

Challenge-Context-Action-Result (CCAR) Model for Executive Resume Writing

Table of Contents

Background	2
Challenge-Context-Action-Result (CCAR) Model Requirements.....	3
The CCAR Model	3
The CCAR model involves these components:.....	3
CCAR Statements should adhere to the following:.....	3
Executive Resume General Guidelines	4
Executive Core Qualification (ECQ) Narratives General Guidelines	4
General Guidelines and Format	4
Stay Focused	4
Things to Avoid.....	5
Tone	5
Challenge-Context-Action-Result (CCAR) Model Requirements.....	6
The CCAR model involves these components:.....	6
CCAR Statements should adhere to the following:.....	6
CCAR formatted list of Accomplishments and ECQ Narratives Examples	7
Example 1: List of resume accomplishments:.....	7
Example 2: ECQ Narrative Statement:	8

Background

In general, there are two major artifacts that construct your executive resume:

- The Resume: this contains traditional resume information but also outlines the accomplishments addressing the Core Executive Qualifications below
- The Executive Core Qualification Narrative: This is a supplement that is submitted with your resume. This highlights specific scenarios, addressing the five core qualifications below, outlining the
 - **Challenge** the scenario addressed
 - **Context** relevant to the scenario
 - **Actions** you took to solve the challenge
 - **Results** (outcome) of your actions

Executive Competencies: There are five core qualifications and 22 associated competencies. For a list of these competencies click here:

- Executive Competencies: <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/senior-executive-service/executive-core-qualifications/>
- Executive Proficiency Levels: <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/assessment-and-selection/competencies/proficiency-levels-for-leadership-competencies.pdf>

Plain Language Guidelines: In addition to the information in this guide, you should develop your resume and narrative using plain language guidelines that can be found here: <https://www.plainlanguage.gov/guidelines/>

This guide outlines the best practices and examples for:

- Challenge-Context-Action-Result (CCAR) writing model
- Writing effective resume accomplishments
- Writing effective Executive Core Qualification Narratives

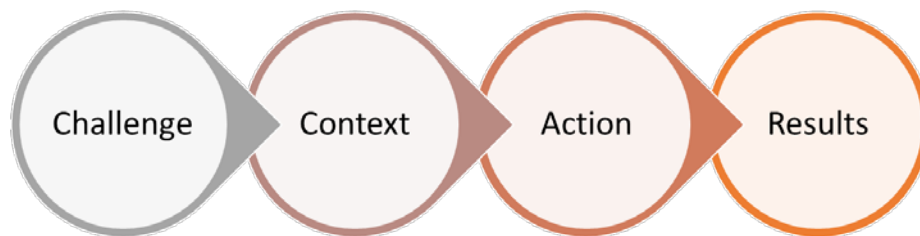
Challenge-Context-Action-Result (CCAR) Model Requirements

The CCAR Model

The CCAR Model is a methodology used to outline the four parts of every story that is relevant to prove executive competencies while focusing the narrative to what is minimally required to convey the details of the scenario. The four parts of the CCAR Model are:

- **Challenge:** describe a specific problem or goal
- **Context:** describe individuals and groups you worked with and/or environment in which you worked to address a challenge
- **Action:** measures/outcomes that had some impact on the organization. This demonstrates the quality and effectiveness of leadership skills
- **Results:** discuss specific actions you took to address the challenge

Each part of the CCAR Model is a building block to a complete product.



The CCAR model involves these components:

- Challenge: Describe a specific problem or goal.
- Context: Place the example in its context, i.e., describe the individuals and groups you worked with, and/or the environment in which you worked, to tackle a particular challenge. Explain the complexity of the situation.
- Action: Discuss the specific actions you took to address the challenge.
- Result: Give specific examples of the results of your actions to demonstrate the quality and effectiveness of your leadership skills. While each ECQ narrative should be written in paragraph format, the CCAR approach must be evident in those narratives. Write-ups are limited to four pages total for all ECQs (Fundamental Competencies are cross-cutting, they should be addressed over the complete ECQ narrative).

CCAR Statements should adhere to the following:

- Use Times New Roman font, size 12
- Be clear and concise
- Write in the first person
- Write with the audience in mind: i.e., your supervisor, organization leadership, Component, DSLDP Program Manager and an executive-level Selection Board
- Spell out all acronyms the first time used
- For achievements and results, focus on recent examples
- Avoid repeating the same accomplishment for different write-ups
- Describe recent education and training that enhanced your skills in each element
- Avoid personal beliefs or philosophies
- If possible, quantify accomplishments/results
- Use the CCAR model while developing the write-ups, but do not annotate specific statements with the four headings (Challenge, Context, Action or Result)

Executive Resume General Guidelines

Executive Resumes are written and formatted differently than technical/SME resumes. If you are using the same resume you used for non-executive technical/practitioner/management jobs, you likely won't meet the requirements needed to be selected for an interview.

Executive Resumes should

- Be 3-5 pages in total reflecting 5 - 10 years of experience. (7 years is typically the sweet spot for 5 pages).
- Your experience should only reflect job related accomplishments addressing your specific domain expertise (e.g. IT, Security, HR, Medical, etc.), the position's duties and responsibilities, & the mission of the organization you are applying to.
- Accomplishments should reflect mostly large scale, substantive, multi-year efforts that you led from start to finish (or for an extended period if you did not see it through the end).
 - Each scenario you list as an accomplishment should highlight domain expertise addressing some or all of the executive competencies below.
 - While each scenario may not address all the executive competencies below, the totality of the accomplishments on your resume should address all of them.
- Most, if not all, your accomplishments should be quantifiable (\$, %, #) facts you can cite highlighting efficiency, effectiveness, accuracy, and/or quality benefits/outcomes.
- Accomplishments you are unable to quantify should directly address cultural, environmental, mission, satisfaction, & workforce benefits/outcomes.
- You should use the Challenge-Context-Action-Result (CCAR) Model to write your accomplishments. (See CARR sections below)

Please Reference Example 1 for a sample list of accomplishments

Executive Core Qualification (ECQ) Narratives General Guidelines

General Guidelines and Format

Note: May vary by application. Make sure you follow the instructions in the announcement carefully)

- You will have one narrative for each of the 5 ECQ core qualifications -- totaling 5 narratives not to exceed two pages per narrative. You can outline multiple scenarios per narrative if you do not exceed the page limit.
- Use paragraphs to separate items.
- Use headings and subheadings to indicate each part of the CCAR Model.
- Use 12pt font and 1 inch margins.
- Application should be neat, clean, and typed
- Number all pages.

Stay Focused

- Focus on leadership rather than managerial and technical abilities; all three are important, but leadership is most important. Use clear, concise narratives written in the first person.
- Follow the Challenge-Context-Action-Result model.
- Each ECQ or competency should contain specific, job-related experiences with specific accomplishments.
- Focus on what you have accomplished personally, but don't exaggerate.
- Show that you have the qualifications needed to succeed in the Senior Executive Service.
- Focus on your vision for the organization not your personal vision.

- Focus on recent experience, education, and training. Some reviewers consider experience that's over 10 years old to be stale.
- Highlight awards or other forms of recognition that relate specifically to an ECQ or competency, e.g., "Human Resources Manager of the Year."
- Address the fundamental competencies over the course of the complete ECQ narrative.
- Include non-Federal experiences (e.g., private sector, volunteer and professional organizations) if they support the ECQ or competency.
- Include relevant education or training enhancing your skills in a particular ECQ or competency.
- Include examples of special assignments and details.
- Include special qualifications if relevant to the position sought: public speaking, publications, languages spoken, membership in related professional organizations or scientific societies, or expertise in a technical area (e.g., budget, information technology).
- Show measurable results, especially in terms of improved customer service, increased efficiency, productivity, or money saved.
- Spell out all acronyms.
- Write in short, complete sentences (subject, verb, proper tense agreement).
- Use common words and expressions instead of bureaucratic ones.
- Less is more; Economize on words and expressions, but not to a cryptic extreme.
 - Good: I briefed Congress.
 - Bad: I conducted a briefing to key Congresspersons and their staffs. (10 words.)

Things to Avoid

- Avoid vague narratives.
 - Good: I produce two weekly radio shows, one monthly television program, and a bimonthly newsletter to 10,000 employees located in 12 regional offices.
 - Bad: I manage various communication processes to field offices.
- Avoid using an identical example for more than one ECQ or competency.
- Avoid a "laundry list" of activities without context, actions, or accomplishments.
- Avoid typos or grammatical errors. Don't assume Spell-Check and Grammar-Check will catch all the errors; proofread every word. ☒ Avoid combining any of the ECQs or competencies.
- Never address an ECQ or competency by referring the reader to other parts of your application (e.g., resume). ☒ Avoid narratives that describe your personal beliefs, philosophies, or commitment to social or political causes unless they are necessary to describe the results you have achieved.
- Avoid revealing information about your political affiliation or activities unless you are using experience as a political appointee to qualify.
- Avoid identifying your race, sex, national origin, color, religion, age, marital status, physical or mental disability, sexual orientation, or any other non-merit factor.

Tone

- Be friendly and professional, not stilted, formal, or chatty.
- Avoid passive verbs; use active verbs with the personal "I."
 - Good: I established a new team structure that eliminated the need for six supervisors (only 13 words; concise, clear, good use of personal "I" with an active verb).
 - Bad: The establishment of a new team structure was considered one of my best accomplishments in that it reduced the need for six supervisory positions (too long--24 words; stilted, awkward sentence structure, passive verb).

For more information, visit

- **OPM Guidelines:** https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/senior-executive-service/reference-materials/guidetosesquals_2012.pdf
- **USAJOBS Guidelines:** <https://www.usajobs.gov/Help/working-in-government/unique-hiring-paths/senior-executive-service/>

Challenge-Context-Action-Result (CCAR) Model Requirements

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CCAR formatted list of Accomplishments and ECQ Narratives Examples

Example 1: List of resume accomplishments:

For an executive resume, you want to summarize the most important career accomplishments that address the Executive Core Competencies and/or relative to the position you are applying for. The following are examples of CARR formatted accomplishments:

1. Conceived the idea, developed a vision and strategic plan, and stood up the Iraqi Republic Railway, which became the first government agency in Iraq to generate revenue and become self-sustaining, providing relief to logistical planning and response to all categories of contingency situations in that region.
2. Provided planning and coordination guidance for military and DOD personnel and equipment for two joint federal and DOD emergency response exercises: SUDDEN RESPONSE (guided efforts of 143 emergency responders from NORTHCOM, FEMA and Region VII military personnel) and VIBRANT RESPONSE (a national training event involving 500+ DOD, federal, state and civilian emergency responders).
3. Represented the Air Force and senior government officials before the Governor and other agencies, committees, organizations, media, unions, and private organizations. Developed and promoted relationships with federal and state military, and civilian and interagency organizations including FEMA and the state Emergency Manager and staff. Guided official staff in obtaining DOD Title 10 support as needed for disasters. Advised the Governor on the status of the federal response.
4. Led the development of wilderness management plans for over 1.2 million acres of Congressionally designated wilderness through passage of two lands bills.
5. Led comprehensive change in managing BLM's Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) within the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the initiative to gain full funding for the LWCF Program, which required completely transforming how all four affected land management agencies work together.
6. I reorganized the realty staff as part of an agency-wide transformation initiative designed to streamline staffing and identify opportunities to consolidate positions, especially in the Washington Office. In support of the Director, I recommended and implemented revisions to the organization that included eliminating certain positions, filling long vacant but vital positions, and utilizing alternative hiring authorities. My recommendations were incorporated into the

Example 2: ECQ Narrative Statement:

- **(Challenge)** When deployed to Iraq as the Director for Contracting-Forces, subordinate to Joint Contracting Command-Iraq/Afghanistan, I provided overarching leadership for contracting support for 140,000 troops and 12 Regional Contracting Centers, stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan, and executive oversight for more than 5,000 contracts worth \$550M, for work including construction, vehicle maintenance, intelligence gathering, media services, and water bottling. Shortly after my arrival, the leader of Multi-National Forces Iraq challenged my organization to take on a more strategic focus; specifically to focus on his strategic objective of improving the Iraqi economy. I accepted the challenge of meeting this objective, but my organization was not immediately ready.
- **(Context)** My 12 regional centers, while operating well, were largely operating independently of each other, without any integrated focus or standardized procedures—capabilities critical to successful strategic operations. My vision was to create an organization capable of taking on and achieving strategic Theater objectives, while still supporting tactical operations. To realize this vision, I faced numerous obstacles to effecting major organizational changes in an environment of perverse violence and extreme fluidity. The challenges included making changes to operational focus, creating capacity in the organization to take on increased work, developing common processes, and introducing infrastructure changes across the enterprise.
- **(Action)** Time was of the essence; I took decisive action to implement the change. To begin, I challenged my staff to develop an action plan. I then revisited many military combat leaders to explain the changes about to happen. This critical step provided them situational awareness, engendered trust, and obtained their buy-in. I focused the center leaders on the need to standardize processes. I was honest and direct, telling them that the integrity and credibility of deployed procurement operations was on the line; that Congress and the public questioned our ability to make quality business decisions, while still supporting our mission. We agreed to establish a new quality review process to ensure all products met standard.
- **(Result)** My leadership inspired innovative and creative thinking among my management team. Before introduction of my changes, the organization was not capable of supporting broader strategic initiatives and economic development faltered; after the shift in operations and workloads across the regional centers, we began effectively executing procurement programs to improve/speed the process of economic recovery in Iraq and Afghanistan. Dialogue I engaged in with senior leaders throughout Iraq and Afghanistan, began focusing on both supporting the troops AND strategic economic development. This shift in primary focus completely revamped my organization's role in the region—I began supporting nation building; we addressed NATO issues, grew infrastructure, designated economic safe zones, and built trust amongst the Iraqi business people and public. Overall, I led my organization in delivering a wider range of services, with much broader impact—at the national level, and transformed a tactical operation into a strategic powerhouse.