

Writing the Senior Executive Service
Traditional ECQs and Five-Page SES Resume



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Sample Top Ten List of Accomplishments–Short Version

This sample Top Ten List of Accomplishments are mapped on pages 28-29 and expanded using the CCAR format on pages 32-34.

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 transformed organization and approved by the agency's Executive Leadership Team.

Sample ECQ Essays

The following ECQ essays are from real case files of The Resume Place (names, locations, and dates have been fictionalized to protect client identities). Some examples include the “before” and “after.” As an exercise, review and evaluate each example, identify the problems with each, and examine how those problems were resolved in the final document.

The ECQ essays in this book are one page each. In 12-point font with one-inch margins, that equals about 3,200 characters or a bit less than 500 words. By contrast, two-page ECQ essays can be 4,500 to a maximum of 8,000 characters for various federal online application systems (or two pages maximum for hard copy submissions). Applicants should always be mindful of the specific requirements for different agencies or federal application job boards, as responses/ECQ essays can range from 250 characters to 8,000 characters. You should have a variety of story lengths available for specific job announcements and application types. The CCAR element labels (Challenge, Context, etc.) in these examples are for reference only and should not be included in final essays.

Chapter 7 of this book contains shortened versions of these ECQs for use in the five-page resume-based application format, ranging from about 50 words to 150 words (about 300 to 1,000 characters).

Even if the announcement indicates that an applicant can use up to 8,000 characters, a shorter and more concise essay response, with powerful, clear writing, is often more attractive to the readers/reviewers than a long, jumbled essay.

Leading Change

1. Delta Air Lines Turnaround Story – Before and After
2. Economic Transformation in Iraq – After only

Leading People

3. Employee Buy-In for Performance Improvement – Before and After
4. Low Team Morale – After only

Results Driven

5. Created a New Organizational Strategy for Agency – Before and After
6. Created Profitable Operations – After only

Business Acumen

7. Secured Location for University-Hosted National Center – Before and After
8. NSPS – After only

Building Coalitions

9. Missile Defense Coalitions – Before and After
10. Audit Coalition – After only

Technical Qualification Samples (3)

Leading Change ECQ Example 2

Economic Transformation in Iraq (Military Officer to SES)

► After Only

(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.

Case Study 1 – Military Officer/International Corporate Executive

Target Agency and Position: Executive Director, Mobilization & Training, Department Of Navy

Judy Johnson (name fictionalized) had an exciting and interesting parallel industry and military Reserve career for more than 20 years. She was a senior executive for a consumer goods corporation, and a military officer for the Reserve Component in Europe. When she decided to apply for an SES position, we transformed her Resumix into a senior-level federal resume package with full ECQ essays and a five-page SES resume.

Judy submitted her application against fierce competition. The Agency received approximately 117 applications for this coveted position, a position that would support the Agency's Secretary. Of the 117 applications, eight candidates were interviewed by a panel, in a structured interview environment with behavior-based questions. Of the eight who were interviewed, two were selected to interview with the Agency head. Judy was selected for the position and her ECQs were certified by the QRB.

Our focus was on highlighting her executive leadership across a diversity of organizations and describing powerful accomplishments, concentrating on the position description and Technical Qualifications. Keywords are in bold:

- Knowledge in **directing the development and implementation of new policies** for **Reserve readiness and training**
- Ability to **initiate programs, actions,** and **ensure adherence** to established **policies** and **national security objectives**
- Ability to **develop systems** and **standards** for the **administration of approved plans** and **programs**
- **Advisor to Agency head** and other senior stakeholders for **readiness, training, and operations, policy guidance, and program direction**
- Participate in **conducting analyses, providing guidance, making recommendations,** and **issuing guidance** for **defense plans and programs**

See also Judy Johnson's five-page resume
in Chapter 7 starting on page 119.