Effective KSA Writing

Participant Guide

April 28, 2006

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Welcome

This training session will provide participants with strategies and techniques to effectively complete KSAs. These supplemental statements provide specific examples of paid and non-paid work experience, education, training, awards, and honors. The session will include lecture and an activity.

Topics of discussion will include:

- Identify What KSAs Are
- Understand the Rating & Ranking System
- Identify a Poor and Good KSA
- Understand the KSA Steps to Success
- Identify the Five Approaches to KSAs
- Write Effective KSA Responses

Audience

Effective KSA Writing is for all employees interested in career advancement.

Instructor

The course instructor is Elaine Poole, Training Officer for the Capitol Training Center in Washington D.C.

Timing

The Effective KSA Writing Workshop takes four hours to complete. The program will be broadcast on April 28, 2006 from 12:00 pm until 4:00 pm ET.

How to Interact with the Instructor

If you were physically in the classroom with the instructor, you would raise your hand to let her/him know you had a question or comment. Then you would wait for the instructor to recognize you and ask for your question.

With TELNPS courses there is also a "protocol" to follow to ensure that you can easily ask questions and others can participate as well.

As part of the TEL station equipment at your location, there are several push-to talk microphones. When you have a question, press and hold down the push-to-talk button, maintaining a distance of **12-18 inches** from the microphone, wait a second and then ask you question or make your comment. It would sound something like this:

Excuse me [instructor's first name], this is [your first name] at [your location]. I have a question (or I have a comment)." Then release the push-to-talk button. This is important because until you release the button, you will not be able to hear the instructor. The instructor will acknowledge you and then ask for your question or comment. Stating your name and location not only helps the instructor, but also helps other students who are participating at different locations to get to know their classmates.

Knowledge, Skills and Abilities (KSA) Overview

What are KSAs?

- Ranking and rating factors
- Evaluation factors, criteria
- Job ranking elements
- Supplemental statements
- A written test
- An elimination tool

Why are KSAs IMPORTMANT?

KSAs can be **EXTREMELY IMPORTANT** in the applicant evaluation process since they are scored. Poor responses may prevent you, as an applicant, from being considered among the "best qualified" group. Your score for experience is based solely on your responses to the KSAs, not the information included in your resume, OF-612 (Optional Application for Federal Employment) or SF-17l. There's an easy way to decide when to pay attention to KSAs. In a word, ALWAYS.

The federal resume or application is the information that tells the position selection decision-maker **if you are qualified for the job** and KSAs describe your skills using concrete examples so that the hiring manager can determine if you can perform their job. The application review is a three-step consideration process.

The Human Resources Review Process for determining your qualifications and for rating and ranking your KSAs goes as follows:

Your total application will be sent to the federal agency. This will include your federal-style resume or OF-612 and KSAs for a specific announcement. The announcement might ask for other information as well. You have to read the instructions to determine what they want, i.e., college transcripts, DD-215, your last supervisory evaluation, etc.

- **Step 1**

APPLICATION REVIEW: A Personnel Staffing Specialist will review your package to make sure you have completed the application correctly by including all of the appropriate documentation requested (lots of people don't make it past this point). If the application is correct, they will review your resume to decide if you have the basic qualifications for the position.

- **Step 2**

RESUME REVIEW: The staffing specialist will then review your application to determine if you meet the minimum qualifications for the job. You can find this qualification information on every vacancy announcement. If you are qualified for the position, they will usually decide if you are QUALIFIED or HIGHLY-QUALIFIED. If you are either of these, then the KSAs are reviewed.

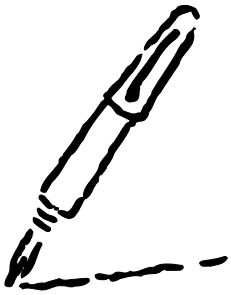
- **Step 3**

KSA RATING AND RANKING: Each KSA will be reviewed by the Human Resources Staff and assigned a numerical score using a crediting plan or "scorecard". The scale is generally based on a point system. Ex: 5 points for barely successful, 15 points for successful and 20 points for highly successful. Each level has a description of benchmarks, which are examples of tasks a candidate would perform at that level. Agencies may emphasize the most important aspects of a job by assigning relative weights to each KSA. Others will designate particular KSAs as being Mandatory (M) or Desirable (D). Obviously the job applicant will want to focus the most effort on responding to the more heavily weighted KSAs or the mandatory ones, but it is important to remember that you need to address every one on the list. If a vacancy announcement makes no distinction among the position's KSA, the applicant should assume that all KSAs are equally important. Factors affecting level of credit your KSA is given include: **complexity** of duties, **circumstances, impact, variety, duration and people contacted.** Panel members take into account experience, education, training and awards as they relate to the factors. Once the total score (responses to KSAs, performance appraisal and training) is determined, you will be ranked among other applicants. If your KSAs are scored in the range of the highest scores, you will have your name included on the Best Qualified List. This group of Best Qualified candidates will go forward to the Selecting Official or hiring manager for consideration, who ultimately makes the selection for the vacancy.

A key point to remember about all KSAs is that they must be job-related. An agency cannot ask for anything in a KSA that is not in the job's position description.

Understanding the personnel review process and the importance of good KSAs is critical to your success in being hired by the Federal government.

Capture your notes here



Definition of Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

Knowledge. An organized body of information, usually of a factual or procedural nature

Skills. The proficient manual, verbal, or mental manipulation of data, people, or things

Abilities. The power to perform an activity at the present time

KSAs (Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities and Other Characteristics)

Knowledge – An organized body of information, usually of a factual or procedural nature, which if applied, makes adequate performance on the job possible.

Examples include knowledge of:

- Administrative practices
- Budget and accounting principals
- Federal Regulations and Directives
- Operational systems and procedures
- Environmental Compliance Law

Skill – The manipulation of data, things, or people through manual, mental or verbal means. Skills are measurable through testing, can be observed, and quantifiable. Often referred to expertness that comes from training, practice, etc.

Examples include skill in:

- Electronic or computer repair

- Carpentry, plumbing and/or HVAC repair
- Second language proficiency
- Weapon usage
- Motor vehicle operation

Ability – The capacity to perform a physical or mental activity at the present time. Typically abilities are apparent through functions completed on the job. Abilities and skills are often interchanged. The main difference is that ability is the capacity to perform where a skill is the actual manipulation of data, things or people. You may have the ability but unless observed through actions that ability may not transfer to a skill set.

Examples include the ability to:

- Organize and plan work (observed at work)
- Analyze situations, programs and problems
- Coach and mentor others
- Communicate orally and in writing

Other Characteristics – Mental or physical attributes or characteristics that don't fall under the other areas:

Examples are:

Multiple work assignments – capable of successfully handling various tasks

Proactive – takes initiate to get things done without prompting

Copes well in stressful environments – handles complex tasks

Reliability – assigned work is completed ahead of schedule and the quality of work is exceptional

This factor is required for jobs that to a greater degree encounter these characteristics such as jobs in **air traffic control, careers in law enforcement, work at nuclear power plants, firefighters, etc.**

KSAs Can Include:

- Paid and unpaid experiences
- Education:
  - degrees, courses and research projects
- Awards and recognitions
- Quotes from letters written by people who think you are great

What Stays and What Goes?

How should you decide which examples of tasks to keep in comparison to those that can be discarded? Use the following type of tasks to represent your experience, when possible:

LEADERSHIP	Use tasks that demonstrate your leadership, organization, or management skills. For example, applicants should discuss their role on committees/taskforces; discuss how they planned activities and events; or discuss their responsibilities in managing groups of individuals in various settings (i.e., office, classroom, organization/club, correctional environment)
FUNCTIONING IN A STRESSFUL ENVIRONNENT	Use tasks that demonstrate your ability to effectively deal with stress related events/activities. For example, applicants could discuss their responsibility for transportation security issues or discuss how they dealt with critical deadlines.
COMPLEXITY AND/OR CREATIVITY	Use tasks that demonstrate complexity or creativity. For example, applicants could describe how they designed programs for personal computers, prepared papers on technical subjects, or used formulas to derive solutions.
PERTINENCE TO THE POSITION	Frequently, applicants apply for positions outside their own discipline. However, applicants who have experience directly related to the position and include this in their responses will usually be awarded the higher points.

MAJOR IMPACT OR SIGNIFICANT OUTCOME	Use tasks where your actions had an impact on others or the work environment. For example, applicants could discuss procedures they developed for their office that streamlined operations; discuss how they negotiated a contract that resulted in a favorable outcome; or describe how their input on a project made a significant impact on the organization.

KSAs: Steps to Success

Step 1: Gather information about yourself.

- Employment background (an up-to-date federal application).
- Accomplishments (concrete evidence that proves your knowledge, skills, and abilities).
  - Did you resolve a long-standing problem?
  - Did you discover a new and better approach for getting things done?
  - What was solved, created, changed for the better or improved because you were there?
  - Did you take on any extra responsibilities above and beyond your job description?
  - What have your supervisors' commended/cited/awarded you for?
- All of the training and education you have received.
- All training and education you have provided to others.
- Special assignments, details, team responsibilities, acting positions.
- Publications, products, or research to which you contributed, whether as part of a team or independently.
- Presentations and briefings you have made, whether in-house to key people, to other agencies, or at conferences.
- Honors/awards (within the past three years).
- Performance appraisals (they serve as "memory joggers" for your accomplishments).

Step 2: **Learn as much about the position as possible.**

Step 3: **Compare the KSAs with the vacancy announcement and the position description. Classify each "duty and responsibility" according to which KSA it reflects.**

Step 4: **Match your skills to the KSA requirements. List all related experience, accomplishments, education, training, and honors/awards that directly relate to each KSA.**

Step 5: **Write your narratives, revisit them, polish them.**

KSA Tips

1. Present your KSAs in specific or measurable terms.
2. Be specific with your role in the organization.
3. Show production and responsibility increases.
4. Use action words to describe your experiences.
5. Use your position description as a guide only.
6. Use wording from the duties section of the vacancy announcement.
7. Limit KSAs to 1 or 1 ½ pages…per KSA.
8. Include all work experience.
9. Spell out all terms before using any acronyms.
10. Use narrative paragraphs and bullets

Activity and Take a Break

Activity

Part One:

Looking at KSA Tip #6 – "Use wording from the duties section of the vacancy announcement"

Read the Duties for the HR Assistant below and highlight words that should be in a KSA for "Ability to Communicate both in Writing and Orally."

Part Two:

From "Samples of Good and Poor KSA Responses" below, work on an example using the following list:

- ✓ Alaska and Pacific West Regions take number one
- ✓ Intermountain Region number two
- ✓ Midwest and Southeast Regions number three
- ✓ Everybody else take number four

Instructions: Using the list of KSA Tips on page 9, read through your statements and list those items that make it a good or poor KSA. Be ready to share your findings.

Activity: Duties Section

POSITION: HR Assistant (HR Development),

WHAT DUTIES WILL I BE PERFORMING IN THE POSITION?

Uses office automated systems and software to manage, administer and maintain training related data. Prepares memoranda, letters, spreadsheets, and other reports and process descriptions/job aids in draft and/or final form. Prepares all final correspondence and reports in accordance with established guidelines, with responsibility for the proper grammar, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and format. Adapts guidelines as needed to fit specific situations, referring situations not covered by guidelines or instructions to the supervisor. Collects and complies information for the preparation of training related and general correspondence, reports, and other required documents. Maintains a library of organization reports and documents including all monthly reports, annual reports, and on-time deliverables. Receives all visitors and either addresses their questions, schedules the facility, or directs them to the appropriate staff member. Answers the telephone and either responds to their inquiries, or if necessary, refers callers to the appropriate office members. Sorts and distributes daily

incoming correspondence (hard copy, email, fax, and other materials). Sends mail by various means (e.g., priority, UPS, FedEx) according to required deadlines and requestor. Maintains manual and electronic files used in the office and, as assigned, assists in their establishment and disposal. Operates standard office equipment. Attends meetings and takes minutes; copies and distributes minutes to attendees. Schedules meetings and appointments and maintains calendars for office members.

Samples of Good and Poor KSA Responses

SUPPLEMENTAL STATEMENT

Position/Series/Grade: MANAGEMENT ANALYST, GS-343-1 I Announcement: 48-X2-W3N

Factor # 1 Ability to gather, organize and analyze data

Example of a poor response:	Example of a good response:
During the past three years in my current position, I have had many opportunities to apply my ability to assemble data, organize it into a coherent form, and then analyze it. I have also taken advantage of the opportunity to acquire additional skills in this area through completion of specialized courses.	My present position requires that I periodically collect reports from eight regional offices on enforcement actions taken during the previous monitoring period. The data are presented in varying forms, and it is my responsibility to organize and compile the information into a uniform format. When data appear to show inconsistencies or aberrations, I check with the submitting office to verify all information. Using Lotus 1-2-3, I then review the information to identify trends in….. In January 1996, I completed the course, “Writing Analytical Reports," offered through the National Independent Study Center. This was a six-month course involving 24 hours of training and covering such areas as: planning an analytical report, collecting and analyzing data, identifying possible solutions to problems addressed in the report, and organizing, writing and editing the report.

SUPPLEMENTAL STATEMENT

Position/Series/Grade: MANAGEMENT ANALYST. GS-343-11 Announcement: 48-X2-W3N

Factor # 2 Ability to organize and administer projects

Example of a poor response:	Example of a good response:
To date, I have had no opportunity to apply my skills to organizing and administering large projects	Although my job duties do not involve administration of major projects, I have been a participant in a number of bureau-wide initiatives. In these instances, I have approached my role in the same manner that I would a larger project. That is, I have developed schedules and budgets, identified milestones, initiated progress reviews, and evaluated results. A recent example of this has been…

SUPPLEMENTAL STATEMENT

Position/Series/Grade: MANAGEMENT ANALYST. GS-343-11 Announcement: 48- X2- wm

Factor # 3 Knowledge of data processing and ability to utilize "'user friendly" computer software.

Example of a poor response:	Example of a good response:
In my current job, I use various software packages in a PC environment to track personnel trends.	In my present position, I designed and implemented a complete personnel database utilizing R:BASE software. This required interviewing pertinent department heads and targeted users to obtain information on desired elements of the proposed system. I later coordinated the effort to convert current records to this automated database. Utilizing the capabilities of the R:BASE system, I performed analyses on the personnel data and designed and produced tables and charts based on the results. As part of another project, I developed a tracking system to monitor on-going project resources utilizing LOTUS spreadsheet software

SUPPLEMENTAL STATEMENT

Position/Series/Grade: MANAGEMENT ANALYST. GS-343-11 Announcement: 48- X2- wm

Factor # 4 Skill in written communication

Example of a poor response:	Example of a good response:
My communication skills are excellent. I am often asked to help out in this regard and have been commended for my work.	In the past 10 months, I have taken over a number of writing assignments previously held by my supervisor. These include: (I) Drafting monthly reports on leasing activities under the purview of our office. These are routinely approved by my supervisor without change and are circulated to 10 field offices and regional directors. (2) I have assumed the responsibility of reporter for the quarterly meeting of the bureau's research directors. Reports of these meetings are reviewed by the Director's Office prior to distribution to all participants. In January 1996, I completed the course, "Writing Analytical Reports," offered through the National Independent Study Center. This was a six-month course involving 24 hours of training and covering such areas as: planning an analytical report, collecting and analyzing data, identifying possible solutions to problems addressed in the report, and organizing, writing and editing the report. This course also addresses the ability required in Factor 1

Components of a KSA

Five Approaches to KSA Statements

Here are some ways to approach KSA statements:

1. Describe a specific situation.
2. Give an overview of your experience.
3. Give an example of relevant education or training.
4. Describe an award given for specific accomplishments.
5. Describe an experience in your previous jobs in the history format.

Don't feel tied to one approach. Feel free to combine different types in a single statement. Each KSA statement, for example, can be made up of paragraphs giving an overview, describing a situation (one or two of these), discussing relevant education, and describing an award or recognition. Next, you'll find examples of the five types of KSA statements.

Situation KSA

This specific example demonstrates your knowledge, skill, or ability in a certain area. This is an example of a nonpaid work experience KSA statement for a budget analyst, GS-9.

Ability to perform effectively and maintain composure in tension-filled situations:

As a member and Chairman of the Middletown, Virginia, Town Planning Commission, I directed sometimes tension-filled Rezoning Meetings that affected the commercial activity of the town, but would also affect the residential character of the town. I was successful in mediating controversia1 rezoning issues concerning the Main Street. I also chaired many sensitive hearing, acting as sounding board for long-time residents. The rezoning activities involved local media coverage and required skills in problem-solving and public relations.

Overview KSA

This introductory, summary KSA statement is for a secretary, GS-9

> **Skill in expressing ideas orally in a form that is clear, logical, and grammatically correct:**
>
> As a Secretary to 3 senior government executives, I have developed a clear, logical, and grammatically correct writing style that is trusted by my

supervisors. I am skilled in communicating clearly both orally and in writing. My supervisors depend on me to communicate priorities and significant information to department heads, congressional offices, and the public. I am sensitive to public affairs issues, politically accurate responses, and tense situations. I speak and write with excellent grammar.

The next KSA was written by a security specialist, GS-12.

Knowledge of the theories, principles, practices, and techniques of Automated Information Systems (AID) security for U.S. government computer systems and installation:

As a result of experience in both Army and Navy operations, in overseas as well as with U.S.-wide computer systems, I have maintained extensive knowledge of U.S. government computer systems. In addition, due to widely varied experience, I have cultivated a network of top computer experts in the U.S. and abroad who regularly inform one another about latest updates and developments in sophisticated systems.

Education/Training KSA

The following is a statement of related education and training that supports the KSA. The employee is chief of medical technical equipment, GS~12.

A general knowledge of the mission, organization and activities of a health care facility:

Education and Specialized Training:
Currently enrolled (with 42 hours earned) in dual degree Bachelor's program at Howard University, Washington, DC, in Business Management and Computer Sciences.

Earned well over 1,500 hours training with advanced medical technology and equipment {see complete listing attached to federal resume).

In earlier career, completed over 400 hours as firefighter in fire safety, prevention and emergency medical care.

Award/Recognition KSA

An award or recognition indicates the quality at which duties have been performed that demonstrate a KSA. The record of the award must contain sufficient information about relevant behaviors or activities to show that the KSA was demonstrated at some level. The following KSA was written by an environmental specialist, GS-13.

Knowledge of federal hazardous materials transportation regulations:
At the conclusion of a recent Safety Review by the Office of Motor Carriers, I was commended for knowledge of regulations and programs developed for the company. In addition on my most recent performance evaluation, I was cited for having "excelled at meeting new challenges and improving the performance of the Fleet Safety Programs."

The next example was for a foreign affairs officer, GS-13.

Ability to plan and direct program activities:

> Commended on most recent Performance Review for being "only division officer who planned and managed two town meetings, one month apart, in St. Louis and San Francisco. The results were outstanding. The St. Louis event drew over 350 citizens (despite the floods) and great media coverage. The San Francisco meeting, with a record-breaking attendance of 1,300, was the first such meeting in over 13 years. Both the Secretary and the spokesperson commented publicly on their tremendous success."

Historic KSA

The following summary of past experience supports the KSA for a vocational rehabilitation specialist, GS-12.

> **Ability to promote the rehabilitation program and to negotiate contracts and agreements with prospective employers and training facilities:**
>
> My work in vocational rehabilitation for the department has spanned over 20 years, and, through regular positions and special assignments, I have gained a broad understanding of the department's mission, goals and programs. As a result, for the past three years I have been selected to speak on panel presentations regarding "Effective Client Strategies" at the annual National Rehabilitation Hospital Conference.

Here is another historic KSA example, this one for an inspector general, GS-12.

> **Skill in the analysis of complex multi-million dollar financial transactions:**
>
> For the past ten years, I have managed cases that involve individuals charged with economic crimes as well as local and national businesses charged with such offenses as money laundering and procurement fraud. For example, I serve on task force investigations in complex…..

Important Elements of the KSA Statement

CONTEXT: Write about individuals and groups with whom you've worked.

CHALLENGE AND ACTION: Describe a specific problem or goal and the actions you took to resolve the challenge.

RESULT: Provide examples of results. If you can include numbers to quantify the result, please do that.

_____

_____

_____

Recommended KSA Format

RECOMMENDED KSA FORMAT

Here is the federally recommended setup for each KSA. Follow this format when you write your own KSAs. The fonts and paper you use should match your application package.

Department of Health and Human Services

Program Support Center

Division of Supply Management, Quality Assurance Branch

Perry Point, MD

Announcement Number: 98P-04

Title of Position: Project Coordinator, GS-301-12

Candidate: Thomas Richard Smith, SS: 123-45-6789

KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND ABILITIES

Knowledge of theory and principles of management, organization and administrative procedures of a Medical Supply Center.

As the Center Project Coordinator from 1985 until present, I have demonstrated my expert knowledge of theory and principles of management, organization, and administrative procedures of the Supply Service Center. I m currently coordinating seven major critical NIH drug studies and serve as the facilitator for the Veterans Administration's central mail order pharmacy program (CMOP). This is a large service contract disseminating products to ten distribution centers.

Helpful Tools

KSA: Sample Questions and Answers

See Appendix C

Buzzwords

Buzzwords will result in a more positive outlook on your application. The verbs that you select to describe your knowledge, skills, and abilities can demonstrate your level of expertise.

ADMINSTRA TION	COMMUNICATION	MANAGEMENT	RESEARCH/ DEVELOPMENT
administer	contact	adjudicate	analyze
engage	critique	analyze	compile
furnish	declare	anticipate	define
insure	display	approve	determine
justify	inform	change	evaluate
process	interpret	direct	identity
procure	issue	establish	investigate
purchase	speak	evaluate	prepare
receive	testify	execute	propose
reclaim	write	manage	recommend
reject	DECISION	meet	research
requisition	MAKING	organize	review
secure	approve	plan	submit
ship	authorize	PERSONNEL	SUPERVISION
supply	consider	appraise	adhere
AUDITING	decide	discharge	assign
analyze	render	employ	counsel
assemble	require	handle	define
assist	solve	interview	delegate
change	terminate	promote	demonstrate
compare	test	recruit	develop
conclude	EXTERNAL ACTIVITY	screen	encourage
evaluate	cooperate	seek	exercise
guide	coordinate	select	foster
recommend	negotiate	train	maintain
report	publicize	transfer	meet
review	represent		

CHANGE	strengthen	PLANNING/	participate
activate	HELPING	CONTROL	report
compare	arrange	acquire	request'
create	assist	allocate	supervise
design	contribute	control	
establish	counsel	extend	
improve	give	forecast	
make	guide	formulate	
modify	initiate	measure	
stimulate	serve	monitor	
upgrade	solve	plan	
		progress	
		schedule	

Six Steps to Strong Accomplishment Statements:

The following steps will help you to develop your action statements that give evidence of your accomplishments. Select skills necessary for the position you are applying.

Step 1 - State the problem, need or challenge

Provide secretarial support; write letters, memos, and reports, as needed.

Step 2 - Identify a skill

Write letters and memoranda

Step 3 - Cite an example of how you used this skill

For three years wrote letters and memoranda for the office director's signature.

Step 4 - Describe the circumstances – Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How.

Daily, independently researched and drafted letters in response to congressional inquiries, requests for information from companies and the public, and red borders for the seventh floor principals.

Step 5 - Reinforce with measurable data-numbers, dollars, percentages, volume per month, year, etc.

Wrote 20- 25 responses to congressional inquiries per week during a 6-month period; wrote 25-30 responses to public inquires per month; wrote 3-6 red borders per week during crises, ensuring that all were grammatically correct and in compliance with correspondence regulations.

Step 6 - Give results. What was accomplished because of your use of this skill? Productivity, morale, customer service, problem solving, money saved, etc.

Handled the correspondence previously done by two secretaries, and reduced turn around time significantly. Received cash award for outstanding performance.

Appendix A

The Importance of KSA's in the Federal Application Process

KSAs...Knowledge, Skills and Abilities...a list of special qualifications and personal attributes that you need to have for a particular job. These are the unique requirements that the hiring agency wants to find in the person selected to fill a particular job. A primary purpose of KSAs is to measure those qualities that will set one candidate apart from the others. In federal personnel guidance, KSAs are defined as the factors that identify the better candidates from a group of persons basically qualified for a position. How well an applicant can show that he or she matches the position's defined KSAs determines whether that person will be seriously considered for the job.

Knowledge statements refer to an organized body of information usually of a factual or procedural nature which, if applied, makes adequate performance on the job possible. A body of information applied directly to the performance of a function.

Skill statements refer to the proficient manual, verbal or mental manipulation of data or things. Skills can be readily measured by a performance test where quantity and quality of performance are tested, usually within an established time limit. Examples of proficient manipulation of things are skill in typing or skill in operating a vehicle. Examples of proficient manipulation of data are skill in computation using decimals; skill in editing for transposed numbers, etc.

Ability statements refer to the power to perform an observable activity at the present time. This means that abilities have been evidenced through activities or behaviors that are similar to those required on the job, e.g., ability to plan and organize work. Abilities are different from aptitudes. Aptitudes are only the potential for performing the activity.

KSAs.....Why You Can't Ignore Them.....

Some job applicants, especially those looking for their first federal position, are not sure whether the KSA requirements apply to them or where a response is optional. There's an easy way to decide when to pay attention to KSAs. In a word, ALWAYS.

Agencies may emphasize the most important aspects of a job by assigning relative weights to each KSA. Others will designate particular KSAs as being Mandatory (M) or Desirable (D). Obviously the job applicant will want to focus the most effort on responding to the more heavily weighted KSAs or the

mandatory ones, but it is important to remember that you need to address every one on the list. If a vacancy announcement makes no distinction among the position's KSA, the applicant should assume that all KSAs are equally important.

A key point to remember about all KSAs is that they must be job-related. An agency cannot ask for anything in a KSA that is not in the job's position description.

The Writing Part.....

Do not assume that reviewers will pull the information out of your application package and pick up the salient points. They will not. Even if there were time for such insight, reviewers/ evaluators are not allowed to infer anything.

Hints to follow when developing your KSAs:

- Read the vacancy announcement carefully
- Gather the information needed to begin writing
- Be specific
- Be precise
- Get to the point
- Do not ramble
- Use lots of examples
- State specifically what you have done
- Do not use acronyms
- Present yourself in "clear and plain" language
- Do not borrow language from the position description

Appendix B

How to Write Responses to (KSAs)

If you apply for a position announced in the KSA format you should respond to the KSAs. You have to describe your experience and how it relates to each of the KSAs. How do you do this? Where do you start? What do you need to think about?

To help you do this, we have divided the process of writing KSA responses into 4 steps.

Step 1 Read the KSAs very closely.

You need to make sure you understand what the KSAs are and what they mean. This step is critical. If you do not understand each KSA, you will not be able to write good responses. A KSA by itself tends to be general in nature. The vacancy announcement usually contains a brief summary description of the duties of the position. Read this summary description very carefully.

Step 2 Review very thoroughly all the experiences you have had and look for things that relate to the individual KSAs.

This step is really a "brainstorming" session. You need to review your experiences and find things that relate to the KSAs.

Let us say the KSA that you are writing about is the ability to communicate orally. You need to think about all of the times when you use oral communication skills.

Examples: While you were a File Clerk you instructed other clerks on new filing procedures; as a Management Analyst you had to present recommendations on workflow procedures to members of top staff.

Also, consider relevant education, training and self-development activities, and any awards received.

Examples: A training program in effective briefing techniques that you completed or an award you received that relates to your ability to communicate orally.

Do not forget experiences you have had in non-work related areas (volunteer activities) or in school related activities.

Examples: While you were a Cub Scout Leader you acted as the Chairperson for a fund raising activity; while a student you were a student council representative.

These experiences are just as valid as work-related examples as long as they are relevant to the KSA about which you are writing.

Try reviewing your experience in order from the earliest experience to the most recent experience so as not to miss any job or experience that is relevant to the KSA. You should review your total experience both paid and volunteer, and training for each KSA and look for situations that apply to the particular KSA. This is because experience that you have in one job or one area may apply to more than one KSA.

Example: The KSA Ability to meet and deal with members of the general public and the KSA Ability to coordinate the activities of a subordinate staff- both involve skill in oral communications.

Do not worry about being repetitious in writing KSA responses. Each KSA is rated separately by the subject matter expert (SME)/promotion panel and as long as the information you give is relevant, it does not matter if you have used it already in another KSA.

To help you with this step we have attached a chart showing one method you can use to organize your thinking when you begin to review your experience.

Step 3 Analyze the experiences you have identified

This is where you scrutinize the experiences you identified in step 2 and zero in on the things that really matter in what you do or have done. It is where you identify how you use the knowledge, skill, or ability in your job or experiences. This kind of information is at the core of the KSA process. (This process is sometimes called "Task Analysis.") You need to ask specific questions about the experience you have identified. The answers that you come up with will be used to complete the actual writing of the KSA (Step 4). Examples of the kinds of questions you need to ask about your experiences follow:

What kind of knowledge or skills do I use in my job?

What are the steps, procedures, practices, rules, policies, theories, principles or concepts that I use in my job?

How do I apply the knowledge, principles or concepts that I use in my job?

How do I apply the knowledge that I have to accomplish my work?

What kind of supervision do I receive?

How is my work assigned?

What is my responsibility to accomplish work?

How independent are my actions?

How is my work reviewed?

What guidelines do I use to accomplish my work?

Are the instructions that I use to perform my work in written or oral form or both?

Do I use procedural manuals?

What other written procedures do I use?

What kind of oral instructions do I use to perform my work?

How much judgment do I have to use to apply the guidelines for my job?

Are the guidelines I use very easily applied or do they require interpretation?

How difficult are they to interpret?

How complex is my job?

What is the nature of the work that I do?

For example: Tasks are clear-cut and directly related to each other; or the work involves different and unrelated processes and methods; or the work consists of broad functions and processes of an administrative or professional nature?

How difficult is it to identify what needs to be done?

For example: Little or no choice in deciding what needs to be done; or it depends on an analysis of the situation as there are many alternatives; or extensive analysis is required to even define the nature of the problem.

How difficult or original is the work I do?

How does my work affect other processes or individuals?

Who do I have contact with on a daily basis?

Why do I have contact with these individuals?

What is my role in these discussions or meetings?

For example: To provide information; to receive information; to influence or advise someone; to convince someone of something.

If you have done a thorough job on steps 1, 2 and 3 in this process, you now have a good understanding of the KSAs and lots of facts about your experiences. You also have a better understanding of these experiences. You are now ready for the last step.

Step 4 Show how the facts you have gathered about your experience relate to the individual KSAs.

You need to tell about the experiences you have had in a way that clearly shows how they are related to the knowledge, skill, or ability. In other words, you need to show a link between your own experience and the KSA. Do not assume that the link is obvious to someone else even though it may be obvious to you. The SME/promotion panel member(s) who(m) rate your application can only credit what you tell them in your KSA response. They will not be able to give you proper credit for your experiences unless you give them specific examples showing how and why your experience is related to a particular KSA.

In telling this to the SME/promotion panel, remember a few important facts:

*It is the content of your responses that is rated and not the writing style that you use. It is acceptable to use brief sentences or phrases as long as the SME/promotion panel knows what you mean.

*Very long responses do not guarantee a high rating. Give the SME/promotion panel direct and to -the-point responses.

*Do not use abbreviations, acronyms, or jargon. Chances are the SME/promotion panel will not know what you are talking about if you write this way. They will be able to give proper credit for your experience if they do not understand what you have done.

Appendix C

Examples

SECRETARY, GS-5

KSA Title : Ability to write non-technical correspondence.

Sample Responses

KSA Response #1:

I type letters every day. Sometimes I have to type them from a draft that the manager gives me. I also use form letters or the manager tells me that he wants me to write. I write memos requesting supplies or advising employees of training classes. I have been a secretary in my unit for 3 years and always finish my work quickly and correctly.

KSA Response #2:

I am the secretary in my unit. I handle the writing of responses for most non-technical correspondence received in the unit and for all administrative matters within the unit. I respond using various form letters that we have. Sometimes I have to draft a letter from start to finish depending on what the inquiry is about. For example, an employee may need a statement regarding leave balances, which I would write or I might have to write a memo to the warehouse regarding supply shortages. When the manager writes memos he will give them to me in draft form and I will rewrite them to ensure proper grammar and to put them into the right format.

Which response is better?

The writer of the first response seems to be confusing typing with writing. It is not until the third sentence that we get some specific information regarding a writing activity. And then, in the last sentence, the writer gives us some new information (how long the writer has been a secretary and how well the writer does the work of the position) that has nothing to do with the KSA as defined for the job. Remember that the SME/promotion panel rates your responses as they relate to the Crediting Plan. If what you have written is not relevant to the KSA, it will not relate to the Crediting Plan either and you will not receive any credit for it.

The second response gives more relevant and useful information. The writer has provided specific information related to the KSA and has given examples to show the kind of writing that is being done. This response has given the

SME/promotion panel enough information to properly credit the writer's experience.

Management Analyst, GS-12

KSA Title: Ability to communicate in writing.

Sample Responses

KSA Response #1:

One of the most important things I do in my position is prepare reports and studies of the various components in our organization. They always have to be written in a clear and concise manner and often involve very complex issues like organizational structures, work methods and procedures, manpower utilization, delegations of authority and other issues. I usually have to pull together a lot of different information and from difference sources. I usually have to work within very short time frames to produce a really needed study or report. Below are some examples of the material I have written.

Staffing Reports/Workload Reports -in particular I am involved in the WMS/FTE weekly reports -this includes components in Fiscal Control and also DTB PLUS studies. These studies are done on an "as needed" basis and involve many operational and technical issues. They only are required when management sees a need for them and specifically requests an analysis. We set up a team and review the targeted work. These reports require a lot of data gathering activity. Director's reports-These also involve a lot of data analysis from the HAL reports and are sent to the Director's Staff Advisor.

KSA Response #2:

I write technical and administrative memos and study reports, which identify actual and potential problem areas in interrelated work processes, the underlying source of operating difficulties, trends, significant management accomplishments, merit/deficiency situations and areas of imbalance. These papers always include recommendations for improvement in the studied areas. Example of the kinds of studies or reports I produce are as follows:

I write memos, which represent the Regional Office (RO) position on proposed procedures or work processes. This involves evaluating the affect of alternative actions on the work processes under consideration and how best to use manpower and resources and the identification of other alternatives worthy of consideration. This almost always involves the consolidation of information and comments from multiple components into one memo representing the Regional Office position on a given issue. An example of this type of product is the formulation of office comments on the design of the new national fishery control system user's comments, a committee reviewed the release to evaluate if all

pertinent work processes were included and to identify possibly more efficient design alternatives. In most cases I consolidated the comments of the committee and formulated the final office comment memo.

I have been involved in periodic reports on national TS/incubation workloads since 1978. These reports were researched and written by a team of analysis. The final product was usually consolidated from other area reports and consolidated report issued to the Secretary.

I also wrote position papers detailing the Regional Office position on administrative, workload processing, or work measurement issues. An example of this type of product is a memo prepared for Central Office in July 1989 stating the RO's position on the issue of productivity measurement in the field stations. This memo presents our views on the Secretary's Productivity Analysis Project and pointed out what was considered flaws in their basis assumptions. It then listed the major problems with areas, which should be addressed in order to provide valid productivity measures for all the field stations. The RO's concerns and ideas concerning the elements necessary for an acceptable productivity measure were presented.

In addition, I have also completed 6 semester hours of writing courses in college. I am presently the corresponding Secretary for Tri Sigma National Sorority.

Which response is better?

The writer of the first response has "borrowed" some of the language from the duties described in the vacancy announcement in order to tell the SME/promotion panel what he/she does in the job. Unfortunately, this does not give the panel any more specific information about his/her experience than they would get by reading the announcement. The examples given by the writer sound like they could be relevant to the KSA, but the writer does not provide any specific information to explain how these activities relate to the KSA. The writer also uses a lot of acronyms. These are sure to confuse a SME/promotion panel and should not be used without explanation. Finally, the writer does not tell us what his/her specific role is in any of these activities (i.e., what is the meaning of "I am involved in...", what is the writer's role when he says "We set up a team...."?).

The second response gives more relevant and specific information. The writer gave a general introductory statement, which acts as a background to the examples that follow. The first and last examples are very specific and give enough information so the SME/promotion panel will understand what the writer does and how it relates to the crediting plan. The second example of this response falls short of the other two examples. The writer uses some jargon (TS incubation workload) which may mean little or nothing to the SME/promotion panel. It is also not clear what the writer's involvement was in the activity described in the second example (i.e., what is the meaning of "I have been

involved in periodic reports" -should the SME/promotion panel assume that this means involvement as a writer or just as a team member?). Regardless of this problem, the second response is the better of the two responses.

In each of the hypothetical responses you have just read, the second response, although the better of the two, is not the best response possible. With practice you could write an even better KSA response.

Ability to Analyze Problems and Develop Solutions.

My formal education and career are in two problem-solving disciplines: engineering and operations research. I have developed solutions to extremely complex and complicated problems by developing case studies and using analytical tools. Solved urgent and high-visibility problems that required the simultaneous application of communication, negotiation, and people skills. Use quantitative problem-solving methods, such as decision trees, statistical studies, case studies, and mathematical methods, when appropriate. Frequently these are more useful in obtaining the necessary support than in initially deciding what to do,

I was managing partner of two real estate partnerships that owned office condominiums. We had purchased the condominiums at fire-sale prices in early 1990s, primarily because the common area needed a lot of work. The object was to keep the condominiums rented, while increasing the value by fixing the common area defects. As managing partner, I had three challenges:

- Work with the condominium association to get the improvements made within the original budget
- Maintain positive cash flow from rental income
- Sell the properties at market or near-market, not fire-sale, prices

By applying negotiation and relationship skills, I was able to

- Build cooperative relationships with other owners and work with the construction oversight committee to get the modifications completed with no new assessments
- Train small-business renters to pay their rent every month and not consider the security deposit as a form of prepaid rent
- Agree with a few owners to turn down offers at fire-sale prices for long enough that the real estate agents would stop encouraging potential buyers to present low offers.
- Sell the condominiums at over 40% higher than the purchase price

People consider me to be an excellent problem solver, and frequently ask for my assistance or advice. I approach problems with a logical methodology to define the problem, identify any root causes, identify constraints, develop a solution that removes the root cause whenever possible, obtain resources, and implement the solution. To successfully accomplish these tasks, I work well both within the organization and with stakeholders to create solutions that fit into the culture.

Ability to manage a program.

Some of my greatest successes over the past 25 years with the National Park Service's cultural resource and museum programs are a direct result of my extensive experience in program management,

While at the Southeast Regional Office:

- Developed and implemented the region's curatorial program. This program included historical and scientific research for cultural and natural resources, and the planning, development, budgeting, management, and supervision of all curatorial activities in the 64 National Parks that comprise the Southeast Region. In addition, I had curatorial oversight responsibility for curatorial operations at the Southeast Archeological Center and the 21 university repositories that hold archeological collections from the region's parks.

- Developed a Regional Computer Program for use in the cataloging and accountability requirements for museum property. This program was adopted by the NPS National Catalog as the servicewide Automated National Catalog System (ANCS) computer program. Modified the program for use as the Southeast Archeological Center's program for inventorying, categorizing, and monitoring its archeological site inventories and cataloging artifacts.

- Created and implemented a Curatorial Assessment and Evaluation Program for the region. This entailed, evaluating curatorial operations in the parks, the Southeast Archeological Center, and repositories for compliance with the NPS and professional curatorial standards, Developed both short – and long-range plans to be used to meet these standards. Provided comprehensive recommendations to the Regional Directorate, Park, and Center management concerning the management, preservation, maintenance, exhibition, use, security, and storage of museum collections in their care.

At Harpers Ferry Center:

- Effectively managed the NPS Clearinghouse by evaluating park museum collections, determining artifacts in excess of park needs, preparing lists for servicewide distribution, coordinating placement of selected artifacts, and disposing of unwanted artifacts utilizing appropriate procedures.

- Maintained a collection of over 3,000 artifacts at the Center for possible placement in parks.

• Managed the servicewide program of purchasing and distributing curatorial supplies and equipment to 337 national parks. This program entailed consulting with curatorial supply and equipment companies to develop supplies and equipment needed to properly manage and store the diverse museum collections held by the National Park Service. This centralized curatorial supply program allowed for volume buying and contract negotiations, resulting in savings of over $50K/year.

• Developed and conducted servicewide "Curatorial Methods" training courses. Consistently improve the course content to address current needs and management thrusts; thereby, meeting the strategic goals and mission of the agency.

SUPPLEMENTAL EXPERIENCE STATEMENT

Announcement Number: 03994281

Maintenance Worker Helper

1. Ability to do the work of the position without more than normal supervision.

Upon receipt of instructions, I am able to carry out the assignments with little or no supervision. Rarely do assignments require redoing. I have always been able to communicate with supervisors, and co-workers. In receiving work assignments, I complete the tasks, and do not have problems with doing several things at one time. Received formal and on-the-job training to perform my assignments. While working with my uncles, on the farm, I would look at drawings from magazines, and assist with the landscaping of flower beds. Also, as a Laborer with the grounds crew, I assisted Gardener with the layout of planting various beds (i.e., tulips, mums, etc.) While employed with the National Park Service as a Maintenance Worker Helper - (Lincoln Theatre NHS), I served as acting supervisor for the night crew, in my supervisor's absent. In this capacity, I was solely responsible for the safe operations of the facility. Conducted preventive maintenance surveys (i.e., checking lighting systems, heating/air conditioning systems, plumbing fixtures, pipes, etc.,) to ensure that everything was operational properly. Presently, I receive oral directions from the supervisor, and successfully complete the assigned task without incident. These duties were performed on a daily basis (approximately 6 to 8 hours per day). As indicated on my resume, I've consistently receive awards for performing outstanding work.

2. Ability to interpret instructions, specifications, etc., (includes blueprint reading.

07/07/91 - 09/08/96 (National Park Service) – Received formal training in blueprint reading. Using layouts of bedding area, completed planting/transplanting flower beds and small shrubbery. Used appropriate material to fertile seedbeds. Pulled weeds and grass from beds. Graded area and dug water trenches around flower beds. Marked areas for planting various seeds. Removed and replaced old turf/sod in areas were heavy traffic occurred. To avoid grass/shrub drying/burning, watered during appropriate time of the day. Trimmed and shape lawns and small trees, removing dead limbs/leaves. Aerated flower beds on an as need basis. I am aware that before proceeding to plant any type of ground coverage, one must perform a soil test to determine the texture and drainage issues. The planting procedure involves various steps (i.e., season; how to handle plant material; preparation of planting hole; fertilizing techniques; watering; mulching; pruning; and monitoring the process, to ensure successful growth). In managing pest both on and off the job, I used herbicides/pesticides/insecticides such as Roundup, Weed-be-Gone, etc. in a safe manner. Attended horticulture seminars (Identifying Spring Flowers, and Principles of Horticulture). Learned different gardening techniques. Additionally, when assembling furniture (i.e., computer workstation, dressers, etc.), I've used appropriate specifications, without any problems. Presently, I dismantle/assemble displays and exhibits; in this capacity it is vital that instructions are interpreted accurately to accomplish the desired affect for the general public. Without the benefit of overtime, work was performed in a 6 to 8 hour a day timeframe. These duties are performed in a highly professional manner.

3. Ability to use and maintain tools and equipment.

As Laborer with the National Park Service, and while performing work around the house, I've used -- manual/power driven lawnmowers, edgers, and trimmers to maintain small areas. Used hatchets, handsaws, clippers, and other cutting tools to clear small trees and bushes. Utilize shears (manual/electric) to trim/shape trees and shrub. Utilize portable compressed-air sprayer for pest control operations. Use rake and electric blower to gather leaves and dispose of properly. Use small lawnmower tractors to cut grass, operate pickup trucks to transport supplies and materials. After using tools and equipment, I always wash, clean, and oil if necessary to prevent rust, and prolong the life of the items. Additionally, I inspect the tool and/or equipment be using it, to make sure there are no defects, that could cause injuries. As a maintenance worker with the National Park, I assisted the building engineer with installing pipes, tubing, fittings, and repairing leakage in the water and sewer system. Serviced restrooms by using hand and power equipment, such as sewer snakes, jets, to clear stoppages, both on and off the job. Additionally, I have used various hand tools (hacksaws, pipe threaders, cutters,

packing/caulking irons, wrenches to install/repair new/damaged pipes. I've used plungers to remove build-up in commodes/urinals; pliers pipe wrenches to remove and repair water faucets. In sealing a leak in a pipe, I've used the specified tape. Operate hand-motorized power mower to cut grass, shovels to remove snow, rakes to maintain and clean leaves/debris from lawns, walkways. (Some activities were performed on an as-need basis, others were accomplished in increments of 6 – 8 hours per week timeframe). Tools and equipment are cleaned and stored in a safe manner, after use. As an accomplishment, received numerous 'cash awards' for outstanding performance of my duties.