

How to Apply for Competitions

Get that promotion. You deserve it.

Purpose of a Competition

The purpose of a competition is to screen out as many applicants as possible. Each competition will have thousands of applications. Each application represents a pay raise for the remainder of the candidate's 30 year career, and the duration of the candidate's pension. This pay raise will cost taxpayers money for the remainder of the candidate's life. Competitions are designed to screen out applicants based on bureaucratic technicalities.

Your actual job performance has nothing to do with it. Do not take it personally if you are screened out. Review your answers again before your next competition, find the loopholes they used to say you weren't a successful candidate. This page will help.

In General

- ▶ Questions are re-used across competitions. If you don't have time to finish your application ahead of the deadline, that's okay. Copy down the questions, save your answers in a document, you'll have a head start next time you do a competition.
- ▶ When answering competition questions, you are not describing what your job is. You do that in the interview, later.
- ▶ When answering competition questions, you are listing a specific time/document/CRQ/INOT that proves you meet the criteria. Dates, ticket numbers, BR numbers, these are your friends.
- ▶ Do not assume the person reading these has a competent understanding of the English Language, or cause-and-effect logic. They will use these kinds of assumptions to screen you out, saying "this applicant has not proven they meet the criteria".
- ▶ Do not assume the person reading these is technical. Don't say "I configured NXOS", say "I configured Cisco Nexus Operation System (NXOS), the command line interface for Cisco switches". I was in an interview once, the interviewer said "I can see by your resume you've rarely used Microsoft IHS" and I was able to say "I have seven years' experience with Apache, which is the Open Source equivalent." Assume the person reading this has no idea what you do for a living and is not technical.
- ▶ Each question is being read by a different person. For each answer you give, you need to spell out the acronyms again (like CRA and SSC). The person reading question 2 has not read question 1, so you will have to re-state information about where you work, what partner you support, what team you are on, etc.
- ▶ This means you can use one example across multiple questions.

The STAR Method

STAR - Situation - Task - Action - Result

- The **Situation** must include exact words from the question.
- The **Task** outlines what needed to be done to solve the problem.
- The **Action** is full of "I did X" and "I did Y". All verbs in past tense. Don't say "I do Z as part of my daily routine". Focus on a specific time in the past when you did Z. BR numbers, CRQ numbers, INOTs with INC numbers, these are all good. Make this as specific as possible. Assume the person reading these is non-technical.
- The **Result** describes how this was good for the business. This is the part that makes Managers excited to hire you.

EX1: Do you have recent* experience in the generation, presentation or maintenance of reports, technical documentation or presentations?

*RECENT experience is defined as experience normally gained within the last five(5) years.

Please Specify Yes No

If you answer Yes: Please describe your experience in more detail with complete sentences in 4000 characters or less.

Please include in your answer the "From MM-YYYY to MM-YYYY" of when you gained this(these) experience(s).

Situation: I gained experience in the **generation of technical documentation** from 09-2017 through 03-2018 as a Support Technician working with Middleware Services, Shared Services Canada (SSC).

Task: Create documentation to enable the ongoing support and Keep The Lights On (KTLO) for these legacy systems until they could be successfully migrated to modern technology.

Action: I created the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for Oracle Forms 10.1.2.3.1 and Oracle Forms 10.1.2.2 systems. Oracle Forms is unsupported technology, and the previous technicians who maintained them had retired from the government. I documented how to startup services, health check services, deploy applications, configure applications, and troubleshoot these platforms. I documented which Linux commands to use, which errors codes are commonly encountered, what the error codes mean in context, how to avoid dependency issues, and what differences are expected when working on an Oracle Forms system versus a modern web service such as Tomcat or Websphere.

Result: These documents were used by the Middleware Team supporting Health Canada and Indigenous Services Canada to keep the Critical Business Applications and Services (CBAS) on them running. My documentation was vital to the maintenance of these services until they were finally migrated to a modern platform in 2020.

- Some competitions ask for STAR. Just do the above and you're good.
- If the competition does not ask for STAR, then take out the STAR words and smush the whole thing into one paragraph.
- You can use multiple STARs to answer one question.

Resume

The only reason anyone reads your resume is to be sure that everything you list in your STARs is on there. Make sure your resume backs up your STARs.

Interviews

I keep the competition questions and answers in a file. I keep copies of documents, INOT reports, CRQs, BRs mentioned in the STARs in that same file.

Read over the file (briefly) before the interview.

If I didn't read over my file, when I'm in the interview I'll only be using two or three examples from my past week of work. By reading over the file, I have several years' worth of projects and work fresh in my mind.

The best technical interviewers will be interested in what you do day-to-day, but they will want to know what else you're curious about. What other side projects do you have? Are you the kind of person who will build their own PC, or set up their own home network? The best technical interviewers are looking for someone who's curious, eager to learn, and willing to throw themselves at new (or new-to-them) technologies.

The best management interviewers will be interested in how you've helped your team grow, and how you've helped SSC/CRA/CBSA grow as a business. They'll want to know that you automated a process that used to involve lots of man-hours. They'll want to know that you solved a security problem, once and for all, so no one ever has to worry about that particular thing again. They'll want to know ways you've streamlined processes to make your job, your colleagues' job, and your TL's job easier.

The Catch: Interviewers have to ask the same questions of all candidates to prove that there was no favouritism involved. The questions will be fairly bare-bones, and the interviewers won't be able to adapt the questions to show off something you've already mentioned earlier in the interview.

This means you need to talk. Talk lots. Take a simple question about "what documentation have you written", answer it, then ramble on about how you singlehandedly kept a CBAS running. You should leave the interview feeling like you've been bragging about yourself for 45 min straight. This means you're doing it right. Good job.

