Civil Service recruitment **top tips** for candidates

GCS

We’re **so pleased** that you’re considering a role in the Government Communication Service. As a government communicator, not only are you directly contributing to your organisation's outcomes, but you are joining a profession of over **7,000 skilled colleagues**, with a tailored curriculum, networks across the UK and disci- pline networks to share best practice.

This page provides some top tips for nailing your application and interview.

# [About GCS](https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/about-us/)

[Before writing your application or attending your interview, find out more about GCS and the department you are applying for:](https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/about-us/)

* [**About GCS:**](https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/about-us/)

Find out more about the profession and what it offers you.

* [**The GCS Strategy:**](https://strategy.gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/)

Read about how we are developing the profession.

* [**The GCS Career Framework:**](https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/publications/career-framework/)

Understand the career paths available

# CV Tips

Your CV is used to assess your experience for the role: use it as an opportunity to list your skills, experience and achievements. Tailor your CV to the job advert by highlighting how your experience matches the job requirements. It’s okay if your experience is not from the Civil Service; the important thing is that it demonstrates the ‘essential requirements’ listed in the job description.

# A good CV Structure:

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| **Work experience:** |
| Role, time period, key responsibilities. |
| **Relevant qualifications:** |
| For example, accreditation from the Chartered Institute for Public Relations (CIPR). |
| **Transferable skills:** |
| What skills have you gained which would make you a great comms professional (for example, customer service, clear communication and ability to understand different customer needs). |

You will be asked to submit your CV form without information which could identify you, for example, name, age, school name, university name. This is to ensure the process is as fair as possible, as candidates are scored on merit alone.

**Personal Statement Tips**

The personal statement (sometimes called a supporting statement) should be used as an opportunity to outline how you meet the criteria in the job description. Ask yourself, why are you a great candidate for this role? What excites you about the role? What examples of tasks do you have that demonstrate the skills outlined in the job advertisement?

Make sure your personal statement covers all the essential criteria listed in the job description.



Specifically address why you want this specific job. What is it about the role/organisation that really interests you?

Ask yourself, ‘So what?’. What was the impact of your work; why did you do what you did? What would have happened if you hadn’t done it (the jeopardy)?

Read it out loud: do the sentences make sense? Are the sentences too long? Is the spelling and grammar correct?

Give an example (or two depending on word count) of something you have done which demonstrates the essential criteria. This does not need to be an example from working in the Civil Service.

# Behaviour Examples Tips

In a written application you may be asked to provide examples of work which demonstrate the [Civil Service Success Profile Behaviours](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/success-profiles). Behaviours assess the actions and activities that people do which result in them doing the job well.

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| --- |
| Look at the success profile behaviours at the level you are applying for. Try to make sure you are covering the behaviour’s description in your answer. For example, for a communicating and influencing example, how do you consider the best communication channel to use for an audience? How do you listen to and value different ideas, views and ways of working? |
| Structure your example in the STAR framework: **Situation, Task, Action, Result.** |
| A yellow question mark | Constantly ask yourself, ‘so what’? When describing what you did, so what: why did you do that; what was the impact; why was it an important thing to do? Write in plain English avoiding jargon and acronyms |
| Remember to **link results** to the situation you have outlined, |
|  |  | for example, if you started with low numbers or percentages,show what this grows to. |
|  |
| Utilise the full word count (usually 250 words per behaviour). If you need to edit down to fit the specified number ensure that the essence, decision making and impact isn’t lost. |
| **Text that reads “I did...”**  | **Be direct and avoid passive language**, e.g. ‘I delivered’ rather than ‘I have experience of delivering’. This will make your application more impactful and help with word count. |

Ask someone to read your application and provide you with feedback. Whilst you do not have to take onboard any suggestions they make, it will help to gauge whether the application is clear and easy to understand.

# Interview Tips

Interviews are a great way to demonstrate what you could bring to the role. Studies show that organisations are more successful when the workforce is diverse, as different ways of thinking and experience bring new ideas to the table. The panel wants you to do well, and these tips will help you to do so.

**After accepting the interview**

## Think about the time of your interview

You will have limited control over this as the vacancy owner will release interview slots via the Civil Service Jobs platform but from the options available try to choose a time when there will be no interruptions and when you know you will perform best.

## Tell your interviewer if you need a reasonable adjustment

GCS is committed to making sure everyone has the conditions they need to perform their best. Examples of adjustments might be:

* Regular breaks.
* Extra time and posting the interview questions in the chat.
* Receiving the questions before the interview.
* Panel cameras off unless asking a question.

## Prepare examples

Prepare examples of work you have done which demonstrate the essential criteria of the role and the Behaviours which will be tested. Practise these aloud; examples often sound different to how they are written.

## Think of questions for the panel

Remember that interviews are two way. Think of questions for the panel that you genuinely want answers to. It shows your sincere interest but also allows you to make the best decision on whether you want the role.

**A few days before the interview**

**Think about where you will do your interview**

If the interview is virtual, think about where you will do your interview and test your tech. Set the scene to minimise distractions: find a room with good lighting. Spend some time working in that space before your interview so that you are comfortable.

If the interview is in person, look up how to get there and make a note of how long it will take you. Check if there are any planned transport strikes or works which might affect your journey. Make a note of who you will be meeting in reception and their contact details.

**Morning of the interview**

**Get prepared**

**Dial-in or arrive on time**

* Have a glass of water and some bullet point notes to hand.
* Turn your phone to silent.
* Before the interview, tell yourself that you can do it - studies have shown this can lead to better interview performance.

# Presentation Tips

You may be asked to give a presentation. A presentation is often used to assess communication skills, as well as the ability to structure and present an idea clearly. This is an important skill for communicators.

You will be told the subject of the presentation either in advance or on the day (with limited time to prepare). The email inviting you to the interview will give details of the format the presentation will take, the time allowed for the exercise and whether pres- entation slides are expected. Some top tips from previous candidates are:

**Make sure your presentation has a clear structure:**

**Introduction:** why is the topic important; outline what you will talk about.

**Middle:** structure your main content into a couple of themes. If given the question beforehand, use research or best practice to back-up your points.

**Summary:** bring it all together to show you have answered the question. Practise the timing beforehand; the panel will stop you if you overrun.

Breathe and speak slowly. When we’re nervous, we tend to rush.

# Behaviour Questions

The job advert will list the Behaviours being tested. A behaviour question could:

* Ask you to give an example of a piece of work you have done to demonstrate the behaviour.
* Give you a scenario and ask you how you would approach the situation.

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| --- |
| You can ask the panel to repeat or rephrase the question. |
| Write the questions down and take a moment to think about your answer.**Q** |
|  | Answer the question the panel asks, not the one you wanted to hear. |
| Structure your answer in the STAR framework: Situation, Task, Action, Result. BUT don’t read from a script! The panel will pick this up straight away.**?** |
|  | Remember the ‘so what’: what was the result? What impact did your work have? |
| **Text that reads "Reflect"** | Explain any lessons learnt and what you would do differently next time. This demonstrates how you continuously reflect, learn and improve. |

# Strength Questions

Strengths are the things that we do regularly, do well and that motivate us. Strengths questions look at whether your strengths match what the role will require you to do.

**Example strength question:**

**‘How do you react to bad feedback’**

Answer instinctively and don’t think of which strength is being tested. There is no right or wrong answer.

Your answer should be short: 2 minutes at most.

If the strength being tested is not one you’re confident in, say what you have done to help you develop that strength. For example,

*‘If I got bad feedback I would definitely feel bad in the moment. I always try to do my best and so I would be upset by the feedback. But what I normally do is I give myself a moment to feel sad and breathe, and then I return to the feedback and think about what I can learn from it so that I can improve and do better next time.’*

For strength questions, the panel will not ask any follow up questions, it's there- fore crucial you expand on a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ response with additional information.

# At the end and after

It normally takes a few days to a week for interviews to be completed and results released. You will get an email with the outcome of the interview, and feedback from the panel.

If successful a provisional offer will be made, this is subject to pre-employment and vetting checks. To find out more about these and the level required refer back to the advert. Vetting can take a number of months to complete, the vacancy owner will keep in touch with you on a regular basis with updates.

Good luck and we look forward to working with you in GCS!