Work Samples

How to create and implement neuro-inclusive Work Samples.

About Work Samples

Work Samples involve candidates submitting actual pieces of work that are relevant to the tasks they might perform in the target role. This assessment method directly highlights their ability to perform job-specific tasks, providing a realistic glimpse into their day-to-day capabilities and work style. Work samples can stand alone as an evaluation method or be used alongside interviews, where candidates may elaborate on their work and its relevance to the role.

Benefits

The benefits may include:

- It is a direct and practical demonstration of a candidate's technical skills, creativity, and problem-solving abilities.

- Can be a reliable indicator of how well a candidate might perform in similar situations.

- They allow recruiters to assess a wider range of skills, including flexibility in thinking, creativity, and teamwork.

- Focusing on objective outputs minimises the impact of subjective biases.

Ideal for:
Technical roles, engineering, creative and marketing roles.

Considerations and solutions

There are considerations to address to ensure the assessment is neuro-inclusive. These include:

Considerations	Solutions
Relevance to the role: The work samples requested must closely align with the daily responsibilities of the role to provide meaningful insights.	Clearly define tasks or projects that mirror actual job requirements.
Consistency: Variability in how samples are evaluated can lead to inconsistencies and unfair outcomes.	Develop standardised evaluation criteria or rubrics to ensure fairness across all candidates.
Inclusion: The submission and evaluation process might pose challenges for neurodivergent candidates.	Provide flexible submission formats, clear instructions, and accommodations as needed to create an inclusive process.

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Example: Art industry
A gallery hiring an artist might request candidates to submit samples of their recent work, such as paintings, sculptures, or digital art pieces. This allows the employer to evaluate the artist's technical skills, creativity, and ability to align with the gallery's aesthetic or thematic focus, offering a clear understanding of their potential contributions.
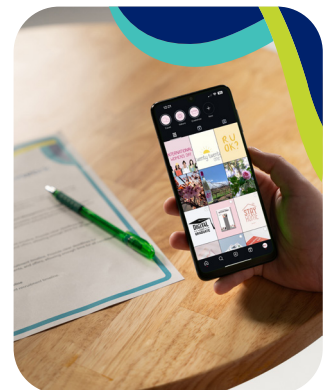
Assessing neuro-inclusive Work Samples

Work Samples can be a practical and effective method for evaluating a candidate's skills, creativity, and potential. They offer employers a realistic insight into how a candidate might perform tasks central to the role. Work Samples can stand alone as an assessment method or be paired with interviews where candidates elaborate on their submissions. However, candidates may face barriers such as unclear instructions, rigid submission requirements, or sensory challenges during live presentations if they are not considered and planned for. By implementing neuro-inclusive strategies for both standalone and integrated assessments, employers can ensure all candidates are able to show their true talent.

An neurodivergent employee shared,

> In a job interview I showed the hiring manager my Instagram profile where I had posted my creative work over the last few years. My Instagram showcased some of my previous projects as well as some of my creative personal projects. It was a great visual prompt for me and helped me talk about some of the skills and experience I have."

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Pre-assessment preparation

Preparing Work Samples may feel overwhelming when instructions are vague, overly broad, or require complex organisation. Adhering to tight deadlines or unclear expectations can add unnecessary stress, particularly for those with executive functioning challenges. Providing clear, structured guidance ensures all candidates understand what is expected, empowering them to perform at their best.

☑ Neuro-inclusive strategies
Applicable to: Stand-alone Work Samples and Work Samples paired with Interviews

☐ **Explicit instructions**

Use clear, direct language to describe the work sample requirements. Avoid vague terminology or idiomatic expressions that could cause confusion.

For example, "Submit two examples of past client projects, including a description of goals, methodologies, and outcomes."

☐ **Step-by-step guidance**

Provide a checklist or timeline to break the process into manageable steps. Provide specific types of files/formats that are required if submitting work online.

For example,
- Select two relevant projects
- Write a brief summary of each project
- Submit files via the provided portal by [deadline].

☐ **Examples and templates**

Offer sample work or templates tailored to the role.

For example, a carpentry role might include a project summary template describing the design elements and materials used.

☐ **Support accommodations**

Communicate that candidates can request accommodations, such as alternative formats.
For example, video submissions, or assistance in compiling their work.

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Flexible submission formats

Rigid submission requirements may not align with a candidate's strengths or accessibility needs. Limited access to necessary tools or unclear technical requirements can further hinder participation. Allowing flexibility enables candidates to showcase their skills in an accessible and effective format.

☑ Neuro-inclusive strategies
Applicable to: Stand-alone Work Samples and Work Samples paired with Interviews

☐ **Multiple formats**

Accept submissions in various forms such as digital files, videos, or presentations.

For example, a hairstylist could submit a video walkthrough of their styling process rather than just photos.

Other candidates might want to provide hard copy e.g. print portfolios for the creative industries when they attend in person.

☐ **Submission support**

Offer help desks or allow candidates to submit drafts for initial feedback. This can reduce anxiety about technical issues or format compliance.

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Preparing the assessment environment

Presenting Work Samples in a live setting, such as during an interview, may introduce additional challenges like sensory distractions or social stress. If conducting an onsite interview, creating a sensory-friendly environment ensures that candidates can focus on demonstrating their abilities without unnecessary barriers.

☑ **Neuro-inclusive strategies**
Applicable to: Work Samples presented in Interviews

☐ **Workplace visit**
Where applicable, offer candidates an opportunity to tour the workplace prior to the assessment. This visit can help candidates familiarise themselves with the setting, reducing anxiety and allowing them to identify accommodations they may need.

☐ **Sensory-friendly settings**
- ☐ Minimise loud, continuous noise
  (For example, humming from coffee machines)
- ☐ Avoid sudden loud noises, like doors slamming
- ☐ Ensure consistent, non-flickering lighting
- ☐ Avoid strong smells from perfumes, kitchens, or nearby restrooms
- ☐ Provide simple décor and communicate any potential sensory stimuli in advance
- ☐ Provide a range of sensory items that the candidate can use during the assessment
- ☐ Provide a range of alternative seating options and encourage them to move furniture around.

☐ **Workplace familiarisation**
Offer candidates the opportunity to visit the space beforehand to reduce anxiety and help them prepare for the setting.

☐ **Break spaces**
Provide quiet areas where candidates can take breaks before or during the presentation if needed.

☐ **Submission support**
Offer help desks or technical assistance to guide candidates through the submission process, answering questions and troubleshooting technical issues.

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During the assessment

Whether submitting standalone work or presenting during an interview, candidates may face challenges such as interpreting unstructured feedback or responding under pressure. Providing structure and flexibility allows candidates to focus on showcasing their skills.

☑ **Neuro-inclusive strategies**
Applicable to: Stand alone Work Samples

☐ **Structured evaluation**
Use an industry standard tool or a clear rubric to evaluate submissions based on specific criteria like creativity, technical skill, and relevance to the role.

For example, stonemasonry project might be assessed on craftsmanship, durability, and design.

☐ **Provide feedback**
Provide detailed, actionable feedback on strengths and areas for improvement.

☐ **Submission support**
Offer help desks or technical assistance to guide candidates through the submission process, answering questions and troubleshooting technical issues.

☑ **Neuro-inclusive strategies**
Applicable to: Work Samples presented in interviews

☐ **Have a clear criterion**
Use a clear rubric to evaluate submissions based on specific criteria like creativity, technical skill, and relevance to the role.

☐ **Have structured discussions**
Guide the conversation with clear, objective questions

For example, "How did you approach the challenges in this project?"

☐ **Be flexible**
Allow additional time for candidates to respond to questions and incorporate breaks if needed.

☐ **Provide supports**
Encourage candidates to use notes, slides, or visual aids to structure their presentation.

☐ **Submission support**
Offer help desks or technical assistance to guide candidates through the submission process, answering questions and troubleshooting technical issues.

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Post-assessment feedback

Unclear timelines or vague feedback may create anxiety and limit opportunities for growth. Providing specific, actionable feedback demonstrates fairness and supports candidate development.

☑ **Neuro-inclusive strategies**
Applicable to: Stand alone Work Samples and Work Samples paired with Interviews

☐ **Timely feedback**

Clearly communicate when or if candidates can expect results, such as, **"You will receive feedback within five business days."** If unsuccessful candidates are not notified, ensure that this is clearly communicated.

☐ **Provide feedback**

Provide detailed, actionable feedback on strengths and areas for improvement.

☐ **Present follow-up opportunities**
Offer candidates the chance to ask questions or clarify feedback.

Continuous improvement

Regular updates ensure processes remain relevant, equitable, and accessible.

☑ **Neuro-inclusive strategies**
Applicable to: Stand-alone Work Samples and Work Samples paired with Interviews

☐ **Regular updates**

Review and revise submission guidelines and evaluation criteria based on feedback, either verbally or written or even using an anonymous survey. Making sure recruitment methods also align with current laws and regulations which can change over time.

☐ **Collect feedback**
Use anonymous surveys to gather insights from candidates on the inclusivity of the process.

☐ **Use technology**
Incorporate assistive tools, such as accessible platforms or automated submission checks, to streamline the process.

Example of a neuro-inclusive Work Sample assessment

Scenario

A candidate for a mural artist role is required to submit two completed project photos with descriptions and demonstrate their process through a live sketching session. The candidate discloses sensory sensitivities and a preference for structured tasks.

Flexibility in submission format allows people to submit work samples in a method that they are most comfortable with.

Actions taken

☑ The candidate is offered flexibility to present their work via:
  - A pre-recorded video of the sketching process
  - A virtual session with one evaluator
  - An in-person demonstration in a sensory-friendly space.
  - The candidate opts for a virtual session scheduled in a quiet time slot with clear instructions shared beforehand.

☑ The evaluator uses a structured rubric, focusing on creativity, use of materials, and alignment with project goals.

☑ Feedback is provided within two days, highlighting strengths in composition and offering suggestions for expanding techniques.

Outcome

These accommodations enable the candidate to showcase their skills confidently, ensuring a fair evaluation and reducing unnecessary stress.

By ensuring the Work Sample assessment process is neuro-inclusive, employers can create a recruitment process that highlights the true potential of all candidates.

Learn more and access resources

To learn more about Neuro-inclusive Recruiting and how to create and maintain neuro-inclusive workplaces, scan the QR code or visit **neuroinclusiverecruiting.org.au.**

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