



**UNITED STATES**  
**POSTAL SERVICE®**

**Applicant's Guide for  
Responding  
To Personnel  
Selection  
Requirements  
On Form 991**

Publication 555  
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## Applicant Information

The purpose of this guide is to provide you with information and ideas that you may find useful when you are completing a Postal Service application for promotion or assignment.



## When Applying for a Position in Response to a Vacancy Announcement, You Are Asking for a Promotion or Reassignment

When you apply for a position, you are competing with others who, like you, believe they are qualified for and can perform the duties of the vacant position.

- If you are successful, you may receive a pay raise and you may be opening doors to future opportunities.
- To be successful, however, you must convince the review committee that you have the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) and are, therefore, qualified; *and*, if there are many applicants for the position, you must convince the committee that you are one of the best.



## Before Completing the Application, You Should Know:

Your application does not normally go directly to a selecting manager. Usually your application will go to a review committee made up of current supervisors, postmasters, or specialists at the same or higher grade than the vacant position. Often none of the review committee members has had any personal contact with any of the applicants.

Review committee members are interested in how the KSAs you possess will enable you to do the work required by the announced position. They will make their recommendation based on what they read in the application and other written records.

Does this mean that only people with excellent writing skills need apply? *Emphatically, NO!* What it does mean is that applicants need to clearly explain their qualifications.

## Your Application Is Your Representative to the Review Committee

You can now see that your written application is very important. Personal interviews, in most cases, are conducted only with those applicants whose written applications have convinced a review committee that they should be considered by the selecting manager.

- Therefore, your application may be your only avenue of communication with these committees. What do you want these committees to know about you?
- If your narrative is simply a list of positions held, then the review committee must decide if, by simply having worked in those positions, you fulfill the position requirements.
- If your narrative does not speak to the requirements directly but is more like a resume, the review committee is likely to give it less consideration than an application that does contain the information they need to make a decision.
- Remember that you already know your job qualifications. However, you are completing an application to be read by people who do not know you, but who are required to make judgments concerning you dependent on what you tell them. Therefore, the more complete and more specific your description of past behavior, the better your chances are to be recommended.

## The Narrative Portion of the Application Is Important

Each application should be specific to the position. Generic or “all purpose” applications are not a good idea.

The vacancy announcement lists the requirements necessary for the successful performance of the duties of the position. You must describe your qualifications for each requirement.

**STAR** = Situation/Task, Action, Result.

The best applications will use the STAR method of describing qualifications. This means that for each requirement listed on the vacancy announcement, you should:

- Give an example of a **Situation or Task** related to that requirement.
- Tell what **Action** was taken to resolve the situation or accomplish the task.
- Explain the **Result** of the action taken. This way, the review committee gets to know something about your behavior in relation to a specific job requirement.

**STAR** = Situation/Task, Action, Result.

If you neglect to use some systematic method like STAR to provide a detailed and complete summary of your qualifications and just leave it up to the reader of your application to draw conclusions from a sketchy outline of your KSAs, the message you want to give may not be received as you intended.

## Writing a Description of Your Qualifications

Read the requirement statements. Be very specific when you describe the achievements that demonstrate the KSAs you possess to meet the requirements. Let's take "Ability to prepare and track a budget" as an example. You may have acquired ability by managing a budget for some outside organization such as a community or service club, or for your own business, or from working within the Postal Service. Maybe you took some courses in accounting or finance and have knowledge about and experience in these fields. Generally, answering the following questions will provide the kind of precise and complete information needed in your description:

- Begin with *situations* you have encountered that needed resolution or *tasks* that needed completion.
- What *action* did you take to resolve the situation or complete the task that demonstrates your knowledge, skills, or abilities?
- What was the *result*? Did you accomplish the desired outcome?
- To what extent were *you* responsible for the final result? Be specific.
- What initiatives and innovative approaches did you demonstrate?
- If education and training are your achievements, indicate what these were and how they relate to the KSAs specified in the factor.
- Be specific about the courses you have taken — topics covered, level of complexity (introductory, advanced, etc.) — and be able to provide evidence of your performance.



## Following Are Two Examples of How This System Works:

Example 1: Requirement — Ability to track budgetary expenditures.

- Qualification response — We didn't have a way of tracking our outstanding capital budget items, and I knew our finance manager was concerned about this problem. Using our spreadsheet software and information from the Corporate Database, I designed a program that would carry outstanding capital commitments forward. This allowed the budget analyst to keep the manager informed of where monies were available for other projects and gave us more accurate budget control.
- The Situation or Task was the untracked expenses. The Action was the program design. The Result was the up-to-date information that allowed better planning.

**STAR** = Situation/Task, Action, Result.

Example 2: Requirement — Ability to plan and schedule work.

- Qualification response — Our outgoing mail section was losing productivity during the early hours of the tour. I performed a two-week survey tracking mail as it came in for processing. I found that PTFs were being assigned to the incorrect processing operations, causing delays and wasting hours. I changed their duty assignments, which resulted in a more even workflow with decreased work hours.
- The Situation or Task was lost productivity. The Action was to track mail and change assignments. The Result was an even workflow and decreased work hours.

**STAR** = Situation/Task, Action, Result.

## The Review Committee and Selecting Manager Have Been Trained in Application Review

A training program concerned with application review and interviewing techniques was introduced at the beginning of FY 1990. This training has now been updated and implemented as a web-based interactive training program.

The training program emphasizes evaluating applications using a behavioral approach. This means that the people assessing your application are looking for your qualifications to be explained (a) in direct relation to the requirements and (b) in the form of what you did (behavior) as an example of this qualification. The 991 facilitates both stating the qualifications and reviewing the application.

The *STAR* concept mentioned earlier in this guide is central to the training that the review committees and selectors receive. They are being trained to identify the Situation or Task, the Action, and the Result. Reviewers will look at a description of qualifications and ask themselves: What is the situation or task, what action did the applicant take in response to the situation or task, and what was the result of the action?

Knowing what kind of information the reviewing and selecting managers are anticipating should help you better prepare your application.

## Do's and Don'ts

- DO allow yourself enough time to do a thorough job.
- DON'T wait until the day before the vacancy announcement closes to attempt to complete your application.
- DO remember that the review committee will consider only the relevant information you provide on your application.
- DON'T assume that the members of the review committee know you or your work qualifications.
- CLOSING THOUGHT: *Always remember that you are the key to your success in achieving the goal you wish to reach.*



