

The
Totally Unofficial
and
Completely Unauthorized
Guide to Participating in
Federal Appointment Processes
(Applications, Exams, Interviews, References)

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Four things to be a happy applicant

- Understand yourself
- Understand different types of jobs
- Understand how to find out about jobs
- Understand how to succeed in process ***



Overview

Introduction

- Personal overview
- Approach

Applications

- Cover letters (RoI, ducks)
- Eligibility
- Prep template #1
- Samples
- Resumes

Written Exam

- Planning
- Source material
- Emphasis on structure

Interviews

- Unexpected questions
- Rating guides
- Prep template #2
- Examples
- Emphasis on structure

References

- Choosing
- Supporting

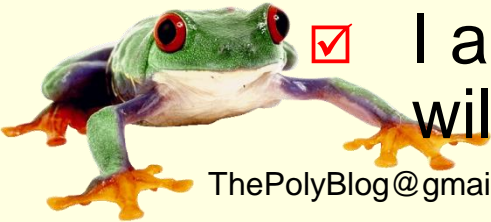




Applications

Cover letters: Four ways to fail

1. Over-estimating Return on Investment (jumps)
2. Never even apply (#s lie)
3. Ignore process (online issues, latest version, deadlines, no cover, overusing generics, ignoring headings, etc.)
4. Quacking up
 - “While I do not have experience...”, “I speak duck”, “I have experiences that are similar to ducks”, “I am in the duck family”...
 - I am a duck, I have always been a duck, you will never see a better duck!



Crafting your cover letter, part I: Ticking the boxes

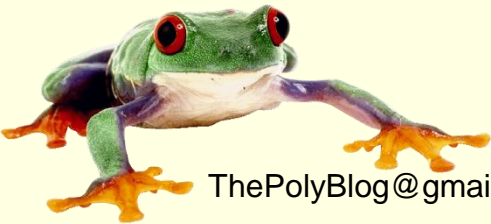
- Opening: Title, Level, Competition, PRI
- Eligibility (1): Education, Employment status, area of selection, language, citizenship
- Eligibility (2): Security clearance, organizational needs (EE), operational requirements (relocation/travel/overtime hours), conditions of employment (travel/irregular hours/part-time)



Cover letters:

Sample text for part I

- I am writing to you in order to apply for the (title) (xx-xx level) position in the *department* (competition xxxx-xxx-xx-xxx). I am sending this letter, and the attached detailed resume, in order to demonstrate my eligibility (A) and qualifications (B-Essentials & C-Assets) against the Statement of Merit Criteria.
- I am an indeterminate employee of HRSDC working in the National Capital Region as a substantive xx-xx, and my PRI number is xx-xxx-xxx. I have a Bachelor's degree in xxxxxxxxxxxxxx from xxxxxxxx (19xx) and a Master's degree in xxxxxxxxxxxxxx from Carleton University (20xx). I am willing to work overtime as required, and travel within Canada and internationally as part of my duties. I have a Level II – Secret security clearance which was updated in 2004 and I meet the official languages proficiency for the position, with a current profile of EBC.
- **Option: “I meet the official language proficiency for the position, but my profile is out of date and I need to be retested”**



Crafting your cover letter: Part II: Experiences - The WRONG Template

- Typical approach is simply to match jobs against experiences
- Works if you are easily able to be screened in
- Easy to miss things and to have insufficient “evidence”

- But there is a **SECRET** alternative...shhhh!

Experience 1	Job 1
Experience 2	Job 2
Experience 3	Job 1,3

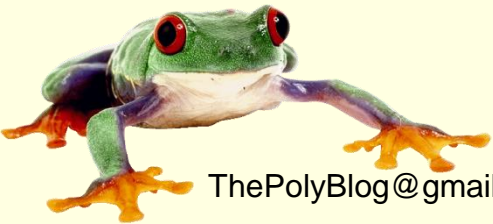


Secret Template #1: Experiences (Essential AND Assets!)

- Goal is overwhelming evidence you meet requirement
- For each experience, look at each job / academic / volunteer
- THEN craft paragraph with best examples (i.e. not ALL)

	Job 1	Job 2	Job 3	Acad	Vol.
Exp 1 →	X	X	X	X	X
Exp 2 →	X	X	X	X	X
Exp 3 →	X	X	X	X	X

QUACK!!!



Cover letters:

Sample text for part II

B2. Experience in managing human and financial resources

- Since 2002, I have had extensive responsibility for human resources. I acted as deputy director within the policy coordination team at CIDA, assisting in leading a team of eight, directly supervising two policy analysts, and acting as director almost 20% of the time. While working at SDC on international issues, I was the head of a team of seven analysts and one support staff on issues related to bilateral relations, multilateral engagement, and policy development. As manager in policy integration at HRSDC, I led a team preparing an integrated policy framework, implementation plan for creating a Centre of Excellence, strategic regional engagement, participation in medium term policy planning, branch coordination of corporate planning requests, and international benchmarking and comparisons; and I am now the manager of the performance team within Integrated Planning and Accountability, as well as having acted as director for five weeks during the summer.



Resumes

- Lots of exciting models out there, most of them completely irrelevant for screening!
- Listing your “skills” doesn’t matter in a formal screening process – you have to PROVE them, not just list them
- Simplest design:
 - Job 1, Time, Experience/duties
 - Job 2, Time, Experience/duties
- Resume should have words from poster sprinkled throughout





Written Exams

The Written Exam: General planning

- Find out in advance (i.e. ask!):
 - On computer? With Internet or not?
 - Hand-written? – EVERY OTHER LINE!!!
 - Duration



Exams: What is covered

Eligibility	90% cover letter / application, 10% language test
Experience	100% cover letter, application (* Officially 100%, but more like 75% cover, 5% written , 20% interview)
Knowledge	80-85% written , 15-20% interview
Abilities	15-20% written , 80-85% interview
Personal Suitability	20-40% interview, 60-80% reference check



The Written Exam: What to review?

- Macro documents
 - Reports on Plans and Priorities, Departmental Performance Reports
 - Internet site for “Vision”, “Mandate”, recent general speech by Minister
- Micro documents
 - Divisional mandate?
 - Substantive files for that area i.e. FAA, HRts
 - Be wary of the incumbent trap!
- What is your goal? Short reusable modules!



The Written Exam: Structure is King!

- Poorly constructed answer with content leaves markers confused
- Expect questions appropriate to category
 - ES – briefing note
 - AS – PSC tests, short answers
- Expect the unexpected
 - Problem-solving steps
 - Policy development cycle
 - Project management cycle
 - Teamwork / partnership / consultation process



The Written Exam: Writing it!

- If you memorized short modules, dump them out of your head in short notation form
- Need to manage your time!
- Save often!
- Outline your answer and answer ALL of the question i.e. “recommendations”





Interviews

Interviews: General preparations

- Main process question: Do you get the questions 30 minutes in advance or not?
- Knowing yourself – do you talk fast? slow? short answers or elaborate stories?
- Be ready for unexpected questions with problem-solving headings, policy development cycle, project management cycle



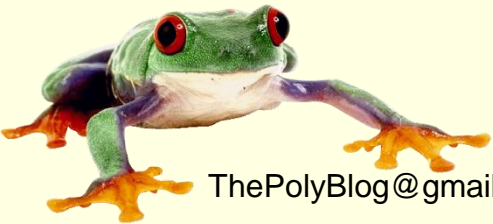
Interviews: Extra speaking points

- Unexpected questions for icebreakers or oral ability – may not be rated but sets tone for interview
 - How you are the best candidate / past experience / personal strengths / achievements
 - How it relates to your career goals
 - Weakness – and what you are doing about it (NOT something that is relevant to the job!)
- Frequent content of other questions:
 - How to deal with challenging project / difficult employee
 - Teamwork or partnering examples
 - Leadership and communications
 - Values and ethics – PSC or personal (respect, diversity, lifelong learning)



Interviews: Getting serious

Eligibility	90% cover letter / application, 10% language test
Experience	100% cover letter, application (* Officially 100%, but more like 75% cover, 5% written, 20% interview)
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Interviews: Knowledge

- Same prep as for written:
 - Macro documents: RPP, DPR, speeches
 - Micro documents: Files, division mandate
 - Substantive area files: Finance? Human rights?

- The goal is same as as for written exam – “short” modules to drop into answers



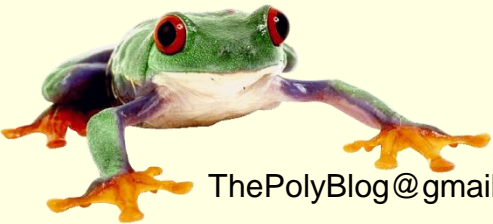
Interviews: Abilities, personal suitability

- Generally speaking, only three main types of questions:
 1. Experience – Tell us of a time when you...
 2. Process – What steps would you take in this situation
 3. Principles – What factors are important in this situation or scenario
- **Surprise:** All three questions are scored the same way!



Interviews: Understanding the rating guide

- All relevant elements from the poster (knowledge, abilities, personal suitability) have “answer key” prepared in advance that says WHAT is a good answer
- Not prepared by rocket scientists
- Has to be GENERIC answer structure to accommodate every candidate
- You can do SAME process to figure out what the criteria looks like, and prepare your answer accordingly

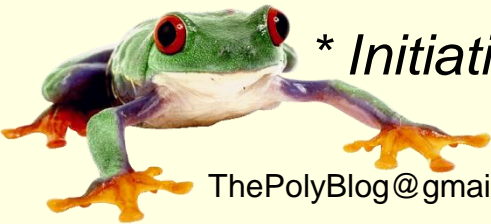


Interviews: Example - “Initiative”

- Dictionary.com:
 - An introductory act or step, serving to initiate
 - Readiness and ability in initiating action;
 - One's personal, responsible decision
 - The power or ability to begin or to follow through energetically with a plan or task
 - An opening move: took the initiative in trying to solve the problem
 - Synonyms: leadership, forcefulness, dynamism

- Rating guide: Candidate's answer demonstrates:
 - Decision: Did something that wasn't part of normal duties (new) or assigned – did it before and without being asked
 - Dynamic Action: Can't be picking up piece of paper
 - Results: Followed through with plan / task
 - Other: Planning, leading (*), risks, questions status quo, originates rather than react or respond, creativity

** Initiative is one of worst understood personal suitabilities*



Interviews: Proper preparation

- IF you know there's a rating guide
- IF you know there are three types of questions
- IF you know every element has to be tested AND only those elements

- You can figure out your answers without even knowing the questions. I give you...

Secret Template #2



Interviews: Secret template #2!

	EXPERIENCE	PROCESS	PRINCIPLES
Experience (1,2,3,...)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work 2. Academic 3. Volunteerism 		
Knowledge (1,2,3,...)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Position 1</i> 2. <i>Position 2</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Step 1 2. Step 2 3. Step 3 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Principle 1 2. Principle 2
Abilities (1,2,3,...)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Position 1 2. Position 2 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Step 1 2. Step 2 3. Step 3 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Principle 1</i> 2. <i>Principle 2</i>
Personal Suitability (1,2,3,...)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Position 1 2. Position 2 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Step 1</i> 2. <i>Step 2</i> 3. <i>Step 3</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Principle 1 2. Principle 2

Goal: One box or all three!!!



Interviews: Sample answer #1 - Same answer, extra info

Q: Name a social or economic trend facing Canada and discuss implications for HRSDC

Answer 1: Aging population

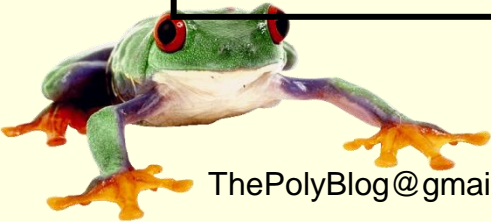
- Demographics → Aging population, living longer, baby boomers, fewer children too
- Implications for HRSDC:
 - Labour market shortages, etc.
 - Health care costs, caregiving issues
 - Life-long learning

Score: 7 or 8 out of 10

Answer 2: Aging population

- Demographics → Aging population, living longer (see it in own family too with aging parents, uncles / aunts), baby boomers, fewer children too (saw it while working in social area, types of issues)
- Implications for HRSDC:
 - Labour market shortages, etc. (saw it while working in LMP, broad spectrum of issues; key principle of income security is participation in labour force)
 - Health care costs, caregiving issues
 - Life-long learning (new areas of learning in process: learning, acquiring, using, adapting)
- Profound changes in society

Score: 8 or 9 out of 10 – MORE ROBUST ANSWER



Interviews: Sample answer #2 - Extra info, different answer

Q: You have three requests due today – a briefing note due for 3:00 for the Minister, a report on yesterday’s meeting for Director due at 11:00, and materials for ADM for meeting tomorrow, but due at noon today. Which order would you start on them?

Answer 1:

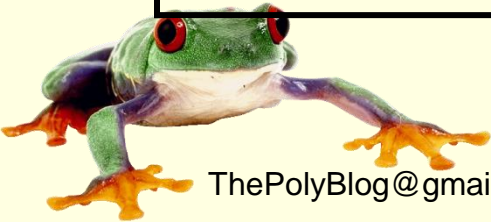
- 11:00 Report for Director
- 12:00 Materials for ADM
- 15:00 Briefing note for ADM

Answer 2:

- Need to meet deadlines while ensuring quality
- Need to prioritize and manage time effectively
- Issues: Sequencing, Audience, Substance
- Might have to shift as progresses, or might need extra resources, and would discuss with manager, but based on above analysis:
 - 15:00 Briefing note for ADM
 - 12:00 Materials for ADM
 - 11:00 Report for Director

Score: 5 out of 10

Score: 8 or 9 out of 10 – **NOT BECAUSE ORDER WAS DIFFERENT, BUT FOR “EXTRA” ELEMENTS**



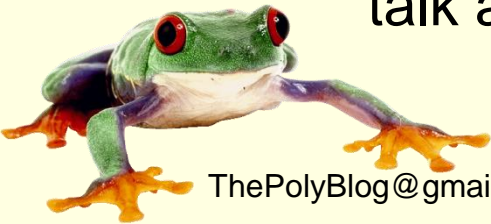
Interviews: Structure is Queen!

- Structure + average content better than perfect content and no structure
- Good to outline but you are NOT reading a script
- Standard answer:
 - Introduction: Show you understand question
 - Body: Tell them how many parts to your answer, and focus on results, say “I” not we – What you would do, why, how
 - Conclude: Tell them you’re done – nicely, without repetition



Interviews: Overall tips

- Use the template in advance, divide up examples over several answers and create solid structure
- If possible, use language from Statement of Merit – **KNOW WHICH ELEMENT IS BEING TESTED????**
- No shooting yourself in the foot:
 - Add personal tips to your sheet (i.e. slow down, eye contact, manage time)
 - BE POSITIVE: No negative comments about past – talk about new directions or changes



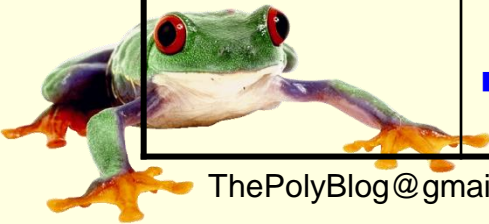
Extra examples: Advice, pressure

<p>Ability to analyze and make recommendations on complex policy issues and provide strategic advice to senior management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Understands scenario■ Seeks out relevant sources■ Articulates analysis and assumptions in logical fashion■ Makes relevant recommendations■ Information provided relates well to developing policy options■ Level of detail appropriate to audience■ Explains rationale for recommendations
<p>Ability to work under pressure and meet tight deadlines // Ability to solve problems // Dependability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Appropriately characterizes problem■ Able to determine priorities even in times of stress■ Adjusts work plan■ Pays attention to detail■ Delegates or gets assistance where appropriate■ Inform, engage, and seek advice from senior management, where appropriate and in a timely manner■ Effective time and resource management■ Tries to meet deadline in face of obstacles and frustrations // Delivers on time or sets expectation when timeframes unachievable■ Presents options or alternatives to management for consideration



Extra examples: Interpersonal, communications

<p>Ability to work in team environment OR Effective Interpersonal Skills</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Recognizes the importance of interpersonal relationships■ Creates and maintains productive relationships■ Able to achieve results through co-operative interactions■ Shares information with interested parties, stakeholders■ Tries to understand other's perspective■ Builds consensus■ Interacts with diplomacy, respect and consideration■ Is respected and influential■ Has ability to find appropriate ways to approach others about sensitive issues■ Makes decisions with a sensitivity for how these decisions may affect others■ Builds and maintains trust
<p>Ability to communicate effectively</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Communicates clearly so the audience understands: Is the message clear, direct and easily understood? Heard easily, does not mumble■ Uses correct words and grammatically correct structures: rules of grammar observed? Are grammatically correct structures used?■ During the interview, points covered are presented in logical sequence with no erratic backtracking: Are ideas logically developed and presented in reasonable sequence?■ Does not lose listeners in lengthy or complicated explanations: Is message brief and to the point?





References

References

- Choosing the right people
- Approval
- Preparing your references: Soft prompting / scripting
 - Cover letter
 - Suggested areas already highlighted
 - Examples while working with them





Conclusion

7 Habits of Highly Successful Applicants

1. Know yourself and what you want
2. Invest your time wisely
3. Quack like a duck
4. Write proper cover letter
5. Anticipate the likely questions
6. Structure your answers
7. Prep your referees

P.S. Share your approach!

