

Information Sheet 2

How to Respond to Key Selection Criteria – A Simple Guide for Applicants

This Information Sheet will act as a guide for applicants when responding to Key Selection Criteria in their application for employment with the Public Service.

1. What is Merit?

Before you start writing your job application, it is important to understand that all vacant positions in the Public Service are filled using **merit and equity based** selection processes. Merit is achieved when the following steps are applied to recruiting and selecting new employees:

- All vacant positions are advertised to ensure that all interested parties have an opportunity to apply (regardless of gender, age, disability, ethnicity)
- A competition is conducted for the vacant position, i.e. applicants compete against each other to try and win the job
- Independent selection panels are formed to identify the most suitable applicant by using a range of non-discriminatory assessment tools and methods
- Decisions of Selection panels are reviewed by Responsible Officers to ensure due process [merit] has been applied
- The final decision maker on appointment is the relevant Services Commission. The Commission is an independent body established under the Solomon Islands Constitution to ensure that merit is applied to all Public Service appointments.

When assessing an applicant's merit for a job, the selection panel will consider a range of factors including:

- Previous experience that is relevant to the job (this experience could be gained either at work or in the community)
- Skills and abilities of the applicant
- Knowledge held by the applicant
- Qualifications and Professional Memberships
- Previous work performance
- Attitude

2. What are Key Selection Criteria?

Key Selection Criteria are statements that summarise the experience, skills and abilities, knowledge, qualifications and attitude that are required to perform a job. When applying for Public Service jobs, all applicants are required to “respond” to Key Selection Criteria which have been taken directly from the Job Description for the vacant position.

3. Why are your responses to Key Selection Criteria important?

Your responses to the Key Selection Criteria are important because they will help the Selection Panel to determine whether you have the essential experience, skills and ability, qualifications and knowledge to undertake this position. The Selection Panel will also compare your responses to those provided by other applicants to come up with a final shortlist for interviews.

4. How to get started

Before you start writing your responses, read the Job Description carefully to ensure you fully understand what is required. As you are reading, make some notes about how you have shown these abilities, skills or knowledge while working in your current or previous job or in community based roles.

Sometimes people don't like to talk big about themselves and leave out important or good points about what they have done. You are not talking big about yourself if you compare your experience and skills to what is being asked for in the Key Selection Criteria.

If you get stuck trying to respond to Key Selection Criteria ask someone you know and trust to give you some ideas. Sometimes friends or relatives or wantoks are able to offer useful ideas and suggestions that you haven't yet thought of.

5. What to write?

When responding to Key Selection Criteria you need to choose practical examples and true life stories that show you have the experience, skills and abilities, knowledge, qualifications and attitude asked for in the selection criteria.

6. Some examples of good responses and poor responses to Key Selection Criteria (KSC)

Example 1 - KSC: Problem solving and research skills

Good Response

In my previous position, I noticed that some figures were incorrect on the monthly accounting report. I checked back through all of the paperwork and figures and realised that receipts had not been provided for all remittances. I immediately approached the responsible people to ensure that receipts were immediately provided. I also reported this situation to my Superior Officer to ensure that he was aware of the situation.

You can see that this is a good response because it provides a specific/real life example taken from experience gained in a previous position. It explains what the problem was, what research was undertaken and how it was fixed.

Poor Response

I have good problem solving and research skills because I used to work for an Accountant.

You can see that this is a poor response because it does not provide a specific example or demonstrate how a problem was researched and solved. This sort of response would be scored or rated very low by a Selection Panel.

Example 2 - KSC: Good written and verbal skills including ability to write reports for management

Good Response

I possess excellent written and verbal communication skills. For example, in my previous position, I was required to prepare a monthly HR report for the management team. This report included information about progress with projects and highlighted some of the risks relating to possible delays and other issues. My verbal skills are also very good. I am a Youth Leader in my Church and regularly speak in front of large groups. Also, at times, I have had to resolve differences between people in my workplace. I did this by getting the parties together to talk and agree on an outcome. I also have a good relationship with all my work colleagues.

This is a good response because it provides specific/real life examples taken from experiences gained both at work and in the community. It is quite okay to use experiences from your personal life as well as your workplace.

Poor Response

I have good written skills because I know how to write reports. I am an excellent communicator because I use clear speech and am kind to people. I have a Master's Degree in Public Administration so this proves I am a good writer.

This is a poor response because it is not specific enough. The response needs to be more specific and include the type of report that was written and what sort of information it included. While it is good to refer to qualifications in your response, this doesn't always prove that someone is good at something, just that they have studied it! Again, be more specific and state why it proves you are a good writer, i.e. did you get a high distinction for one of your assignments, did your lecturer comment on your excellent written skills? Also, the response in relation to verbal skills is way too general and won't help the panel to assess whether or not the applicant has better skills than the other applicants.

Just remember that sometimes the Key Selection Criteria can have several parts (like this example which included verbal and written skills), so read it like an exam question. Break it up into parts or subject matter and make sure you write something about each part.

7. **STAR – a simple framework for responding to Key Selection Criteria**

The **STAR** framework is easy to use and can help you to write your responses to Key Selection Criteria using ‘real life’ situations and examples. It works like this:

- **S**ituation – briefly explain the background of your example e.g. where you were working.
- **T**ask – briefly mention a task (job) you were required to do in the above situation
- **A**ction – describes the steps you took in completing the task, but don’t go on and on! Try to be clear and concise.
- **R**esult – explain what happened as a result of the action you took. Concentrate on the good points and explain the benefits.

8. **An example to demonstrate the STAR framework**

Example KSC: Excellent Computer skills and ability to quickly learn new programs and databases

Situation – My excellent computer skills were demonstrated when I worked as the HR Officer in Ministry of Sunshine.

Task – In this role, I was responsible for managing the staffing establishment for the whole Ministry using Excel Spreadsheets.

Action–This required me to enter data and formulas into the spreadsheet to ensure that staffing numbers and payroll entitlements were correctly calculated. Also, I have been learning the new Payroll and HR system. The instructors told me that I have natural computer skills and this is allowing me to learn the new database very quickly.

Result – As a result of my excellent computer skills, the Ministry establishment data is 100% accurate and staff are showing in their correct positions on the system. This means that all staff are receiving their correct entitlements and allowances are being correctly calculated.

9. **Some final advice**

Make sure you check your application carefully for spelling and grammatical errors before you submit it. Sometimes it can help to get one of your friends or family to check it through for you.

Good Luck with your application letter!