

## KEY SELECTION CRITERIA

Being confident in writing Key Selection Criteria removes a major roadblock to applying for roles. Many people miss out on an ideal opportunity because they lack the time, at the time, to get their CV up to date and to invest days writing KSC. Here is a method to follow that will make this easier.

There are four variations of KSC:

- The long version (used typically, for government and academic positions).
- An abbreviated “covering letter” version.
- Single examples or targetted questions.
- An Expression of Interest.

### THE LONG VERSION

#### Overall

Choosing candidates is often a subjective process. KSC is designed to make the process objective. This increases the chances of a fair decision and minimises the risk of a rejected candidate being successful in a formal objection or grievance. It gives the panel something to score and therefore compare like with like.

KSC lists the qualifications, skills (competencies) and experience needed to perform the role.

You must satisfy every individual criteria – it is not an average across all of them. The fact that you meet one criteria at 150% does not make up for only meeting another at 20%.

Despite this, some criteria may be “weighted” more heavily than others eg in a policy development role, the KSC on “policy creation”, usually the first, will be vitally important. The sixth and final criteria of “having regard to OH&S” will still need to be satisfied, although it may require less detail.

If you cannot satisfy one criteria, as a general rule, you should reconsider applying. It is a judgment call as to how many other people are likely to meet that criteria. Some KSC is written in a way that the only person who can meet each criteria is the incumbent. If you are close otherwise, you could consider admitting that while you don't have [X], you have [Y]. Perhaps you can commit to learning what's required, undertaking relevant study etc.

Generally, half a page should be sufficient for each criteria. You can use dot points.

#### Preparing

You should prepare your CV first:

- Each role should have achievements.
- Look at each achievement and ask what competency it demonstrates. The story might illustrate more than one (eg problem-solving **and** innovation).
- You should add any other good examples that come to mind to the CV.

Examples drawn on in the KSC should also be listed in the CV unless they are more day-to-day. The CV should be a stand-alone document. The reviewer should be able to cross-reference an example used in the KSC with that “story” being listed as an achievement on the CV.

#### Planning

The key is planning, even if you are a good writer.

Our Sample KSC Planner will help you plan your answers before you start writing. Investing 20 minutes planning will save hours later and reaching halfway in a muddle. You need to plan two different examples for each criteria and you may need to shuffle examples around.

Make sure you note and answer every element of the question. If, for example, the question involves “managing projects involving multiple stakeholders” then the example needs to detail who they were.

Most KSC refer to “proven” or “demonstrated” skills, ability or experience. These mean shown through examples.

#### Types of Criteria

There are two types of KSC:

- Tick-the-box criteria eg that you have relevant qualifications, accreditations, memberships and/or the equivalent in years of experience. This is common in academic jobs.
- General KSC requiring “demonstrated” skills or a “proven ability” in a particular area. See below.

Tick-the-box criteria can be answered simply in a sentence or two or a couple of dot points eg:

*Please note I hold qualifications including:*

- *Bachelor of Laws*
- *Postgraduate Certificate in Jurisprudence*

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### Structure for General Criteria

The general formula for answering KSC is:

1. Context: a broad statement that you can satisfy the criteria in your own context.
2. Example One: your best specific example.
3. Example Two: your next strongest specific example, or, if there are several examples, a list of these.
4. Other: Any other relevant matters (eg short courses).

#### 1. Context

The idea is to say that you can meet the criteria but contextualise it. For example:

- *Throughout my fifteen years of working as a professional architect, I have demonstrated my ability to deliver practical solutions to complex problems.*
- *I have worked with multiple stakeholders in my last three roles as...*
- *I can draw on several strong examples to demonstrate my ability to...*
- *Problem-solving is one of my best strengths and I have demonstrated this throughout my time with...*
- *My ability to develop workable policy to resolve complex problems has been commended by managers in my past three annual reviews.*

You should not mimic the KSC itself but draw on it, using the same language, to show that you can meet the criteria.

If you wish to write about the day-to-day of the role, you would mention it briefly in this section.

#### 2. Example One

Lead with your best and most appropriate example.

Some KSC will have sub-points. Focus on the main point. The sub-points might influence the choice of example. Try to draw on examples that mirror the tasks or description of the role.

Use the STAR method when explaining your examples:

- SITUATION: Outline the background to set the scene eg: *In my role at..., I was responsible for delivering a project to... The stakeholders included...*
- TASK: Explain what you were asked to do or were trying to achieve eg: *I had to deliver a component of the project requiring extensive*

*negotiation...*

- ACTION: Detail the steps taken. You might choose to list these in a series of dot points. Sometimes there are steps we take that are so obvious to us but they can give the reader significant insight into our thinking eg: *I called together a meeting with X, Y and Z... Then I... Next I...*
- RESULTS: The obvious result is the outcome but don't forget your other results such as its impact or the acknowledgement it received eg: *The final result was that all the parties were satisfied with the outcome. I received individual emails from X, Y and Z commending me on my management of the situation, noting that they felt their needs had been listened to and accommodated.*
- It is far preferable for you to furnish a response to KSC with the most recent examples but it is perfectly acceptable to draw on previous work experience, or, in some cases, matters outside of work (especially for competencies you might not have faced at work such as an ethical challenge).

Repeat the language of the question to lead into the example. This reassures the reader that it is relevant eg:

*One good example of my ability to lead the team throughout a tumultuous time was when...*

A note on verbal and written communication skills: There are no examples that will show an ability to write well. All you can do is note some of the types of writing you have undertaken (eg briefings, reports, publications etc), then note that your referee will attest to your ability to write well. The KSC examples should then be on the verbal aspect. Remember that a claim about writing well will be quickly undermined by a poorly worded or error-ridden covering letter or KSC.

For example: problem-solving:

*I demonstrated my ability to problem-solve at the end of last financial year. As the Senior Accountant, my job was to ensure budgets were expended so we could secure similar funds the following year. I printed off all transactions for five major cost centres and arranged for my staff to check expenditure. I identified a pattern of accounting errors that revealed the IT budget had been underspent \$50K. I then liaised with the IT Manager and suggested she purchase company-wide upgrades to Microsoft Office software. This upgraded company systems, ensured licencing compliance and exhausted the IT budget. The IT Manager acknowledged my work in an email to the CEO.*

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### 3. Example Two (or More)

Try not to repeat two similar examples. This won't happen if the response has been planned effectively.

If you have multiple, smaller examples that demonstrate the competency (eg projects that demonstrate project management skills), these can be listed for the second example but the first one should be explained in detail eg:

*Other examples of projects I have delivered include:*

- *ABC where I...*
- *XYZ involving...*

If it is a high-priority KSC, it might be acceptable to detail a third example but watch the length.

### 4. Other matters

The last paragraph of your answer should cover off all the relevant "bits and pieces" you want to add eg:

- Short courses
- Psych tests results
- Networking groups
- Conferences attended
- Volunteer activities etc

### Common Mistakes

The most common mistakes with KSC are:

- Not including examples: you do not meet the criteria without detailed examples.
- Cross-referencing: Each KSC should be a stand-alone answer. The interview panel may split the answers among them so that each panel member reads the same examples from all the candidates. It is not therefore in your interest in no 6 to refer to something mentioned in no 3.
- Philosophising: Talking about how something should work in theory, explaining what it means or sharing your beliefs, rather than having an actual example eg *I believe that teamwork is created by...*
- Talking too much about the day-to-day: The way you show, for instance, that you have good time management skills is through an actual example of when you were under pressure and what you did to ensure you could achieve everything, not sharing how you make to do lists and use Outlook.
- Force-feeding: Choosing an example on the basis of its

importance or because you desperately want to draw attention to that project, when in fact it does not illustrate the competency or has only a tenuous connection with it. You need to choose the best example, not the most complicated or highest profile one. The most important requirement is to answer the question. The choice of example is secondary.

- Not understanding what is meant by "collaboration": confusing it with teamwork. Although the two are similar, collaboration is the idea of working with someone to produce a result (and perhaps also define it). Teamwork is more general working together. Collaborators may have different goals but teams share the same goal. If you are in doubt about the meaning of any competencies, you should research them more thoroughly or clarify with HR.

### Checking

Ensure you proofread your work and make sure you answer every element of the KSC. Have a third party check each criteria has been met in full.

## THE COVERING LETTER VERSION

### An Abbreviated Version

Many applications now will list the KSC for the role but say that it is not necessary to address them in a separate document. The application usually calls only for a covering letter and a CV but you should always address the criteria in the covering letter, albeit in an abbreviated form.

This form is different in its format and length. In a covering letter version, you will only have time to draw the reader's attention to the examples briefly. These examples should then be listed in more detail on the CV. There isn't time to use the usual STAR method in its entirety. The key is to make it easy for the reader to "join the dots" to conclude your skills are a good match for the role.

### Structuring the Covering Letter

We recommend the covering letter lists what can be offered in dot points. In the abbreviated version, the dot points will have mini headings representing the criteria eg:

*I can offer you:*

- *Project management: I have led projects on X, Y and Z. Budgets have ranged from \$X-Y with teams of up to ten. On X project in particular...*

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### SINGLE EXAMPLES OR TARGETTED QUESTIONS/ NSW GOVERNMENT VERSION

Some government departments, and in NSW under its GSE Capability Framework, use a sliver of the formal KSC process in their applications. This usually calls for a single story to illustrate a competency, knowledge or experience (often with a word or space limit).

In NSW Government applications, you often need to demonstrate the Capability Framework in the CV, provide a covering letter and answer two "targetted questions". The targeted questions are usually limited in terms of words (300 each) or space (two pages for a covering letter incorporating the answers).

These questions should be answered like Example One, perhaps in more detail. Questions may be:

- Very specifically relating to a competency (eg *Describe a time you collaborated*) or
- A more general question that can furnish examples (eg *Tell me about your knowledge of applying legislation to resolve problems*). In this style of question, you could describe your general knowledge but should also make room to list a couple of examples, dot-pointed into short paragraphs.

Remember that the skills are always demonstrated through examples.

Some more tips:

- You need to set the scene in the situation part of the STAR structure but on an internal application, with a word limit, this can be written more simply.
- It saves words to list the action steps taken in point form.
- You can also list the results in dot points if there is more than one.
- Where there are several parts to the question, try highlighting (in Word) each part in a different colour, then matching the corresponding answer in the text. This will show you have answered all the parts. You should make it even more obvious by repeating the exact language in your answer (eg *The collaboration worked well because...*). Obviously the colour would need to be removed in the final version.
- Even if the question looks more like a theoretical version, you should still list a few examples, even if dot pointed into short paragraphs.
- If the question needs to be loaded online, make sure to

prepare your answer in a Word document first, then cut and paste.

### EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

The EOI process is usually reserved for:

- Internal applications eg secondments. These may be with or without an accompanying CV.
- "Fishing expeditions" where there are no set jobs but the organisation needs to see what's out there before structuring a team.

In a fishing expedition, the organisation seeks a range of backgrounds and, once sufficient numbers of suitable applications are received, it can create the team. We have seen this, for instance, where there is a new taskforce to be formed from scratch. This application might take the form of the Covering Letter version.

EOIs will usually detail exactly the information sought. Answer what is asked, even in point form.

Don't forget that you maybe able to use an available session to have your career consultant review your response.

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