



Assessing Writing Ability of Graduate-Level Applicants

Presentation in Symposium on Scientific and
Practical Concerns of Assessing Writing Ability

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Internship Program

- ✓ Applicants completing graduate degrees in various academic disciplines
- ✓ Two-year internship
- ✓ All Federal departments and agencies
- ✓ Public policies and programs



Policy Internship

- ✓ Expect the internship positions to involve a large amount of writing to summarize, develop and analyze policy
- ✓ Therefore, wanted writing to be an important part of the selection process



Assessment Center

- ✓ Writing sample is part of a three-exercise assessment center that also includes
 - oral presentation
 - group discussion



Other dimensions

- ✓ In the writing sample, also wanted to assess
 - accomplishments
 - interest in government service



Writing sample exercise

- ✓ Candidates have 45 minutes to write about experiences and activities that demonstrate their interest in government service, and the breadth and quality of their accomplishments



Rating process

- ✓ Candidates' writing samples are forwarded to assessors specifically trained to evaluate the writing sample
- ✓ All (approximately 1300) writing samples are rated during a one-week rating process at a remote location



Training Objectives

- ✓ Familiarize assessors with:
 - Written Demonstration Exercise
 - Rating Dimensions
 - Rating Process

- ✓ Practice Evaluating the Written Demonstration Exercise

Ratings

- ✓ Rated on organization/presentation
- ✓ Rated on writing structure
 - Provided checklist for evaluation of writing structure



Rating Candidate Performance

- ✓ Review the Candidate's Exercise and Document Dimension Evidence
- ✓ Rate Individually and then Reach Consensus on Dimension Ratings
- ✓ Complete the Candidate Package

Rating Candidate Performance

- ✓ Review Candidate Exercise and Document Dimension Evidence
 - Notes are the Foundation for Rating Candidates
 - Use Quotes/Candidate's Own Words
 - Reference Specific Parts of Essay
 - Comments Should be as Specific as Possible
 - Do Not Compare Candidates



Rating Candidate Performance

- ✓ Rate Individually and then Reach Consensus on Dimension Ratings
 - Rate One Candidate at a Time on One Dimension at a Time
 - Read Notes/Take Notes
 - Assessors Work Alone to Rate Candidate's Performance, Using the Benchmarks Provided as a Guide
 - Repeat Process for Other Dimensions
 - Reach Consensus on Ratings



Rating benchmarks

- ✓ 5-point scale
- ✓ Examples at high, mid and low points to anchor the ratings
- ✓ Benchmarks are parallel



Consensus Fundamentals

- ✓ Use Non-Judgmental Tone When Reporting from Notes
- ✓ Withhold Evaluation Until all Documentation is Reported
- ✓ Hold Comments Except for Clarification
- ✓ Consensus is Not Perfect Agreement

Rating Pitfalls

- ✓ Rater Bias
- ✓ Halo Effect
- ✓ Cascading
- ✓ Central Tendency
- ✓ Voting, Trading Off, or Bartering
- ✓ Polarizing



Completing package

✓ Administrative details

- maintain copies of writing sample with assessors' notes
- rating forms must have all changes documented
- quality check all paperwork