing with the immediate problems I made a determination and a commitment to turning things around. I realised that we needed to get more feedback from our customers and potential customers about the restaurant and so we went out and canvassed opinions in the community. We received consistent feedback that the restaurant was viewed as being old-fashioned and the food too heavy and lacking in flavour.

I consulted with the chef about changing the menu but he was highly resistant to changing it. I realised that in order to move forward unfortunately he would have to be let go. He was a family friend and so it was difficult to convince my parents that it was necessary to replace him if the restaurant was to be a success again. They challenged me on this view but I stood by my position and persisted, and they saw that it was the right thing to do.

The replacement of the chef transpired to be a turning point in the restaurant’s fortunes and with some other changes and a local advertising campaign the restaurant began to turn a profit again. Although I was enjoying the work after 10 months turnover was such that we could employ a part-time manager, allowing me to return to my studies and finish my degree. To this day the restaurant has remained popular and is often fully booked.”

APS5 to EL1 -Example Answer 3

“I displayed a great deal of personal drive and integrity when for seven months I worked at the Department of Health. I was employed on a contract basis as a Project Leader in the Marketing Team, and the project I was employed to lead was about raising the public’s awareness of the dangerous effects of childhood obesity.

When I began at the Department of Health the project had already been running for some time, and an ad campaign had been developed. However, this ad campaign did very poorly when shown to test audiences, scoring low on both cut-through and on its likelihood of bringing about behaviour change.

I became aware that there were a number of people in the Marketing Team who would’ve preferred to ignore the poor performance of the ad campaign in testing and press on with the launch of the campaign regardless, but I felt strongly that we should debate it internally, and if necessary, take the tough decision to scrap the ad campaign and start again from scratch. My view was that as our corporate agenda was to promote health and well-being in a cost-effective way, we could not in good conscience throw good money after bad after being clearly told that what had been developed would not garner results.

It was difficult to drive this process and I needed to be courageous on many occasions to challenge the views of others in a constructive way. At all times however I felt that if I continued to stand by my position and act positively the momentum of opinion would start to swing my way. This is what happened, and the decision was taken to scrap the ad campaign and engage external consultants to review our team and help us engineer internal change. I encouraged my colleagues to evaluate my performance during this process and I learnt a lot about how my approach impacted on others.

Ultimately we went back to the drawing board with a revitalised enthusiasm and produced a fantastic ad campaign that tested very well. It aired for a couple of months, and follow-up studies have shown that it has had measurable and significant success in changing attitudes, beliefs and behaviours in the community. I’m confident that in time this will translate into less need for interventions from the health sector and reduced costs in providing care overall.”

EL2 to SES3 -Example Answer 1

“I exemplified personal drive and integrity when I worked as an Assistant Director at the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF). This was in the Grants and Contract Services section of DAFF, which focuses on grants management delivery and contract support. In this role I worked extensively on the planning, development, implementation and management of the ‘Caring for our Country Community Action Grants’ program (www.nrm.gov.au). (This is a program where community groups apply for grants of between \$5000 and \$20,000 to take action and protect and enhance their natural environment.)

Providing key support to the section director was a big part of my job and my main duty in this capacity was to provide him with frank and forthright advice. I knew that the program would see the best outcomes if I was willing to voice my opinion and to take up difficult or controversial issues rather than staying silent.

An example of my honest advice was when I championed the inclusion of ‘Community Skills, Knowledge and Engagement’ as a National Priority Area under the program. I did this because of strong feedback from stakeholder groups which showed that it was something that they wanted, but it was something that the section director was against. It would have been much easier for me to drop my support for this National Priority Area, but I believed in it and was resilient enough to embrace the challenge. I modified my approach with the section director and before long I was able to find common ground with him and get him to agree to the inclusion of Community Skills, Knowledge and Engagement as a National Priority Area.

Another time I came to a point where I felt that grant applications were being assessed inconsistently, and that as a result there was a legitimate argument that some community groups were getting larger grants or being more successful than others for no good reason. I strongly felt that a more defined process of assessing grant applications was urgently called for, so I committed energy and drive to achieving this, and within a few months I had overseen an overhaul of the assessment process.

Liaising with external stakeholders also formed a large part of my duties with DAFF. I constantly strove to represent DAFF and the Caring for our Country Community Action Grants program as effectively as possible. I did this by being open to new ideas, open to both positive and negative feedback, and by making myself available before and after public forums to meet with people face-to-face.”

EL2 to SES3 -Example Answer 2

"I exemplify personal drive and integrity every day in my present position as technical team leader at the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research.

The focus of this role is systems delivery. While I have some background experience in ICT I don't have any formal training in it, and so this position initially presented a lot of new challenges. It was also a more pressurized work environment than I had experienced before. As a result of these two things I felt a lot of pressure from day one, but I responded to this in a controlled and positive way, and committed myself to mastering the responsibilities of the role as quickly as possible.

One challenge that presented itself early on was becoming familiar with CA Technologies' program 'Clarity', the complex web-based workflow system used by the Department. I found this to be a very user-unfriendly program, and a lot of other people struggled with it too, but it was a crucial tool in the smooth running of our operations. As such I resolved to make myself an expert in this system. It was only by being persistent and resilient that I managed to advance my skills in this complex program, but after only three months on the job senior management decided that I had displayed such aptitude and personal drive that I was provided with specialised training which enabled me to become the Department's product expert in the Clarity program.

Above all, this position at the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research has demanded that I be motivated and a 'self-learner', and so that's what I have endeavoured to be. I firmly believe that this shows a strong commitment to personal development and a professional and courageous approach. I would bring these values to any future role and I'm confident that no matter the circumstances, my personal drive will lead me to excel."

EL2 to SES3 -Example Answer 3

“As a Councillor in the Darwin City Council, it’s not just my disposition to display personal drive and integrity – it’s my job.

As part of my role as City Councillor I’m on the ‘Tourism Top End’ committee, and my membership of this committee displays my drive and integrity very well. When I joined this committee I saw immediately that it had become stagnant, and that on the marketing side there was too much reliance on easy clichés about what Darwin and its surrounds has to offer to tourists.

Almost as quickly I decided to engage with risk and commit to action over what I saw as the committee’s failings. In partnership with another new committee member (a fellow Councillor) I undertook to reform the committee, rejuvenate the membership and start it generating some new and innovative ideas about how to sell Darwin to the rest of Australia and the world. This proved to be a huge challenge, but it was one that I strongly believed in, and I committed energy and drive to doing it.

It took a good 18 months to really begin to see the benefits of the changes that I masterminded to the Tourism Top End committee, and there were many setbacks where I had to be resilient to sustain the momentum. In the end however the results were well worth it, and they speak for themselves: a 23% year-on-year rise in domestic tourism, a 17% rise in international tourism, and a young and dynamic committee that is ready to respond to future challenges.

Beyond this committee I have been involved with 8-10 other committees during my time as Councillor, and I freely admit that on more than one occasion my enthusiasm has outstripped my knowledge of the subject, at least initially. However my energy, my willingness to engage, and my determination to keep moving forward have been a huge asset to every one of them.”

“COMMUNICATES WITH INFLUENCE”

Communicates clearly / Listens, understands and adapts to audience / Negotiates confidently

Listens to differing ideas and views to develop a clear understanding of the issues.

Discusses issues credibly and thoughtfully without getting personal or aggressive.

Identifies relevant stakeholders.

Identifies other people’s expectations and concerns.

APS1 to APS4 -Example Answer 1

“In my working life one of the things I’ve focused on building is my ability to communicate clearly and confidently with those around me, as I believe this is a vital skill in almost any job.

I faced the biggest challenge to my communication skills two years ago when I started working as a waiter at a café /restaurant with a lot of regular patrons. Many of these regular patrons were older Italian and Greek men, and I found that they could be challenging to deal with. In fact, I found their attitudes towards me as a young woman to be quite condescending and sexist.

I discussed this issue with my boss, the owner of the café, and he said that while he understood my position, these gentlemen were the mainstay of the business and it was vital that they keep coming back. In response I said that although I understood his position, I couldn’t accept a working environment where I didn’t feel respected, and that if the behaviour of these customers continued in the same vein I would need to respond to it. My boss said that this was fair enough and agreed to support me as much as possible.

From that point on, if I felt that I was being badly treated by a customer, I had a conversation with them. I would explain that while it was my job to serve them, I expected nonetheless to be treated politely and with respect. Due to the calm and confident manner in which I approached this it was actually very well received, and it quickly led to a change in behaviour from almost all of these regular patrons. In the weeks and months that followed I began to get along very well with the regular patrons. While I don’t work at the café anymore, I visit once every couple of weeks specifically to chat with a number of the regular patrons – we’ve become friends.”

APS1 to APS4 -Example Answer 2

“I’ve worked to build and improve my communication skills throughout my working life, and I displayed my ability to communicate with influence when for a short time I worked as a contract tender writer at a human resources firm.

This position required that I communicate extensively with people at all levels of the organisation in order to find out the information that was to go in the tender document. At first I didn’t know who to consult on specific issues, but I quickly learnt to identify which people in the organisation were the key information holders.

When speaking to people in order to gather information, my technique was to listen, ask clarifying questions, and then summarise my understanding back to the speaker in as clear and concise a manner as possible. This structured approach to communication allowed me to get my head around a lot of unfamiliar issues in a short space of time.

I found speaking with the directors of the firm rather daunting at first; certain members of this group could be forceful in presenting their views. However, I didn’t allow myself to be intimidated by their seniority. I was respectful, but assertive, and I spoke up if I didn’t understand something or if I needed to point out that someone else had expressed an alternative view.

When it came to writing the tender documents my approach was to hammer home the key strengths of the firm at every opportunity. I spent a lot of time editing and paring down what I had written so that our unique selling proposition was crystal clear to even a bored or disinterested reader.

While the first two tenders I wrote were unsuccessful, we won three out of the next four. This was a great result for the business and activated a bonus clause that was present in my contract.”

APS1 to APS4 -Example Answer 3

“I displayed my skills at communicating with influence during my final year at university, in the course of completing a subject that involved small group work. I was part of a four-person group and we had to complete a project by the end of semester. After a couple of group meetings it soon became clear that one member of our group wasn't contributing. Without knowing exactly why this was, the other two members of the group started to make disparaging comments about her behind her back, and I could see that it was becoming a problem for group harmony and ultimately for getting the best results possible for the project.

I decided to try to resolve the issue, so I approached our under-performing group member away from the rest of the group and asked her how she thought the group project was progressing. At first she was reluctant to say much, but with some prompting she revealed that she didn't feel confident enough of her English to voice her opinions or to get involved with the group decisions. I discussed this with her and explained that no-one in the group would care about her English as long as the important thing was to be an active part of the group and to make a contribution. She agreed that she would try to do so.

After this I went to the other two group members, explained things, and asked that they encourage her to contribute and to be patient. They did this, and with a little encouragement our fourth group member grew in confidence and from that point on the group started to really work well together.

At the end of the term our group received the highest mark in the class for our project, which I'm sure wouldn't have been possible without the full participation of all of our members. I feel that it was my superior ability to communicate with influence that was instrumental in resolving the problem and getting a great result for all concerned.”

APS5 to EL1 -Example Answer 1

“When I worked for 10 months as a speech writer with the Victoria Police I had an amazing opportunity to flex my communication skills to the limit. In this role I was responsible for writing all major speeches for the Chief Commissioner and for most of the other senior members of the Victoria Police.

The goal of my role was “To help the Chief Commissioner and his team communicate their shared vision for the future of policing in Victoria”, and to this end I worked hard to ensure that the speeches I wrote were clear, concise and articulate, that key points were communicated and that the language was unambiguous.” It was imperative that the public got the message but also got the impression that the Victoria Police represented a firm hand on the rudder of law and order in Victoria.

Everything I wrote was thoroughly researched. At times it was necessary for me to negotiate with other parties on the basis that what they wanted to include in speeches wasn’t supported by the evidence, and to this end I had to be very persuasive with people much more senior than myself. I negotiated with the Chief Commissioner, senior members of the Victoria Police, and members of the Media and Corporate Communications Team over the content and format of speeches. Speechwriting is often a collaborative process between the writer, the person who is going to give the speech, and an array of other people, from lawyers to lobby groups and everything in between. I’m always ready to accept comments and criticism on my drafts, and I always seek to remove misunderstandings and listen carefully to the view of others.

Unfortunately, speech writers are only recognised for their errors, but in this role I got my share of recognition for the successes as well. For example, at one time I was called on to write a speech for the Chief Commissioner which announced the Victoria Police’s new campaign to crack down on profit-hungry nightclubs. The speech was to be presented at a drug and alcohol centre in St Kilda. This speech was very well received for its content but also for its tone, and I received a personal letter of thanks from the Chief Commissioner for a job well done.”

APS5 to EL1 -Example Answer 2

“As a result of my current job with the NSW Commission for Children and Young People my ability to communicate with influence has become one of the strongest in my skillset.

The NSW Commission for Children and Young People works to make the state a better place for children and young people. One of the ways we do this is to involve them in the decision-making that affects their lives, as very often children and young people are simply subjected to whatever the adults around them think is best for them.

One of my main tasks is to coordinate the Commission’s ‘Young People’s Reference Group’, which brings together groups of young people to discuss their issues and concerns. This is often tied to new and upcoming legislative regimes. For example, if the government is coming up with a new law or policy that will affect young people, the Young People’s Reference Group is convened to discuss it.

As well as coordinating these groups I also MC about half of them. Some issues I have worked on include health, education, driving, and drugs and alcohol. The structure of them is that the presenter introduces the topic and then leads a structured debate with some floor rules so that things stay on track. When introducing a topic I translate the law or policy into a set of talking points for discussion. I do this using clear and unambiguous language, periodically checking their understanding by asking them questions.

During the debate I listen carefully and interject as little as possible, doing so mostly to ensure that misunderstandings are quickly corrected and persuasively steering the conversation so that it remains on-topic and productive.

Following a debate I feed what was talked about by the group back to my superiors in the form of a written report. I strongly believe that getting the input of young people about proposed laws is beneficial both for the government (as it leads to better laws) and for young people (as it shows them that their opinion is counted) and so I work hard to present their input to the lawmakers in a confident and persuasive way.”

APS5 to EL1 -Example Answer 3

“Many people hold the view that communication skills are under-represented in the IT sector, but this isn’t a view I share. As web content coordinator for the State Records Department I develop and maintain multiple websites, and a large part of the job involves communication, and in particular, explaining technical issues to a non-technical audience.

When I communicate at work I endeavour always to tailor what I say to the technical proficiency of my audience. I’m careful in choosing my words to avoid jargon and abbreviations, and I employ techniques to ensure that my audience is ‘still with me’, as I find that if I don’t do this people will pretend to understand but actually won’t!

I regularly receive highly positive feedback about my oral communication skills in this position. A comment that I hear a lot is “you don’t talk like an IT person”, and many people had told me that they never really understood something until they heard my explanation.

Another part of my position is to coordinate the monthly e-newsletter that goes out to all staff in the Department. Collating this document involves liaising with seven Team Leaders and a handful of more senior staff to gather material for the newsletter. At times I have to be very persistent so that people get their articles to me on time for the next edition, which tests my skills of negotiation and persuasion. It’s very common for people to initially tell me that they don’t have time to complete an article for the newsletter, but once presented with a persuasive set of reasons for doing so they comply.

Something that I always pay close attention to when I’m communicating at work is the medium, which I believe is too often regarded as a triviality. My view is that picking the right medium for conveying information is a factor of both *what* information is being conveyed (this is perhaps obvious), and *who* you’re conveying it to (which is less obvious). Some people simply respond and communicate better via a text-based method such as email or chat, while others are not as effective in these mediums and require a phone call or face-to-face meeting.

As an IT professional I consider it my responsibility to demonstrate to others that those who work in IT can be just as persuasive, assured and influential in their communications as anyone else, and I act on this responsibility on a daily basis.”

EL2 to SES3 -Example Answer 1

“I possess high-level skills at communicating clearly, tailoring my communications to my audience and negotiating persuasively. I got to display these skills when I worked as a Project Manager at the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO). The project I lead was ‘Inspiring Australia’ in the CSIRO Education division.

My chief responsibilities in this role were initiating and maintaining stakeholder relationships, creating partnerships and obtaining sponsorship for science communication events, and all of these responsibilities called for highly developed communication skills.

A specific task that I had to carry out in this job was supporting the successful delivery of National Science Week. I was forced to hit the ground running with this task, as one of our major sponsors pulled out just three weeks from the beginning of my first Science Week. This was unexpected, but I applied myself to the task of replacing that sponsor, and through persuasive negotiating I’m proud to say that I engaged two new major sponsors before Science Week began.

At CSIRO I was also directly involved in developing science communication activities for children, young adults and adult audiences. Because the core of effective science communication is translating complex information for others using appropriate methods, it is incredibly important to seek to understand your audience and then think about the best medium to convey your message to them. It’s often much more effective to communicate science concepts using analogies, stories and practical demonstrations as opposed to mere descriptions.

In my second year in this role I had the task of developing an interactive science workshop for 9-12 year olds for National Science Week. I had some leeway as far as subject matter was concerned, so I choose snot (i.e. mucus) and its role in the nose’s job of smelling. Obviously, this was a calculated choice based on the likely interests of the audience! I structured the workshop to include a lot of hands-on work (the participants got to make and manipulate fake green snot, among other things) as my experience is that a participatory medium is the best way to engage an audience in this age range.

Science presenters must know more about their subject than just what they’re going to present, so that they’re able to respond effectively to questions and be in a position to ramp up the detail and complexity if the audience is ready for it, and I did this on several occasions with my National Science Week workshop.”

EL2 to SES3 -Example Answer 2

“I have always had a flair for effective and persuasive communication, and this perhaps innate ability has been greatly enhanced by a career where I’ve sought to better my communication skills at every turn.

The best evidence of my flair for effective and persuasive communication comes from my time working at a market leading company in the field of medico-legal reporting. As Senior Occupational Therapist, it was my job to do assessments of the impact of plaintiffs’ personal injuries, to prepare expert testimony, and to appear in court to give evidence.

When I prepared occupational therapy medico-legal reports on plaintiffs’ injuries I had to ensure that they always consisted of logically presented facts and opinions supported by my professional expertise. In some cases they also required specific research, which had to be presented so that it was totally unambiguous (to the point that this is possible when reporting scientific findings).

My court appearances were communicating with influence to a ‘T’. My job as an expert witness was to confidently and articulately present my professional view, to adapt my evidence to the ever-changing status of the case, and to do these things while maintaining at all times the ethical standards of my profession.

This job involved a lot of liaising with solicitors and barristers, and this also presented a considerable challenge to my communication skills. As advocates they were utterly focused on success in the court room and so it was not uncommon for them to ask me to present my evidence in a way that I was unwilling to do. The back-and-forth that ensued required me to identify their expectations and concerns, discuss the issues credibly and thoughtfully, and arrive at a compromise that reflected both their management of the litigation and my professional responsibilities.

I’m proud to say that over time I gained a reputation as a persuasive witness, a strong and confident negotiator, and (as I was referred to on numerous occasions) a ‘total professional’.”

EL2 to SES3 -Example Answer 3

“I’ve always found the ability to communicate with influence to be something that comes naturally to me, and my CV supports this, as I have held management positions in a variety of contexts from a young age – often managing people significantly older than me.

For a specific illustration of my skills in this area I would select my four years as a Regional Manager for Integrate Entertainment Pty Ltd. In this position I managed a portfolio of bowling alleys and entertainment centres and reported directly to the State Manager for Operations.

My communication skills were tested on almost an hourly basis in this role with Integrate Entertainment. Much of the time I was the ‘meat in the sandwich’ between the Site Managers and the senior management of the company, and had to work very hard to keep relationships with both sides of this equation content.

On numerous occasions declining revenues, complaints from customers or other reasons meant that I was required to visit a specific site in order to conduct an inspection and audit of their operations. I sought to quickly understand the problems that that particular site was having by effectively communicating with the staff there to get the real story, and then work with them to turn things around in a way that would be acceptable to senior management. This was challenging because there could be a wide variety of issues which had to be addressed.

At one time I was asked to visit a bowling alley site in Lithgow that had been losing money for over six months, and which senior management was strongly considering shutting down. Once on-site I convened a meeting with all of the staff there (including part-timers) and clearly articulated the concerns that senior management had over the business. By fostering an atmosphere that was free of blame and by encouraging people to speak, I was able to quickly identify just 2-3 core problems that were preventing the business from doing well.

Following this meeting I worked closely with the site manager to formulate a plan to turn things around, encouraging his personal input. I then contacted the State Manager and sold the plan to him, asking for a six month period of grace in which to put the plan into effect. He agreed, and in just two months the centre began to break even. Now, two years later, it is one the best-performing sites in the company. I know that my passion for persuasive and inclusive communication allowed that to happen, and both people and revenue were protected as a result.”

PART THREE

This Third and final Part of the book is also dedicated to examples of great responses to selection criteria, but here we're looking at the more traditional, old-style selection criteria that are nonetheless still popular with many agencies and departments. They are arranged in alphabetical order.

OTHER SELECTION CRITERIA

ADMINISTRATION

A typical criterion here would be “General administrative skills including photocopying, filing, electronic records management, responding to emails, typing correspondence, and other duties as required,” or (at a higher level) “Ability to perform a range of complex administration functions.”

Here’s a sample response:

“My general administrative skills, across tasks such as managing records and using office technology, are excellent.

In previous roles I have also built excellent keyboard skills with a fast typing speed (currently 45+ words per minute) and a high degree of accuracy (95%). I’m very confident in the use of computers and I’ve never had any problems learning new systems and software quickly and easily.

In my current role as a part-time receptionist at Smith Dentistry my day-to-day work involves answering the phone, filing patient records, maintaining stationary supplies managing our electronic patient database, sorting correspondence, responding to emails and letters on behalf of the dentists, and using the office multifunction device. It’s a very busy work environment with a lot of short timeframe tasks, which has allowed me to hone my abilities at multi-tasking and prioritisation of administrative tasks.

Working in a dentist’s office means dealing with a lot of private and confidential information about the patients. I’m always conscious of the responsibility I have to keep this information secure, and I keep it secure by measures such as locking away documents that aren’t in use, and locking my computer with a password when I get up from my work station.

When I started at Smith Dentistry I was tasked with overseeing the migration of our legacy hardcopy patient records into electronic format. This involved scanning the hardcopy documents, coding some information from them into a database, and doing a lot of quality assurance so that we could be confident nothing had been missed. This was a task that required a lot of administrative skill and attention to detail, as mistakes were unacceptable. It was expected that this would take six months to complete, but in fact I completed the task in just four months, saving the business time and money.”

ANALYTICAL OR CONCEPTUAL SKILLS/ATTENTION TO DETAIL

This is a common criterion. Happily, it's an easy one to write a response to, as pretty much *any* job can be argued to require some analytical skills or attention to detail. This should give you many possible Situations to talk about.

A typical criterion here would be "Highly developed analytical and conceptual skills" and another would be "Solid analytical skills and attention to detail".

Here's a sample response:

"I'm a detail-oriented person with very solid analytical skills, and a number of my previous positions provide solid evidence for this.

When I worked as a paraplanner with Ashmore Financial Planning for example, my job was to analyse client data and used it to prepare Statements of Advice. In order to prepare Statements of Advice I also had to analyse statistics about a very wide range of financial products, and the finished Statements of Advice had to comply with strict financial services laws, making attention to detail absolutely critical.

In the world of financial planning, new financial products and tools are constantly being created. I applied my powers of analysis to these new offerings in order to separate 'the wheat from the chaff' and identify new products and tools that would be of genuine benefit to my clients.

At one time I had a client who had built up a large debt but was expecting his first child. He wanted to pay off the debt completely before his son was born. It was a challenge to structure his finances in such a way that he would be able to reduce his debt quickly without drastically affecting his standard of living, but with careful thought I was able to develop a plan that did this for him. This was a time when a generic approach would not have worked. He was so happy with the advice he received that he took me and my wife out to dinner once his debt was paid off.

More generally, in his job I gained a reputation as someone who never made mistakes. While my co-workers thought this was down to luck, or to a 'knack' of some kind, I knew it was simply because I worked hard to develop and apply my powers of analysis, and by doing so, spot and correct errors early before they became apparent."

APS VALUES/APS CODE OF CONDUCT

The APS Values are a set of statements that define what the APS is and what it does, and the APS Code of Conduct is a set of statements that describes what APS employees must and must not do. You can view the APS Values at www.apsc.gov.au/values and the Code of Conduct at www.apsc.gov.au/conduct.

A typical criterion here would be “An understanding of and commitment to the APS Values”, or “An understanding of and commitment to the APS Code of Conduct.” Note that criteria on the APS Values and the Code of Conduct always seek a ‘commitment’ rather than a ‘demonstrated ability.’ Just make sure you know exactly what the APS Values are, and say that you believe in and are committed to upholding these kinds of values in the workplace. If you have an example Situation to back this up then definitely include it, but if you don’t, don’t worry – this is not a criterion on which SOCs are made or broken.

Here’s a sample response:

“During my employment with XYZ Company, I’ve always based the difficult decisions that I’ve been required to make on the XYZ Charter. This has assisted me greatly in ensuring that I’ve made a fair and effective decision for the business and its employees.

A recent example is when my manager and I were recruiting for the Training Officer / Administration role within our department. We called for applications and received about 35. During the process of reviewing the applications together with my manager, I realised that I had a personal connection with one of the applicants.

While I was sure that regardless of my person connection I would have been able to make an unbiased decision based on the merit of each individual, I understood that if I continued my involvement with a recruitment process that included this person, a *perceived* conflict of interest could have arisen. This being the case, I discussed the issue with my manager and requested that I be replaced on the selection panel.

My manager praised me for my honesty and for speaking up, and I was removed from the panel and a suitable replacement was found. The applications were put under another review and the business is currently in negotiation with an individual to start working with us soon. This was a situation where another person might have stayed silent without any adverse consequences, but I understand that observing ethical standards benefits everyone in the long run.

While the XYZ Charter is of course not exactly the same as the APS Values or the APS Code of Conduct, there are distinct parallels in terms of setting out standards to adhere to and promoting ethical behaviour. If employed by the APS I would bring the understanding of ethical frameworks that I have from working at XYZ, and I would commit fully to upholding the ethical framework used by the APS.”

COMPUTER SKILLS

For jobs that aren't in IT or a related field, criteria on computer skills will almost always refer exclusively to *familiarity* with certain types of software. The 'big three' types of software are of course word processors, spreadsheets and databases. Rightly or wrongly, non-IT jobs aren't thought to require more than a basic level of skill with these software programs, and consequently this criterion should be easy to answer satisfactorily.

A typical criterion here would be "Demonstrated computer literacy skills, including the ability to use spreadsheets, databases and word processing applications."

Here's a sample response:

"I have used spreadsheet, database and word processing applications extensively in my working life to date and my general computer literacy is very high.

When I worked as an accountant at Jones & Blackburn I used Microsoft Excel spreadsheets extensively for my core work, such as preparing end-of-year financial reports for our clients. I have attended beginner, intermediate and advanced training sessions on Microsoft Excel organised by Jones & Blackburn, and consequently I would consider myself to be a 'power user' of this software.

At Jones & Blackburn we use Lotus Notes software for its email and calendar functions, and we use Lotus Notes databases for our digital library of templates and precedents. I refer to this material on a daily basis and I have also added content to several of the databases under the direction of my line manager.

When drafting letters to clients and file notes I use Microsoft Word, and due to the fact that I have been using this software program since high school I feel that I have completely mastered even its advanced functions.

At Jones & Blackburn I quickly gained a reputation as someone with a high level of computer literacy, and I regularly helped colleagues with some of their basic computer needs. For example, I showed one colleague how to perform a mail merge in Microsoft Word, and I helped another colleague redesign the template spreadsheet that employees used to record their flex-time. I also trained new staff (on an informal basis) in how to use our databases, and when necessary I helped them to run the more complex queries.

In my personal life I use computers extensively, as I maintain a couple of blogs and publish my photography online. I feel that my excellent computer literacy is something that gives me an edge over other applicants in today's computer-dominated workplaces."

CUSTOMER SERVICE

A typical criterion here would be “A strong customer focus together with demonstrated customer service skills.”

Here’s a sample response:

“Over the course of my working life to date I’ve sought to build great customer service skills. In a number of my jobs to date I have been given the opportunity to undertake training in customer relations and conflict resolution, and I’ve always taken the opportunity to learn more. I’m happiest when I’m dealing with customers and I’m confident that I can handle any situation that might arise.

When I worked on the cosmetics counter at Myer I had an opportunity to apply and demonstrate my skills in this area.

A core task in this job was to recruit customers who would give me and the label I worked for repeat business. To help achieve this I made a point of remembering names and some personal details for all of my regular customers so that when they came to see me I’d be able to greet them personally and ask after their partner, job or children.

More generally, I took the time and to always put my customers at ease with a friendly smile, and I tried to understand and connect with them rather than treating them as just another potential sale. It would be understandable for people to think that working in cosmetics is all about knowing how to apply makeup, but in fact a far more important aspect is to be customer focused, which means putting people at ease and making them feel good about themselves.

Within six months at Myer I had built a strong client base with a lot of loyalty to me and to the products I sold. This meant that unlike the majority of my colleagues I didn’t have to constantly be seeking new customers in order to meet sales targets, and I feel that this was entirely due to my customer service skills.”

MANAGEMENT

Naturally, this a criterion that normally attaches to higher-level positions, where an ability to manage people is a must.

A typical criterion here would be “Management skills and experience, including people and resource management skills.”

Here’s a sample response:

“A recent position has given me an excellent grounding in management skills when I managed a Just Jeans store for 12 months while the manager was away on maternity leave.

As store manager I managed a team of eight people, almost all of whom were part-time or casual employees.

One of the part-time staff members was considerably older than me and had a lot of experience in retail. I suspected that given the opportunity she would be able to make a valuable contribution to the store beyond her official duties, which were basic. I began to seek out her advice and found that as I had predicted, she had many good ideas about how the store could be run better. Over a couple of months I implemented a lot of her ideas. For example, I reorganised our floor space to maximum efficiency while remaining inviting to customers, and I improved our window displays. These innovations had a swift and measurable impact on our sales.

Other casual staff members required a lot of micromanagement and motivation in order to work well. I made a point of spending time with each staff member in order to figure out how to get the best from them. Some staff members needed to be told exactly what to do, while others worked better if they were left more to their own devices.

As well as people I also managed the resources of the store. I knew that we sometimes ran out of certain types of stock during busy periods, so I began to record when this happened and I used the data to help guide ordering decisions that ensure we ordered new stock when we needed it.

At the end of the 12 months sales had increased 10% over the previous year even though economic conditions had worsened, and customers regularly commented on how much they liked visiting the store.

The manager I had replaced decided not to come back to work at the end of her maternity leave and I was immediately offered her job on a permanent ongoing basis. While I didn’t accept the position, the fact that I was offered the job was a clear testament to the management skills that I had built in a relatively short period of time.”

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH & SAFETY (OH&S)

As for criteria on APS Values and the APS Code of Conduct, criteria about OH&S always refer to “knowledge and commitment” rather than to demonstrated ability.

A typical criterion here would be “Knowledge of and commitment to OH&S.”

Here’s a sample response:

“I recognise the supreme importance of a safe and healthy work environment and always endeavour to play my part in promoting one. I have read the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 1991* and do what I can to put it into practice in the workplace.

My current workplace has a well-defined OH&S policy framework. Each employee is responsible for the safety and wellbeing of themselves and their colleagues, and all work is performed in accordance with the requirements of the OH&S policy and procedures. I’ve attended regular training sessions in safe work practices including manual handling, correct workstation setup, risk and hazard identification, and the reporting of accidents or incidents.

The company conducts an OH&S self-audit every three months where any risks or hazards are identified and appropriately dealt with. All team members share the responsibility of this audit. In one instance I identified that the workstations of several of my co-workers were not compliant with a safe working environment. After speaking to them about it and getting their agreement, I arranged for a meeting with our OH&S consultant. As a result the workstations were adjusted to ensure optimum health and safety outcomes. One person who had their workstation adjusted commented that the changes reduced their neck and back pain, and another said that she no longer suffered from eye strain.

More generally, I’m always on the lookout for unsafe work practices such as obstructions to walkways, spills on surfaces that might become slippery, and heavy items being lifted in a manner that’s likely to cause injury. My view is that if responsibility for OH&S is shared by everyone then it’s very easy to comply with.”

PRIORITISING AND MEETING DEADLINES

Like a lot of the very general selection criteria, this one can actually be a little difficult to answer, as though we all prioritise our tasks in order to meet deadlines, it's more of an everyday thing that doesn't lend itself to pithy examples. Also, some jobs just don't have a lot of specific deadlines on tasks.

A typical criterion here would be "Demonstrated ability to manage time and priorities tasks."

Here's a sample response:

"Throughout my working life to date I have always worked in fast-paced environments with regular deadlines. I like the pace and excitement of this kind of workplace, but it does mean that you need to be very good at managing time and prioritising in order to get everything done.

My current position is Human Resources Specialist at a large government department. The bread-and-butter of this role is recruitment. We employ a multi-stage process where candidates are first asked to send in a CV and cover letter in application. If they pass this stage they are instructed to do two online tests. Then they must attend our site for a role-playing scenario and a writing test. Finally there is an interview round.

This process is obviously labour-intensive from an HR point of view and for me it involves constant and iron-clad deadlines. In order to meet these deadlines I use various tools to organise and prioritise my work; primarily Outlook diary, Outlook reminders, and the Outlook to-do list. Every morning when I come in to work I spend 15-30 minutes planning the day ahead and prioritising tasks. I identify what must be done that day and what could conceivably be pushed back if necessary.

Throughout the day I track the tasks I have completed and what is yet to be done, and I re-prioritise where necessary. I try to limit distractions (for example, I only check my email once every 30 minutes rather than continuously) and I group similar tasks together in order to make efficiency gains.

While I try to be as self-sufficient as possible, in extreme circumstances I'll ask for assistance from others in my team so that deadline aren't missed. Conversely I try to leave a little bit of 'wiggle room' in my schedule so that I can make myself available to help others out.

Prioritising and meeting deadlines in my job is a daily challenge, but my skills in this area make it one I can always overcome. My colleagues recognise this about me, and as a result I'm the 'go-to' person for advice when someone needs assistance with managing their time and prioritising."

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

A typical criterion here would be “Demonstrated ability to develop clear project plans and timelines, regularly communicate with stakeholders including team members, and monitor progress maintaining the project within budget and required standards.”

Here’s a sample response:

“I possess strong project management skills which I have developed in the course of a number of different jobs. My toughest challenge to date as a project manager was in my last job, as a Project Officer with the Australian Red Cross.

I began work in this position just before a weather-related disaster devastated multiple towns and cities in Queensland. This was a very testing time as our resources at Red Cross were strained to the maximum.

My team was responsible for coordinating the disaster relief effort. I immediately volunteered to organise and facilitate team meetings, which were occurring once or even twice a day, and I was the designated point of contact for two of our partner organisations as well as for the Queensland State Government. This meant coordinating a huge amount of information and channelling requests to the relevant people quickly and efficiently.

Five days into the disaster relief effort I was required to travel to Queensland to assist with the rebuilding efforts there. This chiefly involved organising volunteers into teams and assigning tasks to them where they would be most useful. Strict budgets had to be observed and the work done, even though it was being carried out by volunteers, had to meet numerous safety and quality standards.

To deal with these requirements I used my excellent time management skills to organise and prioritise the tasks which needed to be done, and I created workflow breakdowns with expected outcomes in relation to time, cost and quality. Above all I ensured that my volunteer teams were equipped with what they needed to achieve maximum output for their efforts.

Overall I would have no hesitation in holding myself out as a proven leader who holds a consistent track record of achieving outstanding results when managing teams in a project management environment.”

SUPERVISION

A typical criterion here would be “Supervision skills, including the ability to effectively lead a small team”.

Here’s a sample response:

“As a General Service Officer in the Army Reserves, my ability to effectively lead a small team has been tested many times in some highly stressful situations. I command a platoon of 30 reservists, some of whom are at times inexperienced in the work that the Army Reserve does.

Several years ago I was deployed in East Timor on a peacekeeping operation. Our mission was to assist the regular army in providing security for the East Timorese people during their presidential elections. My platoon relied on me for guidance but also for discipline. On two occasions I had to reprimand members of my team who was behaving in a manner unbecoming of a member of the Australian Armed Forces. I don’t enjoy this, but I recognise that sometimes maintaining discipline means imposing sanction on people who transgress.

My leadership style is very much to give the people under me as much responsibility as they think they can handle while letting them know that I’m behind them 100% if they need assistance.

Part of my role in the Army Reserves is to conduct performance appraisals. The technique I’ve developed is to begin with a discussion of the person’s level of satisfaction with where they are and what they’re doing, and then lead into areas that they may want to develop in. This organically leads into a plan for their personal improvement without making it seem like they’re being judged.

Both the reservists in my platoon and my commanding officers have been highly complementary of my leadership skills, and this is something of which I’m very proud.

The Armed Forces are known for strict hierarchies and a supervisory model which does not allow for dissent, but I believe that my personal style is much more in line with best practice in business, which allows me to transition easily between these two worlds.”

TEAMWORK

A typical criterion here would be “Demonstrated ability to work in a team-based environment”.

Like some other criteria, this should be a pretty easy one to write a response to, as there are few jobs that don't involve working in a team of some kind. And if you don't have suitable examples from your working life you can easily draw on your personal life: perhaps you play in a band (that's a team) or you play a team sport.

Without further ado, here's a sample response:

“I've always enjoyed the experience of working as part of a team, and find that the opportunity to be a valuable contributor is one of my strongest motivations for getting out of bed in the morning.

My view is that effective teams rely on each and every member endeavouring to be friendly, respectful, and above all supportive with the other members of the team. I try to live these values, and am always willing to jump in and lend a hand to other team members where I can see that it would be of assistance.

In previous jobs I've found that I have a natural ability to slot in alongside other team members and to accept and embrace colleagues regardless of their background, ability level or seniority.

In my present position I'm one of a team of consultants with no clear line manager. We are out of the office most days conducting client visits, and this makes it difficult to meet en masse on a regular basis, as is common in other workplaces. Rather than just accept this situation, we have decided collectively to make a concerted effort to have regular catch-up meetings where we discuss our work, share complex issues and challenges that we've encountered, and support each other in our work. While it takes effort to organise these meetings, I believe that they are well worth it, as the mutual commitment to our colleagues gives us encouragement that helps us to out-perform. I believe it's no coincidence that we have received team awards for consistency in sales, and that we have on a number of occasions achieved the highest sales targets of all teams within the company.

In the future I hope to put my experiences of good teamwork to even better use by managing a truly effective team.”

TRAINING STAFF

A typical criterion here would be “The ability to deliver learning and development programs to staff.”

Here’s a sample response:

“Throughout my career so far I have taken every opportunity presented to me to develop my skills in the area of delivering training programs.

For example, as Administrative Support Officer at the Office of the Victorian Privacy Commissioner I supported three staff members who ran our daily four-hour sessions training Victorian Public Service workers in the operation of the Privacy Act.

My role was not supposed to include presentation duties, but there was a need for an additional presenter to cover for staff absences, so I volunteered to ‘act up’ in a presenter role approximately one session per fortnight.

At the end of each session our participants were asked to fill out feedback forms where they rated the presentation and the presenter. My average after six months was 8.8 out of 10, which was the highest of any presenter.

As well as giving the presentations, I also worked on the content of the presentations. For example, I updated all of the stories, news clippings and examples in our standard presentation to reflect up-to-date technology and social issues.

At one of our end-of-year functions I received an achievement award. This award was voted on by my colleagues, and it recognised outstanding contributions to the section during the year. To have my hard work rewarded in this way was very gratifying, and it made me want to do an even better job the following year.

A further example of my ability to deliver learning programs comes from my private life, as I’ve been teaching a ten-week adult education class in photography twice a year for the last three years. People in these classes come from all walks of life and a wide range of ages and skills levels are always represented. Teaching this class has above all really improved my ability to adapt what I’m presenting on the fly if I realise that I’m pitching the lesson at the wrong level.”

WORKING EFFECTIVELY AS AN INDIVIDUAL/ALONE

This is a slightly tricky criterion, as if you answer it *too* well you run the risk of making yourself sound like a loner, which is never a good idea. What you should focus on is the fact that you don't need someone looking over your shoulder all of the time in order to work hard or maintain high standards. It's about discipline and being a 'self-starter'.

It can be hard to think of examples that fit this criterion exactly, so you may have to 'fudge' a little by for example talking about parts of previous jobs when you had to work alone (even if the majority of the work was done as part of a team).

Note also that this criterion is sometimes expressed in double-barrelled fashion as "Demonstrated ability to work alone *or in a team situation*," which means that you have to combine talking about your ability to work alone with saying how good you are in a team as well. A typical criterion here would be "Demonstrated ability to work autonomously."

Here's a sample response:

"My ability to work very well alone is demonstrated by the fact that for about five years now I have worked part-time (about 10 weekends per year) as a freelance wedding photographer. This job involves some advertising; meeting clients; preparing extensively; operating the equipment and coordinating people on the day; doing paperwork and accounts; contacting clients, answering their questions and responding to their concerns; and finally collating, organising, editing and presenting the photos to clients within tight deadlines after the event. I do *all* of this work autonomously – it's just the nature of the job.

There aren't too many jobs where for the employee it's 'just another day at work' but for the employers it's a once-in-a-lifetime-event. This of course means a lot of pressure not to make mistakes, and when there is no-one else to help you catch errors, it's even more difficult. I deal with this by meticulous planning and ensuring that I have back-ups to deal with every eventuality, like having a key piece of equipment fail at a crucial time.

Every day job I have had has involved working with a team, and while I definitely enjoy being a productive and supportive team member, I also enjoy the additional challenges that come with working autonomously and knowing that it's all down to me. I know that it has greatly sharpened my skills in areas such as time management and organisation

My success at working autonomously in this job is evidenced by the fact that I have refused (and continue to refuse) a lot of work despite steadily increasing my rates, and by the many recommendations and testimonials made by the clients that I have had. These are the best endorsements I can think of for my ability to work well without supervision or indeed assistance of any kind."