

## APPLYING FOR A JOB WITH THE AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION

In general, selection decisions for jobs and promotions within Australian embassies, high commissions or other posts are based on three elements: a written application, referee report/s and an interview.

The following guidelines aim to assist individuals prepare a written application, prepare for an interview and to prepare their referees to provide a comprehensive and supportive referee report.

### **The Written Application**

The aim of the application is to demonstrate your actual experience, qualities and skills.

All advertised positions have a list of key responsibilities and tasks required for the role. The selection panel will use this, the eligibility and other requirements to assess applications. The eligibility and other requirements describe the personal qualities, skills, abilities, knowledge and qualifications (if any) a person needs to perform the role effectively.

The written application is your first opportunity to demonstrate your claims against the key responsibilities and eligibility requirements. Read the responsibilities and eligibility requirements carefully and ensure you address all elements. Support your claims with actual, specific examples of what you have done and how well you did it rather than assertions about skills or experience. Use recent examples as far as possible.

The following **STAR** points are useful guides in outlining your competency or experience in your one page pitch.

**Situation** - Set the context by describing the situation in which you demonstrated the skills or qualities and gained the experience.

**Task** – Describe the task

**Actions** - What did you do and how did you do it?

**Results** - What did you achieve? What was the end result and how does it relate to the job that you have applied for?

If you find it difficult to identify strong examples for the position responsibilities, eligibility and other requirements, you can still show you understand what is required and how it should be done.

The application is also used by the selection panel to assess an applicant's writing and organisational skills as well as their eagerness for the job. Make sure your application is succinct, focussed and well organised. Show that you are well prepared and thorough by ensuring it is sufficiently detailed and coherent as well as free of spelling or grammatical mistakes. Where possible, have someone, such as a colleague or supervisor, read over your application before lodging it.

## **Example of how to structure the written application**

### **Step one – Opening sentence**

As an example, take *written communication skills*.

Begin with an opening sentence that clearly states your claim to this eligibility requirement. For example:

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

Support the statement with detailed examples of where you demonstrated these skills. The following steps will help you to provide a structured, easy-to-understand response.

### **Step two – Brainstorm ideas for the eligibility requirement**

For each eligibility requirement, brainstorm ideas from your recent work life. Ideally, confine your examples to the last two or three years of employment, or other relevant examples (e.g. study, community participation). The following is an example response for a Senior Project Officer role, which includes an eligibility requirement of '*well developed written communication skills*'. An applicant may come up with the following situations to illustrate their skills before they start to write their application:

- *Project Officer at Department of XYZ – wrote report on project planning methodologies*
- *when Research Support Officer at Department of XYZ – designed and compiled a monthly newsletter*
- *research project when at GBL Company – collated diverse sets of data, organized the information into topic areas, and synthesized into a paper for senior management.*

At this stage, it is useful to generate as many examples as possible.

### **Step three – Expand on your brainstorming ideas and provide the evidence**

Expand on these points from step two. Go back to each eligibility requirement and choose which examples to use, by matching them against the wording of the eligibility requirement. Once you have finalized your examples, you need to demonstrate how they meet the different aspects of the eligibility requirement. Be specific and describe exactly what you did, including the outcome, to demonstrate convincingly that you have met the requirements of each eligibility requirement. Here, the STAR method described earlier can be used. For example:

**Situation** – role as Research Support Officer at Department of XYZ

**Task** – needed to ensure that managers were kept informed of policies and procedures

**Action or approach** – initiated monthly newsletter, which was emailed to each manager. Took responsibility for writing the main articles. This involved obtaining ideas and input from other stakeholders to ensure that the articles reflected managers' needs (in terms of content and language)

**Result** – led to improved lines of communication between managers and the Research Support Unit. Feedback was consistently excellent. Received divisional achievement award for newsletter quality.

Once this has been achieved, you can then write the draft paragraph in full. For example:

*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 this newsletter from these internal clients and my own manager. I received a divisional achievement award for the quality of this newsletter from management. Importantly, this initiative resulted in improved lines of communication between managers and the Research Support Unit.*

Remember you only have one page to support your claims, so you may wish to address several of the position responsibilities and eligibility requirements in one example.

#### **Step four – checking work**

At this stage, you should read through your application, and check the following points:

- Have I been honest? Your responses should reflect an accurate picture of your role and achievements.
- Have I used positive and specific language? Avoid ambiguous or unclear expressions such as '*involved in*' or '*assisted*' as it makes it difficult to understand exactly what you did. Words and phrases which could reduce credibility should also be avoided (e.g. some, a little, limited, somewhat).
- Have I used strong action (doing) words? Avoid using passive language. For example, '*I received consistently excellent feedback in relation to this newsletter from these internal clients and my own manager*', is better than simply stating, '*Feedback in relation to this newsletter was consistently excellent*'.
- Have I avoided unsupported claims about my capabilities? For example, rather than simply saying, '*The newsletter was received well by others*', this assertion is substantiated in the following way: '*I received a divisional achievement award from management for the quality of this newsletter*'.
- Have I addressed all aspects of the eligibility requirements? It is important that you go back to the wording of the requirements and key responsibilities of the position.
- Have I paid attention to the language of the eligibility requirements? For example, writing a response to the eligibility requirement of '*well developed written communication skills*' requires a focus on actual experiences and the degree of skill in this area. However, if the eligibility requirement was phrased '*knowledge of effective written communication skills and techniques*', this would require different examples which do not necessarily rely on describing actual performance in the workplace.

#### **The Interview**

Many people are nervous about interviews. Solid preparation is the key to a successful interview.

On the basis of the eligibility requirements and/or key responsibilities of the position, you may be asked a range of questions to demonstrate your skills and abilities. These could include behavioural-based questions and hypothetical scenario questions.

The following interview tips might be helpful:

- Know your own story:
  - your key selling points;
  - examples of achievements relevant to the eligibility requirements and key responsibilities of the position; and
  - what you might have done differently with the benefit of hindsight
- Know the role and its broader context:

- be familiar with the key responsibilities;
  - understand the broader context: the High Commission, departmental and Australian government priorities and how the job you are applying for fits into this picture; and
  - be aware of current affairs.
- Practice aloud to get comfortable with the wording of examples you might use, but don't learn responses by rote – you don't know what the questions are yet!
- You may be given a copy of the questions a few minutes before interview. Be ready to jot down some notes
- Dress appropriately for the interview and check your appearance in the mirror. You should feel comfortable and confident with your appearance
- Questions tend to be broad, open, behaviour-based questions to allow you to convince the interviewer of your suitability for the job/promotion
- Present clearly and confidently
- Questions need to be answered as if you were already at the level
- Follow the STAR principle – Situation, Task, Actions, Results
- Manage your time. If you have a 20 minute interview, you can't afford to spend 15 minutes on your first answer
- You may be asked if there is anything you want to add – be ready
- Remember the 6 P rule:
  - Proper Prior Preparation Prevents Poor Performance.

## **Referee Reports**

Referee comments are a very important element of your application. You will be required to supply contact details of at least two referees. Your referee should be the person most familiar with your work, who can comment on your ability to perform against each eligibility requirement/key responsibility of the position. It is helpful if they are able to provide work-specific examples against each eligibility requirement/key responsibility of the position.

You should assist referees by providing them with a copy of your application, the eligibility requirements and key responsibilities of the position and any other relevant materials. It is your responsibility to advise your referee/s that they will be contacted and to prepare them to be in a position to answer well all the questions they are asked.