

Reviewing the resume and application

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Intro

A structured approach helps to quickly and effectively review resumes and applications.

In this context, 'application' refers to the cover letter or responses to targeted questions (depending on what you have asked for).

Before you start, review the [role description](#) and [job ad](#), highlight the [essential requirements](#) and [focus capabilities](#), and familiarise yourself with the [targeted questions](#) (if applicable) so you know what you are looking for.

Choosing your approach

There are different ways to approach your review.

One option is to review the resume and application at the same time. This lets you use the full set of information to determine if the candidate meets the essential requirements and is likely to have the capabilities, knowledge and experience required.

Another option is to start with a review of the targeted questions, evaluating multiple, de-identified responses side-by-side. This approach can decrease the likelihood of biases.

You could also do this with the resume if you have asked candidates to fill out the I work for NSW application form rather than attaching a resume as a separate document. You can then easily compare the different parts of resumes at the same time for multiple candidates (e.g. education first, then job experience). You will then need to review the applications.

Gathering evidence

When reviewing resumes and applications, you are gathering evidence to help you decide whether candidates are likely to have the capabilities, knowledge and experience required for your role.

Communication skills

The resume and application review is a good opportunity to assess the capability Communicate Effectively. This should only be done if written work is an important part of the role.

Knowledge and experience

Knowledge and experience requirements set out in the role description and job ad usually relate to one of the following factors:

depth of experience – indicates a high degree of specialised expertise or knowledge in a particular discipline

breadth of experience – characterises generalist roles often in leadership, management or senior professional roles

context – refers to experience gained within a particular context or specialised industry setting.

When assessing experience you are looking for achievements and activities the candidate has completed that relate to the role. Look for:

personal contribution and achievements (not just those of the team)

quality or level of experience and skills as well as amount of time spent in a job

transferrable skills even if these were in a completely different industry or type of role.

Example of transferrable skills

Consider the following (hypothetical) extract from a resume:

Project Officer Clerk 7/8 – Housing NSW (1 September 2013 to present)

- Analysed reports and policies relating to the housing sector published by different government and non-government organisations
- Coordinated input from a range of stakeholders for a submission on the housing sector
- Drafted the paper submitted by agency to the Senate enquiry into affordable housing.

This candidate demonstrates skills that are transferrable to different roles. Their ability to analyse information, coordinate input and develop a submission is relevant to other roles (e.g. policy officer) and other contexts (eg. a different industry provided they are given a reasonable amount of time to develop requisite knowledge).

To assess knowledge, you are looking for evidence of the candidate's theoretical or practical understanding of a particular role requirement.

Example of knowledge requirement

A common requirement in job ads in the NSW public sector is to have a good knowledge of machinery of Government processes. However, not everyone has worked in the public sector. You therefore need to think about how anyone can demonstrate that they have a level of understanding of government processes to address this requirement.

For a role relating to Cabinet processes, knowledge could be demonstrated through a general understanding of the structure of Government, the functions of the Cabinet and stages in the Cabinet process. Knowledge of how the executive Government interacts with Parliament would also be advantageous. This would ensure the candidate has a firm understanding of the working environment from day one, with the application of the knowledge, such as using the e-Cabinet system, able to be learned on the job.

Note that knowledge is not experience. If you want the candidate to have a practical understanding (i.e. have participated in a Cabinet process) you need to ask for this in terms of experience.

Resume review

When reviewing a resume, consider:

- relevance of education, skills and work experience to the current role
- evidence of an individual's impact, contributions and accomplishments while in the role.

You may wish to seek further information from the candidate if their resume contains the following:

- unclear employment dates
- noting a higher education program but not indicating graduation
- decreasing responsibilities over time or frequent unexplained job changes.

Cover letter review

The principles that apply to the resume review also apply to a review of the cover letter. You are looking for information to indicate:

- capabilities, experience and achievements relating to the role requirements
- alignment between the candidate's motivation with the role, type of work, organisation etc.
- relevant qualifications.

Review of targeted questions

Targeted questions can be based on **focus capabilities** or about candidates' experience or motivation to work in the role and in your organisation etc. The different types of targeted questions may require distinct review approaches.

Targeted questions on a focus capability

Concentrate on whether the candidate's response indicates that they are likely to meet the **focus capability or capabilities** you are evaluating.

The best responses describe specific situations and give practical examples. If there is insufficient detail, you can also look at the resume and cover letter for more information.

Targeted questions on motivation

Look for whether candidates understand and are enthusiastic about the challenges and opportunities available in the role. You want them to show that they clearly understand the role and have thought about how their experience, skills, values, working style etc. match the requirements.

Examples of reviewing for motivation

Motivation for role – someone who states that they have a strong preference for working alone may not be well suited to a customer service role.

Motivation for organisation / sector – you are looking for someone whose personal values match the goals, values and culture of the organisation or the public sector more broadly, e.g. motivated to provide a great service for the people of NSW.

Important information

The online application form for jobs advertised on the [I work for NSW](#) public website provides the opportunity for candidates to indicate if they require an adjustment to make the assessment process accessible. Indicating a need for an adjustment to the assessment process due to disability or other reason allows the recruitment team or hiring manager to contact candidates to discuss their needs and make necessary arrangements.

It is your responsibility as hiring manager or recruiter to review the information provided by candidates about adjustments required in the assessment process and follow up as required.

Tips for good practice

Having **assessor(s)** review applications and resumes independently minimises potential bias.

Consider anonymising resumes and applications to reduce unconscious bias and improve the prospects of negatively stereotyped groups.

The following resources have examples of some of the biases that may come up in your review:

- NSW Department of Premier & Cabinet 2016 – [Behavioural approaches to increasing workforce diversity](#)
- CIPD research report – [A head for hiring: the behavioural science of recruitment and selection](#).

Be mindful of making assumptions about previous experience. For example, assuming that a candidate needs to have done the exact role previously or believing that because a candidate held a role with a similar name, the role was the same and they will perform effectively in your agency.

Look instead for examples of achievements and behaviours relevant to your role.

Shortlisting

Now that you have completed your review you need to decide which candidates to **shortlist**.

