

PSC Scholarships Application Guide (Senior's Edition)



Your adventure begins

Welcome to the PSC Scholarships Application Guide! Daunted by the scholarship application process? Unsure of what you can do to prepare yourself? Never fear! Paws the lion cub (right) is likewise embarking on its scholarship journey. In this guide, you will get to follow Paws through the first 4 checkpoints of the scholarship journey, and get an inside look into how to best prepare for it!

This guide provides an overview of the general application process for both the open and tied tracks. Please note that if you are applying for a tied scholarship, you may go through another round of assessment by the Ministry or agency, which will not be covered in this guide. That said, these general tips will prove useful across the different stages of the application in general. Though it may commence any time throughout the year, depending on which cycle you are applying in, the whole process will take up to a few months to complete, so do not worry if you do not receive any news for a while.

Before you follow Paws on his scholarship application journey and collect useful tips in your backpack, consider these 3 questions:

1. Why am I applying for this scholarship?
2. Have I thought through this decision?
3. What makes me a suitable fit for this scholarship and a long-term career in the public service?

With that in mind, let's look at the map of this journey!

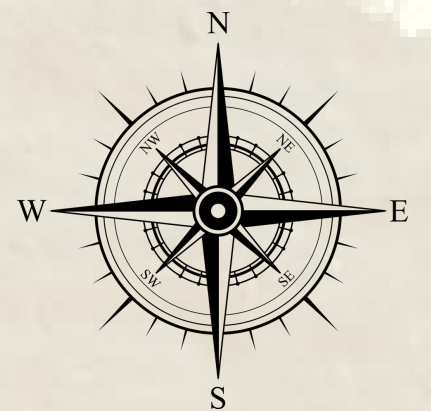
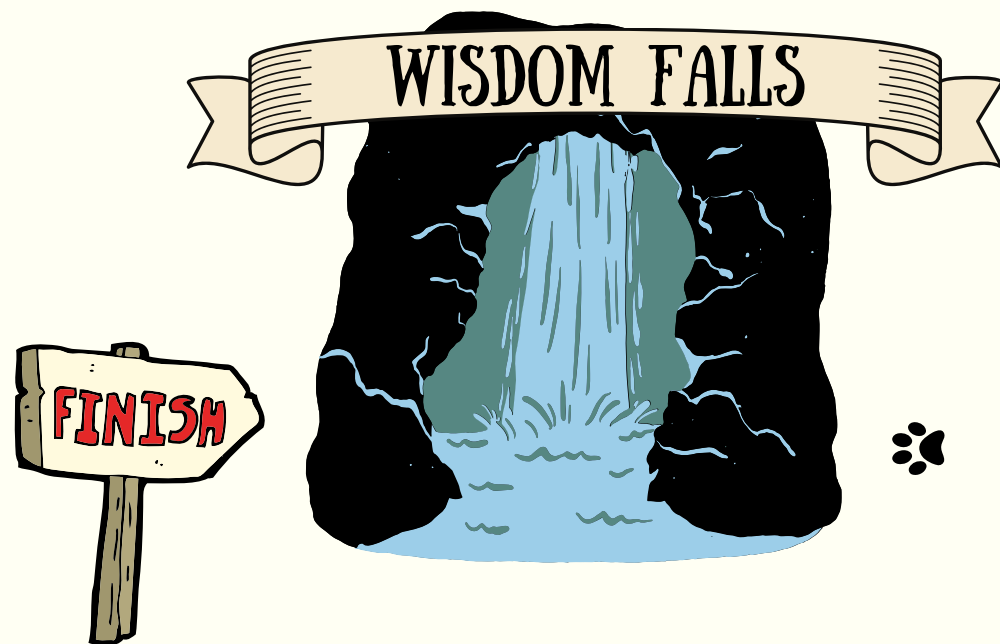
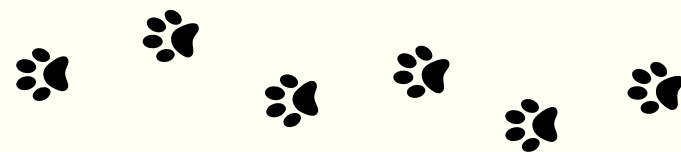
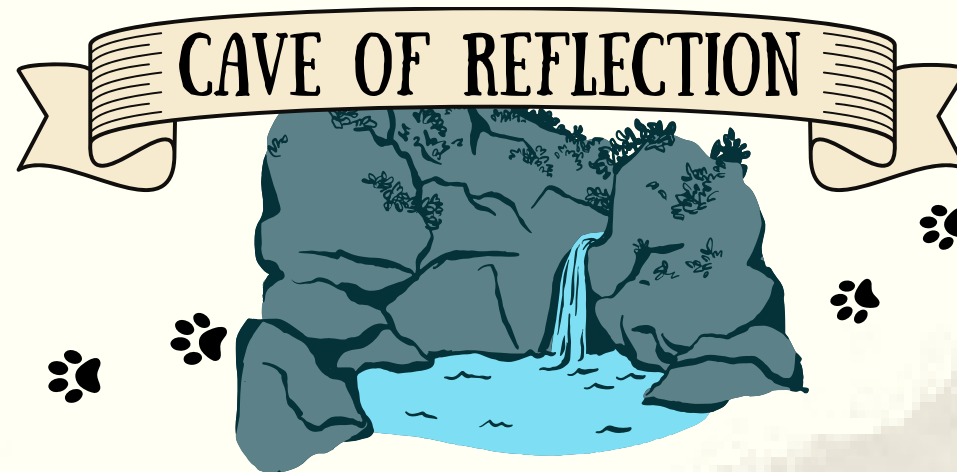
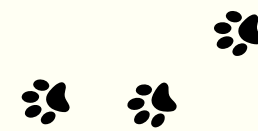
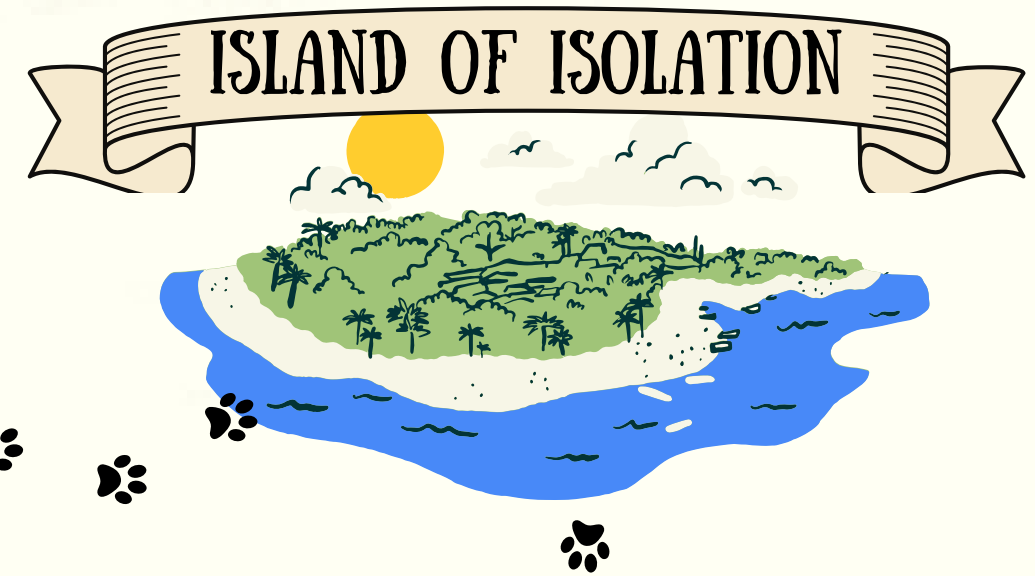
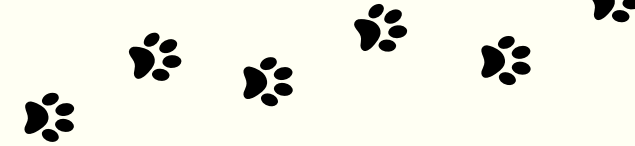
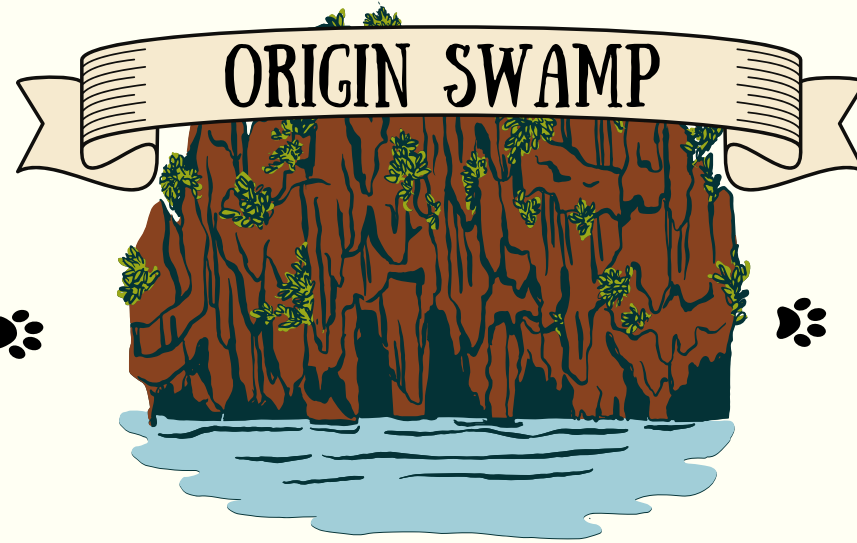
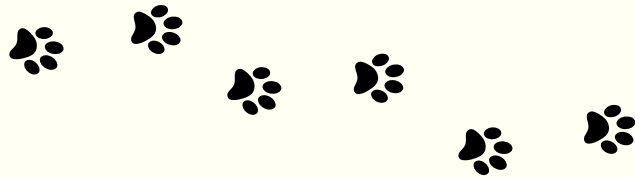


BACKPACK OF TIPS



PAWS

Adventure map



ORIGIN SWAMP

PORTAL APPLICATION & ESSAY

This is where you and Paws start your journey—the Origin Swamp. Depending on when you apply, you will find yourself in the Origin Swamp anytime from early August in the preceding year, to mid-March of the year you will be awarded the scholarship. The Origin Swamp is where your process of introspection and self-reflection begins. Before you embark on the rest of your application journey, take some time to think about your qualities and motivations.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Use these questions as a starting point for your application!

1. What have you learnt from your experiences?
2. How have you grown as a person over the years?
3. What drives you?

BEGIN EARLY

With such a long runway to prepare, remember to begin your application early! Rushing your application will only make it harder for you to provide a holistic view of who you are.

APPLICATION

At this stage, you will need to provide PSC with information via their online portal, including your academic transcripts and extracurricular activity records. It would be helpful to consider your course of study and potential university, as you will be asked to indicate your university plans and the scholarship track you would like to apply for. You will be asked to submit a personal statement based on a list of essay prompts that will be provided to you. Think of this stage as your origin story! You get to provide PSC with information that they need in order to understand you. An important aspect to consider is where you see yourself in 5 years, and the kind of work you would be passionate about. While there are a number of scholarship tracks available, the PSC website has comprehensive information on each track and suitable applicant profiles.

BE METICULOUS!

First impressions matter, even through words on a computer screen. Do check through what you are submitting thoroughly, such as grammar, consistency, accuracy of information, and do not leave out anything important!

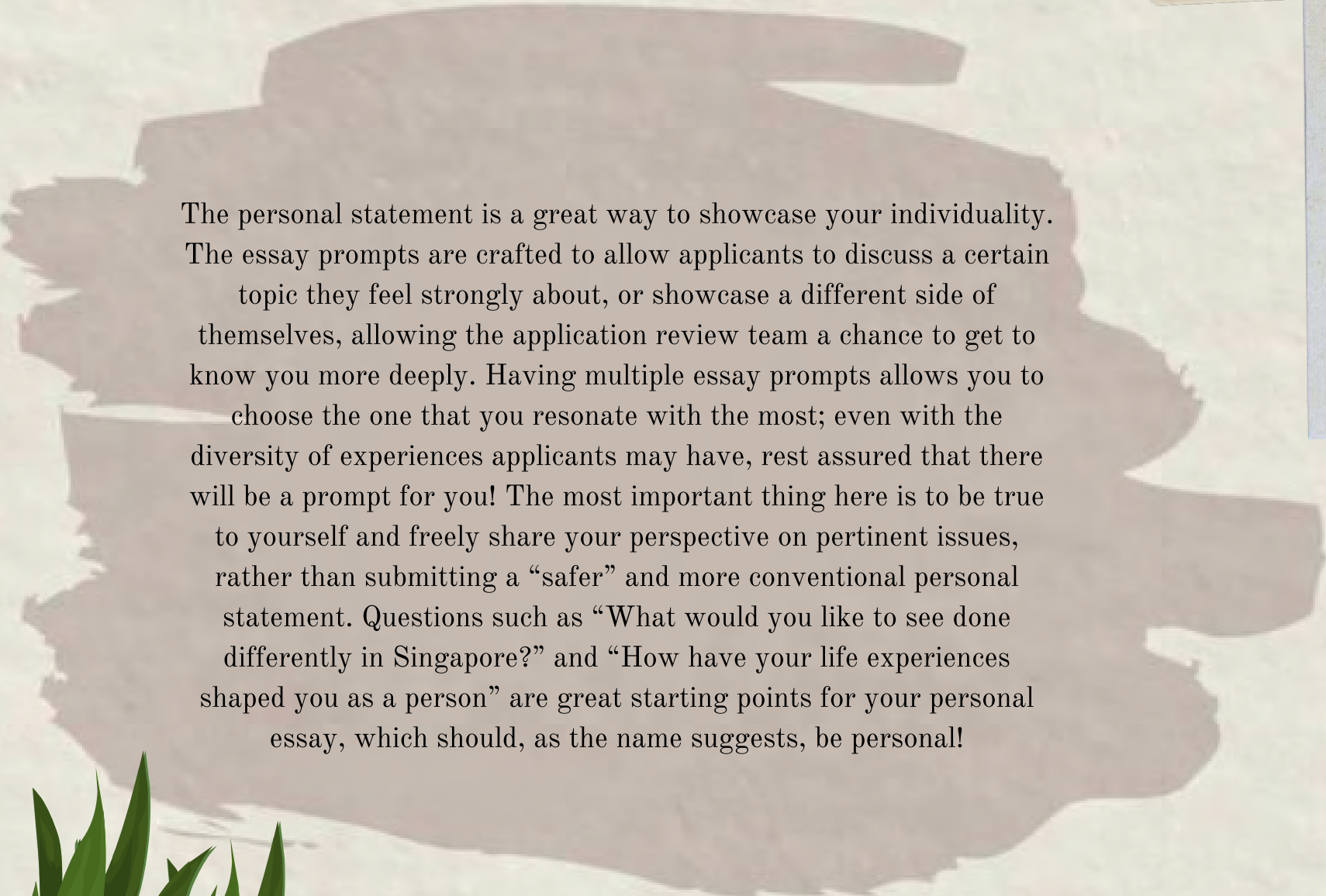
Justin, 2019

Show as many facets of yourself as possible by listing activities of different natures. Although not always true in real life, breadth is definitely more valued than depth in the online application, and rightfully so, as it allows PSC to see different sides of you and what you can bring to the table, rather than seeing 10 things of the same nature.

ORIGIN SWAMP

PORTAL APPLICATION & ESSAY

Yiik, 2019



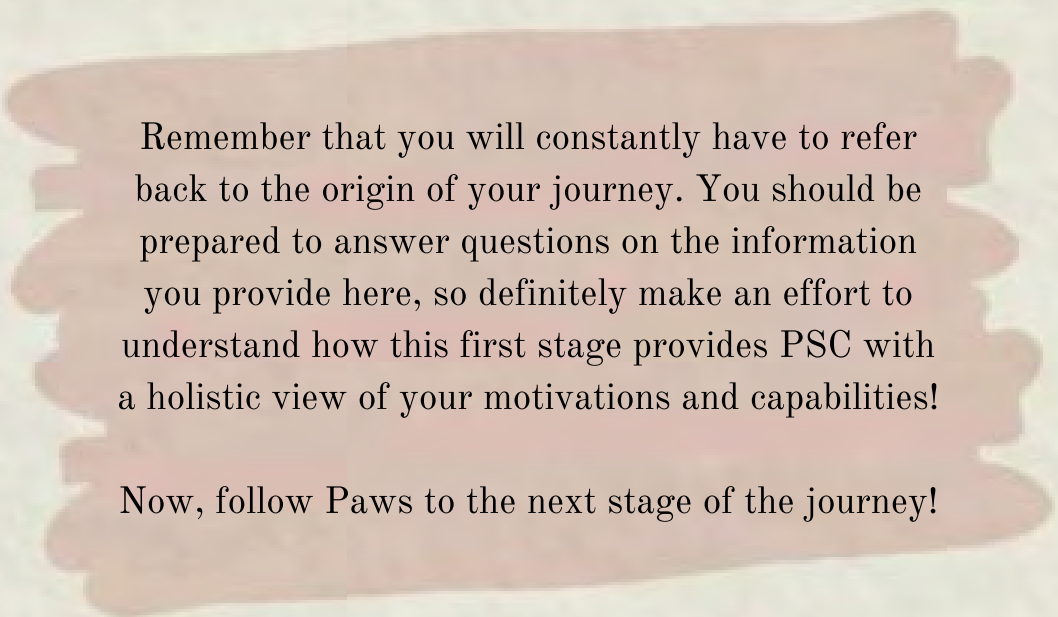
The personal statement is a great way to showcase your individuality. The essay prompts are crafted to allow applicants to discuss a certain topic they feel strongly about, or showcase a different side of themselves, allowing the application review team a chance to get to know you more deeply. Having multiple essay prompts allows you to choose the one that you resonate with the most; even with the diversity of experiences applicants may have, rest assured that there will be a prompt for you! The most important thing here is to be true to yourself and freely share your perspective on pertinent issues, rather than submitting a “safer” and more conventional personal statement. Questions such as “What would you like to see done differently in Singapore?” and “How have your life experiences shaped you as a person” are great starting points for your personal essay, which should, as the name suggests, be personal!

When choosing what to write, a good gauge will be to tie it to the ministry of interest or a reason why you chose the public service. Another tip for the essay is to not throw too many points but just have a few good, well-thought points. It has to be something you believe in or feel strongly about because the essay is meant to reflect you and your views to the PSC board which cannot be conveyed through your application form. Take time to pen it down and it’s always good to run it through with others be it seniors or peers to make sure the ideas are clear and concise.

SECOND OPINIONS	
Get opinions and impressions family, friends and teachers have of you which will definitely help you in articulating what exactly your principles and passions are!	

PERSONAL STATEMENT

Having a coherent personal statement also shows your ability to structure your thoughts logically and express your ideas succinctly. Get feedback from your family or friends before submitting your finalised personal statement!



Remember that you will constantly have to refer back to the origin of your journey. You should be prepared to answer questions on the information you provide here, so definitely make an effort to understand how this first stage provides PSC with a holistic view of your motivations and capabilities!

Now, follow Paws to the next stage of the journey!



ISLAND OF ISOLATION

VIDEO INTERVIEW

Welcome to the second checkpoint—the Island of Isolation. At this stage of your journey, you will be required to submit what PSC calls a video presentation. After submitting your application, you will receive instructions about your video presentation. This stage involves answering questions via video using an Artificial Intelligence Recruiter. You'll be given a practice question to familiarise yourself with the programme, after which you will dive right into answering mandatory questions. For each question, you will be given 60 seconds to read and plan your response. After this, you will be given a maximum of 90 seconds to record your response to each question.

PLAN, PLAN, PLAN

Do not underestimate the power of planning.

As you will effectively be delivering a monologue as your answer, it will be very easy to get carried away, and you may run the risk of rambling incoherently. Plan your response by, perhaps, jotting down the key ideas that you would like to convey in your response.

CONTENT PREPARATION

The questions typically revolve around you as a person, your career goals, and why you want to join the Public Service. As with your personal statement and the interview stage, knowing yourself intimately will be immensely helpful.

BEST FOOT FORWARD

While you are given 3 attempts per question, you are free to submit your response after the 1st attempt. A word of caution though- if you choose to re-attempt the question, your most recent response will be submitted as the final response. You will not have an opportunity to save your 3 attempts and select the best attempt to submit. This requires some discernment on your part. If you are satisfied that you have covered all the ground that you wanted to, you can choose not to re-attempt the question. However, if you are extremely sure of your ability to improve upon your most recent response, you may opt to attempt the question again. The choice is yours to make!

QUALITY OVER QUANTITY

Don't feel pressured to talk for the entire 90-second window! While you may feel like maximising the time you are given, bear in mind that it is perfectly fine to present a succinct response and submit it before the 90 seconds have run out. Remember, quality over quantity.

Being the first stage at which the selection committee sees you physically, how you conduct yourself can have a large impact. As it is simply a video recording rather than a video call with a human interviewer on the other side, you may forget to make eye contact. Train yourself to focus on your webcam without shifting your eyes, sit up straight, and try to be natural! Interviews are always daunting, but making a mental checklist can be helpful for making conscious choices regarding how you present yourself, particularly when many elements of natural conversation are missing from this process. Remember that, even if you are not looking at someone on your laptop, someone will eventually be looking at you as you deliver your answers!

JUNGLE OF GAMES

PSYCHOMETRIC TEST & GAMES-BASED ASSESSMENT

Welcome to the Jungle of Games! Sometimes this might be your second or third checkpoint, but regardless it remains an important milestone in your journey. The tests are meant to provide an additional perspective by testing your critical thinking, understanding your personality and thought process under pressure to figure out whether you're a good fit for the Public Service. You will first take a psychometric test, followed by a games-based assessment – both providing an all-round assessment of you.

PSYCHOMETRIC TEST

The psychometric test may sound daunting, so let us break it down for you. Your psychometric test will comprise 2 sections- numerical reasoning and verbal reasoning. The numerical reasoning section of your test will involve you identifying and manoeuvring through numerical patterns. The verbal reasoning test will test your ability to comprehend, unpack and analyse concepts in excerpts of texts. These tests will be conducted on computers, which will be provided at the test venue.

CONFIDENCE IS KEY

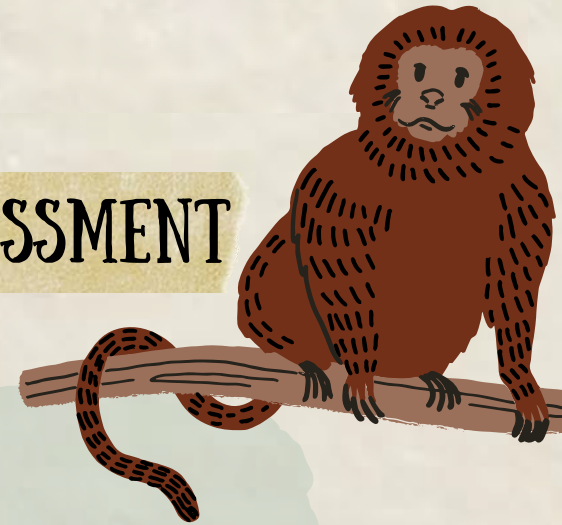
This stage cannot really be prepared for, as it tests your skills rather than your knowledge. Nevertheless, doing similar practice tests (which can be easily sourced on Google by keying in “numerical reasoning test” or “verbal reasoning test”) can be a confidence booster, and will help you mentally prepare for the test. As for the GBA, don't overthink it!

Nicole, 2020

My advice would be to read the questions carefully for the language and reasoning parts. As for the game, just follow your instincts as you play as there isn't much that can be prepared for. Most importantly, get a good rest the night before!

GAME-BASED ASSESSMENT

The GBA is a newly-introduced component of the PSC Scholarship selection process. The minigames are pretty fun, but don't be fooled! They're specially crafted to glean information about your personality, motivations and work style, among other attributes. At some point after your GBA, you will receive a detailed personality report outlining the intensity and direction of the traits you were assessed on, so do look out for that! If nothing else, the report will give you insights into yourself that would be useful for your own exploration and journey of self-discovery.





CAVE OF REFLECTION

PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERVIEW

We're now at the penultimate stage of the journey—the Cave of Reflection. Before you head for the final interview with the Commission, you will be called up for a one-to-one psychological interview, usually held at Civil Service College. The interview may last around 2-3 hours, and you will be posed questions by the psychologist in many areas, including, but not limited to, your family life, successes, failures, leadership style, and personality traits. Be prepared to take a walk down memory lane and reflect on your school life and experiences.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

You may also expect questions such as why you applied for the Public Service, or how you would manage a particularly challenging situation. The main point of this interview is to understand you better as a person through your past experiences, so treat it as a casual chat!

As the interviews are conducted on an individual basis, you may not get the notice at the same time as peers who applied with you. Sometimes, it may take weeks after the previous stage, so do not worry if you have not heard any news for a while.

TRY NOT TO FEEL DAUNTED

The idea of spending 2-3 hours with a psychologist may seem daunting, but remember that the interviewer is genuinely curious about you and has good intentions. Do not be afraid to think of this process as meeting a new friend! Feel free to ask for clarification, and let the psychologist know if you need more time to think of a particular instance or take a break. Even if you feel nervous at the start of the interview, it is perfectly all right as you will slowly ease into it.

Bryan, 2019

Prepare for it by reflecting on your life, be introspective about who you are and how you got here. Think of what shaped you as a person and your decision to enter public service!

BE TRUTHFUL

Answer in a way that reflects who you are. Try not to force an image that you will find difficult to uphold in the future! Remember that their intention is to know you better as a person, so there is no need to intentionally conceal information. Interviewers also have ample experience in distinguishing artificial responses and will try to corroborate your answers with other materials submitted, so just be yourself!

TRIP DOWN MEMORY LANE

There is no need to prepare for this stage, but you can recall your growing up years, your schooling life, leadership experiences, etc. Having distinct examples will make it easier to answer questions! “How am I as a person/leader? What are the motivations behind my actions? What are my values?” can be questions to ask yourself.

WISDOM FALLS

Here are some of the reflection pieces submitted by explorers who have similarly walked down the same path as you with Paws! Find strength from their sharing and advice, and have a thought at how you might want to submit an application that justifies yourself :)



WHAT IS THE MOST CHALLENGING PART OF THE APPLICATION AND ANY ADVICE ON HOW TO GET THROUGH THAT?



Freda Mah, PSC (Medicine), 2021,
National University of Singapore

I actually found the application process relatively fuss-free as the website was very user friendly and it guides the user along every step of the way. I think the most challenging part of it was writing the personal essay, and I remember taking quite a while to submit it due to many revisions and edits along the way. But I felt that this part of the process also helped me to understand my motivations for applying for the scholarship better, and to reflect on what this would entail for me in the future as well. The rest of the application involved a GBA assessment, Psychological interview (nearly 4 hours!), a tea session with the Director of Medical Services, and finally the interview with the PSC panel. Even though I was a ball of nerves before the interviews, on hindsight, most of the questions asked were really to find out more about my areas of interest and my understanding of the role of the Public Service in the bigger scale of things. Hence my advice would be to start the application early and give yourself sufficient time to think about why you want to apply for this scholarship and whether it aligns with your personal motivations as well. Be sincere in presenting who you are to the panel and be familiar with what you wrote in your essay because it will definitely come up in the conversation! The application process will be grueling if you're not certain about your decision, so do think about it early and ask for advice from those who have gone through it before. Personally I really appreciated advice from scholars who applied in previous batches, and also all the help from my family and friends who gave encouragement and support in the little in big ways – from vetting through my essays to helping me prepare for the interviews. It will be difficult to do this alone so do reach out for support!



WHAT IS THE MOST CHALLENGING PART OF THE APPLICATION AND ANY ADVICE ON HOW TO GET THROUGH THAT?

Looking at the past success rates of polytechnic students vs JC students, I felt like my chances were quite low. Even after the interview, I felt that I wasn't going to get it.

My advice would be to be yourself and don't fake anything. Practice doing mock interviews: in Singapore Polytechnic, we have the EDGE team which comprises of mentors who focus on preparing students for scholarship or even other interviews. I truly appreciate the time and effort of the team, as there were times I felt unconfident very near the interview, and they were very prompt to arrange an interview practice session with me.

And if you're not offered the scholarship, take it as a learning point! I've learnt a lot about myself from just the interview, so I feel that even if I didn't get the scholarship in the end, the whole process was worth going through. Have that growth mentality and make the best out of such situations!



Kimberly Suriya, PSC
(Engineering), 2021,
Nanyang Technological
University

The most challenging part of the application was preparing and going for the final interview. I was unsure about how and what I should be prepared in order to do well in the interview. During the interview, it was difficult to balance authenticity with the anxiety to be someone that the panel would view favourably. My advice would be to reach out to someone whom applicants trust that has completed the interview themselves in the past. That would be the most helpful in guiding applicants on what and how to prepare for the interview.

The scholarship has provided me with job security and certainty in a volatile global environment and has given me an opportunity to pursue an education overseas that I would otherwise face various difficulties to afford!



Stefan Liew, PSC (SPF), 2019,
Yale-NUS

The interview was the most challenging aspect for me because the questions they ask are genuinely quite challenging! You are often asked to weigh on very heavy stuff like policies, current affairs and even your own behavioral and leadership styles! My advice would be to not answer immediately. Take a few seconds to breathe, think through the questions, and then answer. This will allow you to think more rationally, to kill any nervousness and to hopefully answer with more confidence. Of course don't take your own sweet time, but please give yourself a short breather before answering :)



Abdul Qayyum Mohamed Fazil,
PSC (Open), 2018,
University of St Andrews



WISDOM FALLS

WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY FOR YOUR PSC APPLICATIONS?



Chelsea Wong Jiahui, PSC
(Teaching), 2019,
National University of
Singapore

Looking back, I don't think I would have done anything largely different – the attitude that I had towards my PSC application was to do my best and be myself, and this attitude naturally allowed me to show the best sides of myself. I also found it very helpful to always keep in mind my values, and why I chose to apply in the first place. Ultimately, the PSC would be looking at who you are as a whole – your character, dispositions towards serving Singaporeans, and your future potential in the Public Service.

If I really had to pick one thing that I would have changed, perhaps it would be the pressure of needing to come off as “excellent” or “perfect”. While I tried to go through the various stages of my scholarship application with a calm mind, there was always a little part of me which worried over not doing well enough. Though it's important to always be seeking improvement, excessive worrying can turn into anxiety and stress. These feelings may prevent you from doing your best and being you! The Commission isn't out to trap you. So do your best, and don't leave with any regrets!

I would have been more open about what I really thought and offer more personal perspectives on different matters. In other words, being more “real”. To make your best application, think about the things that makes you feel dizzily happy or makes your stomach gurgle with excitement. Now think about the qualities that form the basis of that experience. For instance, I really love reading. It makes me feel calm and relaxed. But why I really enjoy it is because I get to learn new things, I get to immerse myself in imagined fantasy worlds; I like the feeling of finishing a book. These are the qualities I speak out to me and in part, define who I am as a person. Remember this process, these feelings, throughout the entire application process. Honesty is your best policy.



Zulhagem Bin Zulkifli, PSC
(Master's), 2019,
Oxford University



Steven Yang Yue Heng, PSC
(Master's), 2019,
Peking University

I would have done a more thorough research on the different career pathways and various developmental programmes offered by the Public Service Division for public officers. When I applied for the PSC Master's Scholarship, I was very certain that I wanted to contribute to the Public Service in whichever roles that I will be tasked to take on. However, I did not have a clear answer for which sectors within the Public Service I am most interested in. The Public Service offers many different career pathways and opportunities for professional development. Having more knowledge of the various sectors within the Public Service and experiencing how it is like to work in the public sector (perhaps through one or two internships) would have allowed me to craft a more concrete plan for how I can develop myself and tap on my strengths to contribute to the Public Service in specific ways.



ANY ADVICE TO JUNIORS IN TERMS OF PUTTING UP AN APPLICATION THAT JUSTIFIES THEMSELVES?

One tip which I think helped quite a bit was researching about public finance to truly gain an understanding of what it was about and what role it played in policy!

Understanding the roles of AGD, AGO, and the differences between both could also help you to make your decision as to which may be more suitable for you! The more conviction you have in your choice, the more your confidence shows!

On the more general front, it would simply to be genuine! Having put in the work to research and do some soul searching, the only thing left to do for the essay or interviews is truly to present your point of view coherently. This would be easy if you remain genuine and truly believe in what you say!

One piece of advice I'd give to anyone in the process of applying is to figure out why you're applying in the first place. Why do you want to join the public service? As cliché as it may sound, that clarity of thought will go a long way not just in the application process but with everything that comes after. It'll help shape your personal statement and response to the question prompt. During the interview, sincerity to yourself and the beliefs you hold become visible as well. This 'why' varies and is a personal question that only you can answer. Speak to others - including your family, your peers, even seniors who are already working in the Public Service – an external perspective will certainly help. All the best!



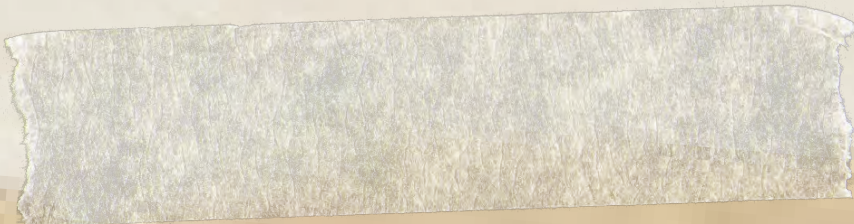
Gan Hui Xuen,
PSC (Finance), 2018,
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University



Abdul Lateef,
PSC (SAF), 2019,
Oxford University



Credits



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This guide was updated in December 2021, and has been entirely curated, designed, and formed by senior PSC scholarship holders in the hopes of helping aspiring applicants navigate the various aspects of the scholarship journey, up until the panel interview.

Overall Editors:

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