

# THE EPSO — E-TRAY — EXERCISE

WRITTEN BY EXPERTS ON THE EPSO SELECTION  
PROCESS TO HELP YOU UNDERSTAND  
WHAT AN E-TRAY IS, WHAT IT IS  
DESIGNED TO ASSESS AND  
HOW TO PERFORM WELL



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# EPSO E-TRAY PREPARATION CHECK-LIST



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# Introduction

This e-book has been written by a panel of experts in the EPSO selection process to help you understand what an E-tray is, what it is designed to assess and how to perform well. In the paid version, we have also **included a sample E-tray test so that you can practice**. Gaining a better understanding of the format of the E-tray, hearing tips from those who have been through the process (as well as from those who design these tests for a living) and practicing will all significantly improve your chances of performing well.

This information represents the most up-to-date understanding of what the E-tray will consist of; however, you should always be prepared for variations as EPSO does update its tests fairly frequently.

Please visit our website [www.eutrainng.eu](http://www.eutrainng.eu) and join us on our Facebook Page [www.facebook.com/eutrainng](https://www.facebook.com/eutrainng) to get the very latest tips about the EPSO process and to share your experiences and advice with others.

# What is the EPSO E-tray?

An E-tray exercise is a computer-based simulation of a real work situation. It replicates an email inbox which contains information distributed through several emails relating to a particular work situation or issue. Based on this information, candidates need to find solutions to related scenarios in the best way possible within a fixed amount of time. The EPSO E-tray in particular seeks to replicate the email inbox of an EU Administrator, Assistant or Secretary.

## Introduction and Scene-Setting

Upon starting the E-tray, you will first see an introduction which details how to use the E-tray interface and parameters such as time available and (sometimes) the role you are playing in the exercise. Once you have read this, the exercise begins and you will be presented with a series of emails all centered around a common issue or set of issues.

You could be based in any Directorate (this could be fictional, e.g. instead of the DIRECTORATE-GENERAL Climate Action it could be DIRECTORATE-GENERAL Environmental (or Green) Action etc.). Sample issues within the emails could include preparing an important report, organising a set of stakeholder meetings or supporting a superior to prepare for a major committee meeting.

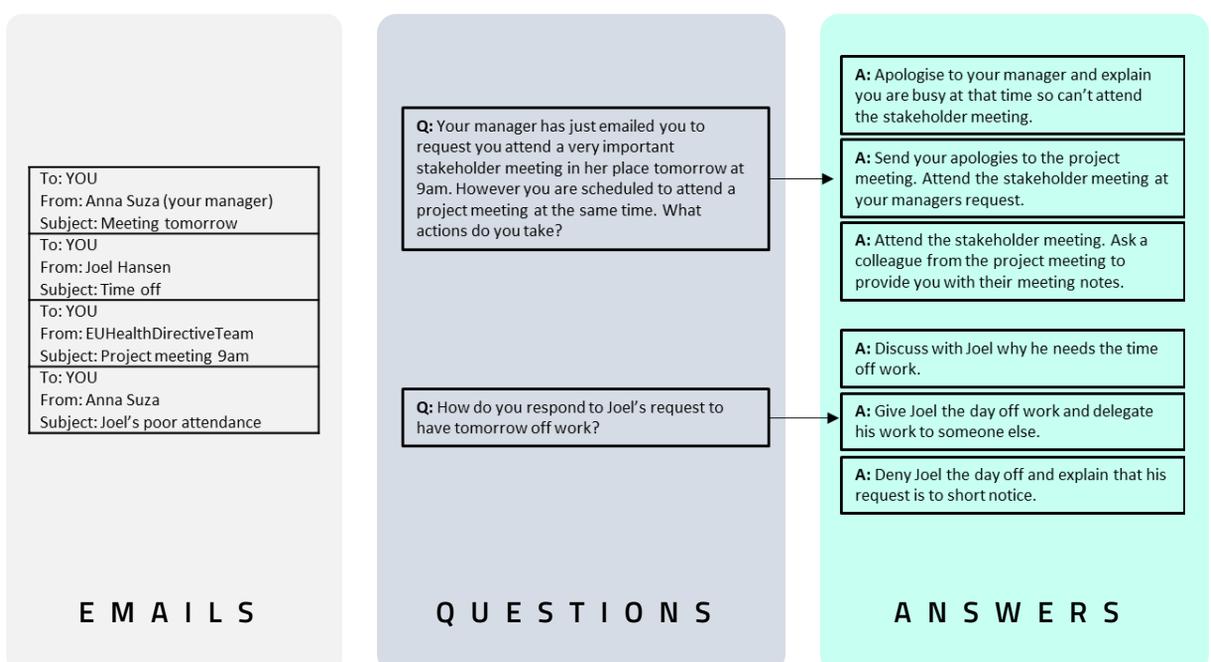
The role that you assume in the E-tray and the issues you face may not reflect the competition for which you are applying (but, as this is an assessment of behaviour not technical knowledge, this will not disadvantage you). Your task in the E-tray is to refer to the emails and 'rate' the desirability of various courses of action that you will be presented with.

Not every email in the E-tray exercise will be relevant to the questions that are posed; this adds an additional level of complexity by testing your ability to skim read, pull out relevant facts and information and discount irrelevant information. In order to help with notetaking, candidates are given two dry-erase boards and two markers. The timespan of the assigned project within the E-tray can be 1-2 weeks, a few months or could span even a year. It is important though that every scenario has a fictional today's date.

We will now describe the structure of the E-tray in more detail.

## Structure — Overview

The E-tray exercise is made up of three components which we will explain in turn: **emails**, **questions** and **options**. These are represented below:



Even though candidates are provided with three options for each question, this is not an 'either / or' situation; each of the **three options** must be considered and rated according to their desirability.

Candidates have a **time limit of 50 minutes** in which to review the emails, read the questions and rate the corresponding options.

## Emails

As the E-tray exercise is designed to test analytical skills and behaviour, not knowledge, all the information needed to rate the options can be found within the emails. When you log in, all emails are present at the start of the E-tray exercise, so do not expect new emails once the assessment has begun. As a rough guide, the emails contain approximately 6,000–7,000 words in total. There will be a range of stakeholders you have received communications from — at least 10 people, but likely more.

Review the job descriptions for the role you are applying for to get a feel for the type of content likely to be within.

**For example, the AD5 role requirements are:**

- Policy Formulation
- Operational Delivery
- Resource Management

**Common tasks in the role include:**

- Conducting analysis and formulating policies
- Drafting policy analysis notes and briefings
- Devising, implementing and monitoring programmes and action plans
- Managing relations with Member States and external interest groups
- Drafting contracts, preparing for proposals and invitations to tender
- Contributing to external communication

- Managing operational, strategic, social and budgetary risks
- Supporting decision makers (rather than being the decision makers themselves)

An example email is given below:

**To:** YOU  
**From:** Vladimir Kulis  
**Date:** 19/06/20XX  
**Subject:** Welcome

Hello and welcome to your first day – your arrival has been keenly anticipated since the unexpected departure of your predecessor, Marie Bessant over a month ago.

Your primary focus is to help promote the work we are doing in bringing stability to Somalia so that we can win support and funding to help us tackle the issue of piracy via a Coast Guard operation next year. Since 20XX–10, the EU has provided more than €1.2 billion to Somalia. The EU's aid focuses on three sectors: state building and securing peace, food security and education.

A key step in helping to bring stability and investment into Somalia is the control of piracy, which is rife in the surrounding waters. Initial training of the local police force has begun: saving lives at sea is now possible for Somali officers thanks to our advice and training activities, which cover subjects such as investigation and searching techniques, police-prosecutor cooperation, IT training, helping to draw up police curricula, among many others. Exercises at sea with simulation of arrests for arms smuggling have also been organised in cooperation with partners such as the UN's peace-keeping missions in the area.

These are initial but essential steps for police officers to acquire experience and skills to put into practice when the formal Coast Guard operation that the country so badly needs is up and running and patrolling the Somali Coasts.

I have forwarded a selection of emails to you so that you are brought up to speed. I would highlight a few important deadlines, including that of the meeting with the head of the Directorate-General next week and the UN Conference next month. Although we have a month for the conference, I think the key messages we will be delivering there should be ready to discuss with Rochelle next week.

I look forward to working with you,

Vladimir Kulis

(Your Manager)

# Questions and Options

The assessment part of the E-tray exercise consists of reading questions that relate to the E-tray and then rating three options for their desirability. Candidates do not need to provide any qualitative written output for the E-tray exercise; even though the questions may mention reports, case studies or presentations: the only output required by each candidate is the rating of each question's options.

EPSO uses three main types of E-tray questions, which we have labelled:

- **'Behavioral'**
- **'Reasoning'**
- **'Judgement'**

Explanations and an example of each follow:

## Behavioral Questions

These question types ask you how you would be likely to behave in a given scenario. They seek to measure your preference for acting in certain ways more than others and are often used to measure the 'softer' competencies such as Delivering Quality and Results and Working with Others.

Here is an example:

### Question 1:

One of the Fifteen Somalian police force senior officials (Abdulkadir Muktar) has not yet been interviewed as part of the project scoping discussion. The person responsible for the interviews tells you that the other interviewees' responses are closely aligned regarding what the new Coastguard operation should consist of. The invitation and follow-up were sent around a month ago and you now only have two more days until this phase of the project is scheduled to end. One of his colleagues suggests that he doesn't think he has been on leave over this period.

**How do you deal with this situation? Rate each response on a scale ranging from -- (least desirable) to ++ (most desirable).**

Q1	Option
1	Contact Abdulkadir by both phone and email, leaving messages where necessary, to try and involve him in this phase of the project. Offer the option of him providing his feedback via phone or email and suggest some times that you are free for a call.
2	Assume from Abdulkadir's absence and the possibility that he is on leave that he is unlikely to be able to participate in this stage of the project. Instead, send him an email explaining the situation and offering the chance to be involved as a reviewer at the next project stage, so he remains involved.
3	Decide to extend the project stage deadline so that you can try to incorporate his views. As a key stakeholder, it is important that he feels involved and that his views are included. Request that your manager re-looks at the project timeframes and re-plans accordingly.

### Option 1:

Shows a desire to do everything possible to include a key stakeholder at a critical early stage in the project and offering flexibility in order to make that happen. It may be futile, given the pattern of behaviour seen to date and also the fact that everyone else seems closely aligned.

### Option 2:

Shows a commitment to moving on with general project delivery to schedule and recognition of the need to keep a key stakeholder involved. It recognises that his views are unlikely to differ from the majority. The risk is that there are still two days to go and if you miss this opportunity now, Abdulkadir may be less bought-in than he would have been otherwise — but he already seems quite disengaged so this is less of a risk than it might have been.

### Option 3:

Shows a willingness to be flexible, however with the decision made, this does jeopardise later stages of the project. Making a unilateral decision to move project deadlines goes against the EU Value of Rules and Procedures. Also, the way in which it describes speaking to a superior goes against the Value of Hierarchy. See later for a description of the Values.

**Although no response is perfect, Option 2 is probably the best in this example, followed by Option 1 and then 3.**

## Reasoning Questions

These questions ask you to make reasoned decisions about a situation which require an element of logic and reasoning to get to the more desirable answer, rather than simply expressing a preference. The question and answer options are often shorter for these questions. These can measure a range of competencies but Analysing and Problem Solving and Planning and Prioritising are the most common.

Here is an example:

### Question 2:

In what order should you approach preparing for the presentation with Marie next week?

Q2	Option
1	Create conference slides, identify stakeholders, prepare project plan
2	Identify stakeholders, prepare project plan, Create conference slides
3	Prepare project plan, create conference slides, identify stakeholders

There is an element of logic required to answer this question (e.g. it makes sense to identify stakeholders before creating a project plan, ruling out option 3), as well as consideration of information in the emails (for example, you may have been asked to send over the Conference slides by close of business today, which would mean option 1 would be correct).

## Judgement Questions

These questions ask you for your reasoned judgement about a situation, rather than expressing a preference or reasoning according to logic. It will require a combination of understanding the information presented (for example, who the key stakeholders are and their needs, how compelling the evidence presented is, how much time you have to perform certain tasks or reach certain decisions) and the ability to reach reasoned judgements as a result. Again, this can measure any competency, but Analysis and Problem Solving and Planning and Prioritising are the most common.

Here is an example:

### Question 3:

What, in your view, will be the most important messages to convey in your presentation regarding the benefits of removing piracy from Somalia's shores?

Q2	Option
1	The potential boost to Somalia's economy
2	The improved safety for Somalia's citizens
3	The reduced environmental damage

Each option is rated on a 5-point scale that covers **least desirable**, **not very desirable**, **neutral**, **somewhat desirable** and **most desirable**, with corresponding + or – signs.

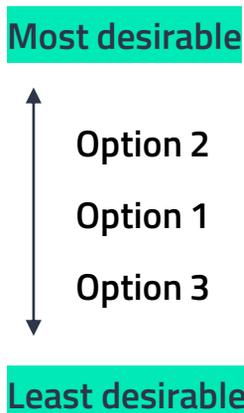
--	—	-- / +	+	++
Least desirable	Not very desirable	Neutral	Somewhat desirable	Most desirable

It is important to note that **each of the ratings can only be used once per question**. This means that, in effect, all three options are automatically ranked according to their desirability, once you have provided your ratings.

Using one of the earlier examples, here is an illustration of the concept of rating and ranking options:

Q1	Option	--	-	-/+	+	++
1	Contact Abdulkadir by both phone and email, leaving messages where necessary, to try and involve him in this phase of the project. Offer the option of him providing his feedback via phone or email and suggest some times that you are free for a call.				✓	
2	Assume from Abdulkadir's absence and the possibility that he is on leave that he is unlikely to be able to participate in this stage of the project. Instead, send him an email explaining the situation and offering the chance to be involved as a reviewer at the next project stage, so he remains involved.					✓
3	Decide to extend the project stage deadline so that you can try to incorporate his views. As a key stakeholder, it is important that he feels involved and that his views are included. Request that your manager re-looks at the project timeframes and re-plans accordingly.	✓				

By looking at the ratings given by the candidate (represented by ticks ✓), you can see that the options have also been ranked according to their desirability:



All options for each question exist independently of each other, and as such should be rated on their own merits. All three could be viable courses of action or all three could be inappropriate; they still need to be rated according to their desirability. Even though the number of emails closely corresponds to the number of questions, the successful rating of each question's three options will often depend upon the information provided in multiple emails (most likely two to five emails).

The E-tray's reputation as a particularly challenging exercise is earned from candidates having to take the assessment in their second language, the sometimes-subtle differences between the options that need to be rated and the short amount of time allocated to read the questions and rate the corresponding options.

## Scoring

Unlike other EPSO assessments (e.g. verbal, numerical and abstract reasoning), there are no definitive correct or incorrect answers to the E-tray exercise questions per se: instead, there are 'stronger' and 'weaker' responses, that have been decided upon by a panel of EU Officials, depending on the context of the question and the emails with which they relate.

The scoring system itself is confidential. However, there are certain principles which underpin the scoring of most E-trays of this nature that are likely to be applicable in this case too.

1) Rather than simply being 'right' or 'wrong' your ratings for each action will be graded according to how close you were to the 'perfect' response. For example, if the 'perfect' response is ++ and you were to choose ++ then you would get the maximum possible points. If you chose + then, you would still get some points, but not as many as if you had chosen ++. If you chose +/- then you may get some points, but less than + or ++. If you chose the complete opposite to the right answer – i.e. --, you would get the lowest possible score for that question.

Let's illustrate this taking the earlier example again, along with three sample candidates' responses:

### CANDIDATE #1'S RESPONSES

Q1	Option	--	-	-/+	+	++
1	Contact Abdulkadir by both phone and email, leaving messages where necessary, to try and involve him in this phase of the project. Offer the option of him providing his feedback via phone or email and suggest some times that you are free for a call.				✓	
2	Assume from Abdulkadir's absence and the possibility that he is on leave that he is unlikely to be able to participate in this stage of the project. Instead, send him an email explaining the situation and offering the chance to be involved as a reviewer at the next project stage, so he remains involved.					✓
3	Decide to extend the project stage deadline so that you can try to incorporate his views. As a key stakeholder, it is important that he feels involved and that his views are included. Request that your manager re-looks at the project timeframes and re-plans accordingly.	✓				

The ratings given by Candidate #1 in this example are correct and would earn the maximum possible points.

## CANDIDATE #2'S RESPONSES

Q1	Option	--	-	-/+	+	++
1	Contact Abdulkadir by both phone and email, leaving messages where necessary, to try and involve him in this phase of the project. Offer the option of him providing his feedback via phone or email and suggest some times that you are free for a call.	✓				
2	Assume from Abdulkadir's absence and the possibility that he is on leave that he is unlikely to be able to participate in this stage of the project. Instead, send him an email explaining the situation and offering the chance to be involved as a reviewer at the next project stage, so he remains involved.			✓		
3	Decide to extend the project stage deadline so that you can try to incorporate his views. As a key stakeholder, it is important that he feels involved and that his views are included. Request that your manager re-looks at the project timeframes and re-plans accordingly.		✓			

Candidate #2's rating for option 1 is incorrect by 3 positions. Their rating for option 2 is incorrect by 2 positions. Option 3's rating is incorrect by 1 position.

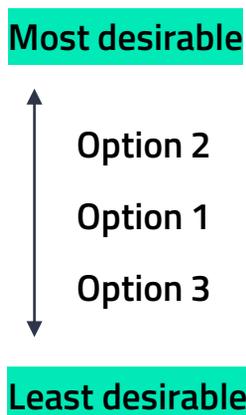
Therefore, they would get the most points for Option 3, followed by Option 2 and then Option 1; based upon their distance from the perfect response. Basically, the closer the selection is to the correct answer, the higher the score that the candidate gets.

2) In addition to getting points for the ratings, candidates are also likely to **earn points for discerning the correct ranking** of the options, even if their ratings are not 100% correct.

## CANDIDATE #3'S RESPONSES

Q1	Option	--	-	-/+	+	++
1	Contact Abdulkadir by both phone and email, leaving messages where necessary, to try and involve him in this phase of the project. Offer the option of him providing his feedback via phone or email and suggest some times that you are free for a call.				✓	
2	Assume from Abdulkadir's absence and the possibility that he is on leave that he is unlikely to be able to participate in this stage of the project. Instead, send him an email explaining the situation and offering the chance to be involved as a reviewer at the next project stage, so he remains involved.					✓
3	Decide to extend the project stage deadline so that you can try to incorporate his views. As a key stakeholder, it is important that he feels involved and that his views are included. Request that your manager re-looks at the project timeframes and re-plans accordingly.	✓				

The correct ranking is:



The ratings given by Candidate #1 in this example are correct and would earn additional points for the ranking component, on top of their points for the rating component. |

## CANDIDATE #2'S RESPONSES

Q1	Option	--	-	-/+	+	++
1	Contact Abdulkadir by both phone and email, leaving messages where necessary, to try and involve him in this phase of the project. Offer the option of him providing his feedback via phone or email and suggest some times that you are free for a call.	✓				
2	Assume from Abdulkadir's absence and the possibility that he is on leave that he is unlikely to be able to participate in this stage of the project. Instead, send him an email explaining the situation and offering the chance to be involved as a reviewer at the next project stage, so he remains involved.			✓		
3	Decide to extend the project stage deadline so that you can try to incorporate his views. As a key stakeholder, it is important that he feels involved and that his views are included. Request that your manager re-looks at the project timeframes and re-plans accordingly.		✓			

Remember, the correct ranking is:

Most desirable



Option 2

Option 1

Option 3

Least desirable

3) The rankings given by Candidate #2 in this example are correct for the first option only and therefore the candidate would earn a relatively smaller number of 'ranking points' on top of their rating points, compared to Candidate #1. If another candidate got all of the rankings wrong, then they would earn no points for ranking on top of the rating

points. The 'perfect' responses will be spread across the 5 categories of --, -, -/+, +, ++. So, noticing subtle details is important to get the maximum possible points: for example, noticing when a good course of action is not as perfect as it could be and thus choosing to award a + rather than a ++.

**Once a candidate has given their ratings for every question's options, assessors will have a total score for the E-tray exercise as a whole, as well as scores for each of the four competencies.**

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Let's now turn to the topic of competencies — which are the essence of what assessors are looking for in order to judge a performance as good.

# What is assessed by the EPSO E-tray?

Competencies are traits and behaviours that people need to do well in their jobs. The EPSO competency framework consists of seven general competencies (and one Leadership competency) that are assessed in order to form what is referred to as a **competency passport**: a rating against a set of competencies that determines whether or not you will be successful. These competencies are measurements of your typical or likely work behaviour and do not assess any technical knowledge or skills you will need for the role.

Depending upon the competition, your competency passport will consist either solely of the results of the E-tray exercise, or in combination with outcomes from the Oral Presentation, Case Study, Group Exercise and Competency-based Interview.

Each competency can be broken down into **positive** and **negative** behaviours.

The proportion of positive and negative behaviours that you display in the relevant exercises gives an indication of your likely strength within a given competency.

The competencies assessed by the E-tray, and how this fits in with other assessments you may be taking, are shown below.

**The Assistant / Secretary E-tray measures three competencies:**

Competency	Tests	
Analysis & Problem Solving	E-tray	Oral Presentation
Delivering Quality and Results	E-tray	Case Study
Prioritising and Organising	E-tray	Group Exercise
Working with Others	E-tray	Group Exercise
Communicating	Case study	Oral Presentation
Learning and Development	Competency-Based interview	Group Exercise
Resilience	Competency-Based interview	Oral Presentation
Leadership	Competency-Based interview	Group Exercise

**While the Administrator E-tray measures four competencies:**

Competency	Tests	
Analysis & Problem Solving	E-tray	Oral Presentation
Delivering Quality and Results	E-tray	Case Study
Prioritising and Organising	E-tray	Group Exercise
Working with Others	E-tray	Group Exercise
Communicating	Case study	Oral Presentation
Learning and Development	Competency-Based interview	Group Exercise
Resilience	Competency-Based interview	Oral Presentation
Leadership	Competency-Based interview	Group Exercise

Here follows a description of each of the competencies assessed by the E-tray. These behaviours are not official EPSO behaviours, but deduced by EU Training Occupational Psychologists who have constructed and graded similar assessments.

## Analysis and Problem-solving

Identifies the critical facts in complex issues and develops creative and practical solutions.<sup>1</sup>

Displaying analysis and problem-solving excellence in the E-tray exercise encompasses drawing accurate conclusions from text and chart-based data while being sensitive to long-term ramifications of short-term decisions, subtleties in politically contentious subjects and seeing potential links between different groups of information.

Analysis & Problem Solving	
Negative Behaviours	Positive Behaviours
Becomes confused by complexity	Copes well with complexity
Accepts all data at face value	Challenges data put before them
Operates at a surface level — does not seek to identify root causes	Identifies the root cause of issues
Considers only one way to resolve issues	Considers multiple options for resolving issues
Suggests standard, conventional ideas	Suggests creative ideas
Suggestions are impractical or unworkable	Makes practical, workable suggestions
Fails to gather relevant information to inform decision making	Gathers relevant information to inform decision making

## Delivering Quality and Results

Takes personal responsibility and initiative for delivering work to a high standard of quality within set procedures.<sup>2</sup>

The ability to work to deadlines and demonstrate project management skills are at the core of this competency, along with taking responsibility for both the success and the failures of the tasks given. Candidates should be able to show that they can come up with pragmatic ideas and well-thought-out suggestions, while eschewing abstract or overly ambitious proposals.

1 & 2: European Union, European Personnel Selection Office. (2014). General rules governing open competitions. Retrieved from <https://eurlex.europa.eu/legalcontent/DE/ALL/?uri=uriserv:OJ.CA.2014.060.01.0001.01.ENG>

## Delivering Quality & Results

Negative Behaviours	Positive Behaviours
Allows objectives to be missed due to failing to take responsibility	Takes responsibility for meeting objectives
Allows quality standards to slip to an unacceptable level	Maintains quality standards to at least an acceptable level
Breaks with established guidelines and procedures in an inappropriate manner	Follows established guidelines and procedures where appropriate
Fails to act before receiving instructions: misses opportunities to take the initiative	Acts without waiting to be told: takes the initiative
Avoids, or becomes demotivated by challenging situations	Thrives in challenging situations
Does the bare minimum of work to be considered acceptable	Seeks to continually exceed expectations

## Prioritising and Organising

**Prioritises the most important tasks, works flexibly and organises own workload efficiently.<sup>3</sup>**

In the E-tray exercise a considerable amount of data, and an extensive variety of possible tasks and actions is presented. Outstanding prioritising and organising skills are essential in order to perform the necessary duties in the most effective manner.

## Prioritising & Organising

Negative Behaviours	Positive Behaviours
Makes incorrect prioritisation judgements	Prioritises tasks appropriately
Fails to set realistic deadlines and milestones	Sets realistic deadlines and milestones
Allows projects to continue without monitoring	Monitors progress
Becomes flustered and ineffective when plans need to change	Adapts to changes in plans effectively
Works inefficiently or becomes overwhelmed with workload	Manages own workload effectively
Fails to prepare in advance	Conducts preparation in advance

<sup>3</sup> European Union, European Personnel Selection Office. (2014). General rules governing open competitions. Retrieved from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/DE/ALL/?uri=unserv:OJ.CA.2014.060.01.0001.01.ENG>



## Working With Others

**Works co-operatively with others in teams and across organisational boundaries and respects differences between people.<sup>4</sup>**

Candidates should fully consider who to consult amongst their colleagues as part of a scheduled project or understand whose sign-off is required prior to endorsing a particular Course of action. In addition, candidates need to be prepared to display effectiveness in resolving disputes or conflicts between colleagues, as well as superiors further up the EU hierarchy.

Working With Others	
Negative Behaviours	Positive Behaviours
Makes decisions in isolation without consulting others	Includes relevant others in decision making
Ignores, or belittles the contributions of others	Praises the contributions of others
Adopts a silo mentality, does not co-operate with other organisational areas	Works co-operatively across organisational areas
Ignores others	Actively listens to others
Fails to consider individual differences in background, skills or motivations	Effectively utilizes the diverse range of backgrounds, skills and motivations of their team.
Shows no concern for the emotional state of others	Shows a concern for the emotional state of others

4: European Union, European Personnel Selection Office. (2014). General rules governing open competitions. Retrieved from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/DE/ALL/?uri=uriserv:OJ.CA.2014.060.01.0001.01.ENG>

# How do you perform well in the EPSO E-tray?

Here, we have collated a range of hints and tips for doing your best at the E-tray exercise. If you follow these principles they will significantly increase your chances of performing well at the event. We have divided these tips into the following sections:

- **Before the event**
- **How to review the emails**
- **How to decide upon a rating**

## Before the event

### **FAMILIARISE YOURSELF WITH THE COMPETENCIES**

Each option that must be rated focuses on one of the four competencies that the E-tray exercise measures:

- **analysis and problem-solving,**
- **delivering quality and results,**
- **prioritising and organising**
- **and working with others.**

If you can arm yourself with a rudimentary knowledge of the four competencies prior to taking the E-tray exercise, it should be relatively easy to decipher which competency is being assessed.

For example, in the example below you could work out that Option 1 is assessing the **working with others** competency, Option 2 is assessing the **delivering quality and results** competency and Option 3 is assessing the **prioritising and organising** competency.

Q1	Option
1	Contact Abdulkadir by both phone and email, leaving messages where necessary, to try and involve him in this phase of the project. Offer the option of him providing his feedback via phone or email and suggest some times that you are free for a call.
2	Assume from Abdulkadir's absence and the possibility that he is on leave that he is unlikely to be able to participate in this stage of the project. Instead, send him an email explaining the situation and offering the chance to be involved as a reviewer at the next project stage, so he remains involved.
3	Decide to extend the project stage deadline so that you can try to incorporate his views. As a key stakeholder, it is important that he feels involved and that his views are included. Request that your manager re-looks at the project timeframes and re-plans accordingly.

#### As a general guideline:

- If an option involves working relationships, the competency being tested is likely to be **Working with Others**
- If an option involves plans, deadlines, urgent issues, the competency being tested is likely to be **Prioritising and Organising**
- If an option involves detailed analysis and reasoning, the competency being tested is likely to be **Analysis and Problem Solving**
- If an option involves quality standards, meeting objectives and following rules, the competency being tested is likely to be **Delivering Quality and Results**

## FAMILIARISE YOURSELF WITH THE EU ADMINISTRATIVE VALUES

The above competencies form the core of the assessment, however, there are other frameworks and cultural factors within the EU that will have been consulted and born in mind when determining the scoring system for the exercises. Key amongst these are the EU Administrative Values: you should also become familiar with these as part of your preparation.

First endorsed by the European Parliament in 2001, The European Code of Good Administrative Behaviour is designed to support the best efforts of European public servants, by sharing best practice and by promoting a harmonised, citizen-focused European administrative culture that both listens to, and learns from, its interactions with citizens, businesses and stakeholders. The code consists of five public service principles and 27 substantive provisions which can be loosely grouped into the following eight categories:

- **Hierarchy**
- **Loyalty**
- **Authority**
- **Rules and Procedures**
- **Equal Opportunity**
- **Quality of Service**
- **Public Image**
- **Work Atmosphere**

The categories that will most affect candidates during their E-tray exercise are **hierarchy, rules and procedures** and **public image**.

## ■ Hierarchy

While some EU departments may have a flat hierarchy, with less of a deference to authority, in general, candidates should be mindful of not contradicting senior colleagues, particularly in a public forum such as group email. Candidates should consider whether or not they need to ask for support or permission from a more senior colleague before embarking on a particular course of action.

## ■ Rules and Procedures

Some of the emails within the E-tray exercise might make references to terms and conditions or some other protocol that should be followed. It is vital that candidates pay special attention to such rules and procedures and refrain from violating them, even if the outcome is not favourable, such as a project being delivered late.

## ■ Public Image

Courses of action that put the EU's public image at risk should be avoided, again, even if the outcome is not desirable, such as missing an important deadline.

## PRACTICE TAKING AN E-TRAY

The E-tray timing is very tight. You have to work quickly and efficiently to get through all the emails, pick out the relevant key details and to correctly rate each action of a scenario. To do this effectively, under such extreme time pressure, requires lots of practice. Begin with the sample at the end of this e-book (paid version only), and [then try a few online E-tray exams on EU Training's website that simulate the actual EPSO E-tray test.](#) Practice your speed and review the feedback on your responses to individual questions to identify where you may have room for improvement. |

## PRACTICE BASIC NUMERACY AND NUMERICAL EVALUATION

Whilst E-trays are not tests of numerical reasoning, some charts and tables of data will be provided. Being able to quickly work out percentages or understand what figures like ratios are telling you will help you spot key messages in the data more quickly.

Learn more about numerical reasoning [here](#) and take our practice tests with feedback [here](#).

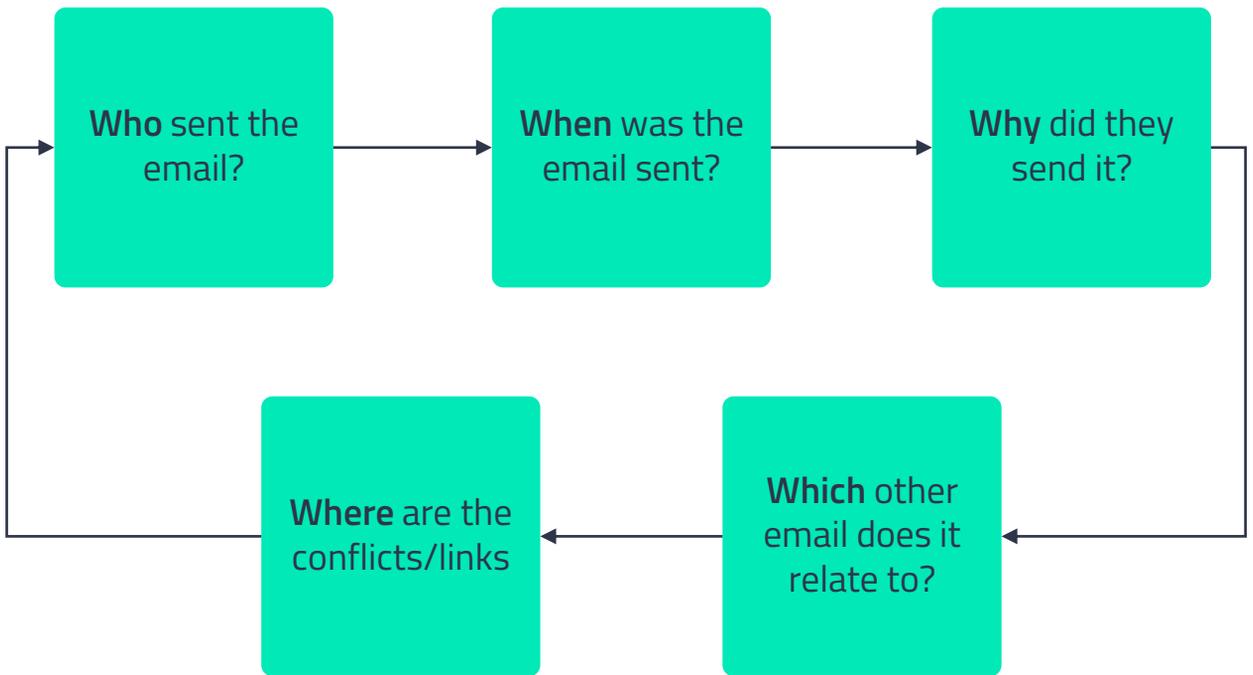
## How to review the emails

### WORK AT PACE

It would take the average adult between 32 and 45 minutes to read the 7,000 words in the EPSO E-tray out loud. Whilst you will not be reading the emails out loud, this still represents a tight timeframe and feedback from last year was that time was the main challenge of this exercise. We would advise that you spend **no more than 25 minutes reading the emails** (do this first), which will leave **25 minutes for reading the questions and rating the options** (referring back to the emails if required) and a final **5 minutes for revisions**.

Many EPSO candidates start making notes on rough paper, including things like a list of all major issues, a stakeholder map, a timeline of events etc. Whilst this may be good advice for some types of E-tray, *you will not have time for this* in the EPSO E-tray, so if you make notes, these must be very high-level.

## FOLLOW OUR FIVE-STEP PROCESS



You will be given an **organisational chart** (or perhaps an email with copy) for their fictitious EU department as well as **today's date**. The information from each email's **From** field, combined with the chart, will be key in determining if the sender is a colleague, junior or senior member of staff, thus affecting the desirability of the options.

The **Subject** line can help you group related emails together or to look for links / conflict. It can be useful when going back to the emails for a second time for any double checks. It can also help you to determine why the email was sent.

The **Date** is important when ascertaining if an email has been sent after a deadline.

## LOOK OUT FOR KEY INFORMATION IN THE EMAIL

Taking the earlier example, we have underlined below what the key things you should have your attention drawn to:

**To:** YOU  
**From:** Vladimir Kulis  
**Date:** 19/06/20XX  
**Subject:** Welcome

Hello and welcome to your **first day** – your arrival has been keenly anticipated since the **unexpected departure** of your predecessor, **Marie Bessant over a month ago**.

Your **primary focus** is to help promote the work we are doing in bringing stability to Somalia so that we can win support and funding to help us **tackle the issue of piracy via a Coast Guard operation next year**.

Since 20XX–10, the EU has provided more than €1.2 billion to Somalia. The EU's aid focuses on three sectors: **state building and securing peace, food security and education**.

A key step in helping to bring stability and investment into Somalia is the control of piracy, which is rife in the surrounding waters. Initial training of the local police force has begun: saving lives at sea is now possible for Somali officers thanks to our advice and training activities, which cover subjects such as investigation and searching techniques, police-prosecutor cooperation, IT training, helping to draw up police curricula, among many others. Exercises at sea with simulation of arrests for arms smuggling have also been organised in **cooperation with partners such as the UN's peace-keeping missions** in the area.

These are **initial but essential steps** for police officers to acquire experience and skills to put into practice when the formal Coast Guard operation that the country so badly needs is up and running and patrolling the Somali Coasts.

I have forwarded a selection of emails to you so that you are brought up to speed. I would highlight a few **important deadlines**, including that of the meeting with the head of the Directorate-General **next week** and the UN Conference **next month**. Although we have a month for the conference, I think the key messages we will be delivering there **should be ready to discuss with Rochelle next week**.

I look forward to working with you,

Vladimir Kulis

(Your Manager)



**The underlined sections are important because you learn, in order:**

- The fact that it is your first day and that your predecessor left unexpectedly. This may mean issues were left unresolved and the team are in a state of some confusion. It has been a month since she left.
  - You learn your predecessor's name, which will help decipher the email trails.
  - What your primary focus should be in this role, and a specific initiative that is being proposed.
  - Top-level aims for the EU's aid programme for Somalia.
  - A potentially important stakeholder (UN peace-keeping missions).
  - The fact that the activities taking place currently are essential to achieving your aims. They are only initial steps though, so they are not sufficient.
  - That there are some important deadlines coming up and despite one being a month away, you need to do the necessary work for it within the next week.
  - What your manager's name is.
- 

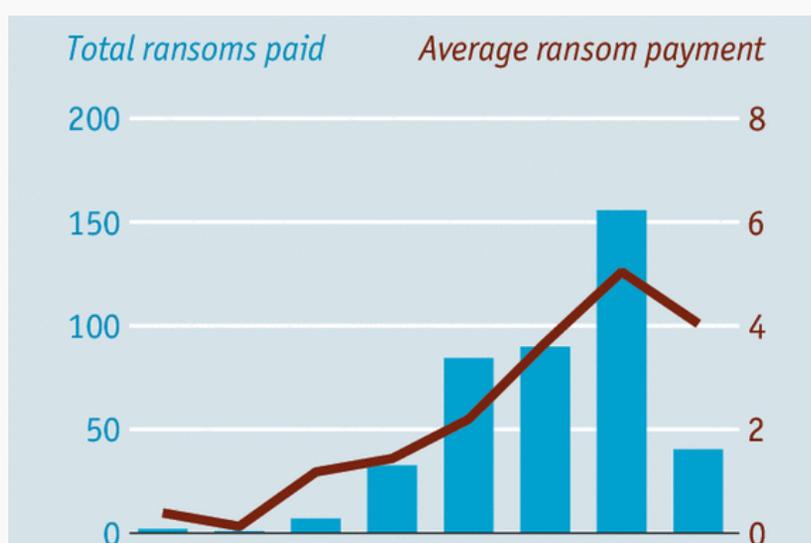
Other emails may contain numerical information and you need to just take the key facts from them.

For example:

**To:** Marie Bessant  
**From:** Rochelle Cheetham  
**Date:** 19/05/20XX  
**Subject:** Data on Somalian piracy ransoms

Hello Marie,

Please find below some statistics on Somalian piracy that you may find interesting as part of your research into the area and helping to build the case for intervention.



The payment is in \$millions and each bar represents a year from 7 years ago (far left bar) to the present day (far right bar).

Many thanks,

Rochelle

In this email, it is interesting to note that the number of ransoms paid has dropped dramatically this year after a steady rise — why? Are there other emails which could explain it? We are only halfway through the year, BUT if the second half of the year mirrors the first, it is still down from last year (unless there are seasonal fluctuations — something a strongly analytical candidate may suggest investigating).

The other thing to be alert for is key phrases designed to direct your attention, for example:

- “Please note that...”
- “Please be aware...”
- “I’m not available from...”
- “Please work closely with...”
- “The deadline is...”

These are often giveaways that they are important points to note.

## Deciding on a Rating

### SEVEN STEP STRATEGY

EU Training has developed a proposed **seven-point system** for deciding on your ratings. It may not suit everyone, but it may help to focus your efforts. Prior to implementing the seven-point system, candidates should **bear in mind the following basic two tips:**

- Look at each option in isolation and briefly consider how desirable the course of action is
- Then consider relativity, compare each option against the other two to get an idea of ranking

1. Identify which of the four competencies are most likely

2. Judge urgency (how quickly is a response required? Interim or final solution?)

3. Judge importance (how does this help achieve your task as described?)

4. Consider relevance (is this your job to do? Is it within AD remit?)

5. Consider who will be affected by your decision and how (within the E-tray — individuals or group)

6. Consider what constraints exist (e.g. rules, procedures, stakeholders)

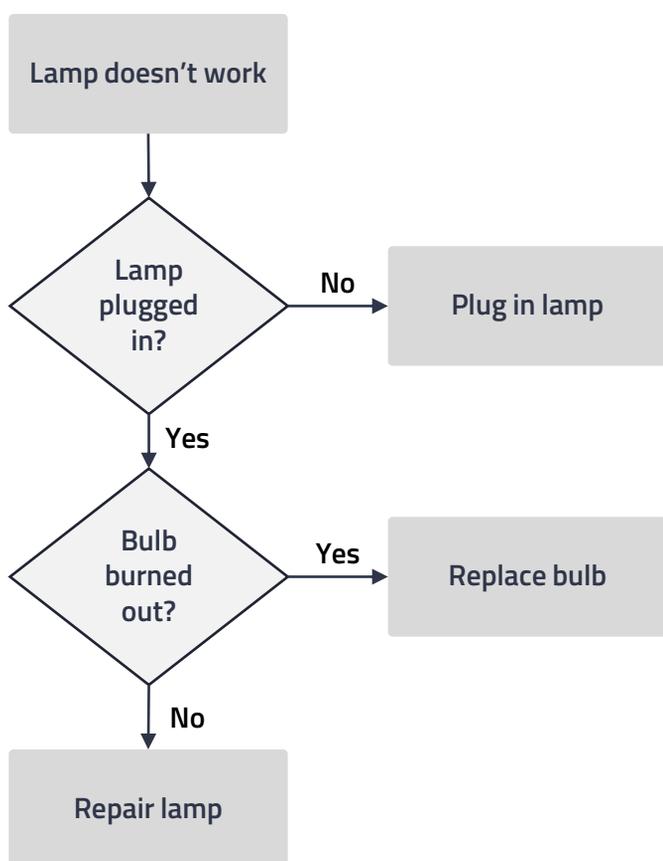
7. Test your theory: consider ‘what else’ they could have done

## APPLY 'PROCEDURAL THINKING

The SMEs who designed the E-tray use procedural thinking to agree on the ideal response and ranking for each option, remember. Procedural thinking is a disciplined method of thinking in sequence, in order and logically.

Procedural thinking can be reflected in a flow chart. Some examples below may help you better understand procedural thinking:

1. Following a recipe requires procedural thinking because you must follow the steps in order
2. Putting together Ikea furniture requires procedural thinking because you usually follow the steps in order
3. Procedural thinking is used when performing CPR to save someone's life - you follow a series of steps (call for help, check breathing, check airway, check circulation, decide if you perform CPR)
4. When you print something on a school printer, you follow a series of sequential steps (choose what to print, click print, choose a printer, go to the printer, and then scan your barcode).
5. If a lamp is broken, you might follow these steps in the flowchart below:



Coming to the right rating for each option will depend on a candidate aligning themselves with SMEs by using procedural thinking and bearing in mind the EU Code and Competencies being assessed.

## DECIDE HOW GOOD OR BAD AN OPTION IS

Actions with very bad consequences will definitely belong to the “- -” **(totally disagree) category**. Examples include: actions resulting in missing important deadlines, suggesting completely unworkable solutions, endangering priority objectives, risking the projects financial stability, or the institution’s reputation etc. Breaking with established guidelines, especially if the action can have serious consequences also fall within this category. If all the three actions measure the same competency actions that evoke only negative indicators belong here, even if the consequences are not fatal.

“-” **(disagree)** options are usually bad solutions without serious consequences. Or ones that do no harm, or no good, thus are completely unnecessary. These are not “-/+” (neutral) actions, even if the name would suggest this. An otherwise “- -” action can become a “-” if there is an even worse option present where the consequences are heavier.

“-/+” **(neutral)** The middle option is for actions with both positive and negative elements to them. These actions get the job done, but are not optimal solutions. Either they lead to resources being excessively used, or they leave a part of the problem unattended. If this part happens to be the most important aspect of the problem, it makes the action rank “-” or “- -” depending on the gravity of the fault.

“+” **(agree)** options are good solutions. However, either there is some extra that could have been done, or an even better option is offered or can be thought of based on the background information.

“++” **(totally agree)** actions are the optimal solutions in the situation. Whether that “little extra” is necessary to the action to make it a “++” instead of a “+” depends largely on the concrete situation.

**Use the full range of the rating scale — the five options are there for a reason and the ‘ideal’ ratings will span all five options across all of the questions.**

The ranking of the options depends on the other options present and whether it is obvious from the available information that something more could have been done.

## UNIVERSALLY 'GOOD' OR 'BAD' RESPONSES

Some responses are more likely than others to be positive or negative, regardless of context or competency being assessed:

### Negative Responses

- **Abdicating responsibility**
- Going **beyond the remit** of the role
- Taking things at **face value**
- **Overcommitting**
- **Taking work off someone** rather than collaborating
- Ignoring or **misinterpreting information**
- **Don't try to be a hero** (take on what you can, but no more — don't jeopardise projects for small extra things or nice to haves)
- Failing to use **full range of the scale**
- Basing answers on **one email only**

### Positive Responses

- Looking for **opportunities to network**
- Following **orders and requests** (sometimes the obvious choice is the right choice)
- Actions based on **analysis of available data**, understanding where the limits of your knowledge lie
- Gathering **more information** (bringing others in as long as not seeing as delaying a decision)
- Setting **clear goals and timelines**
- Passing onto **relevant authority** (passing important points to superior)
- Considering what stops a choice being a ++ or a –

# Sample EPSO E-tray Exercise

A SAMPLE EPSO E-TRAY EXERCISE IS ONLY AVAILABLE IN THE PAID  
VERSION OF THIS PUBLICATION.

YOU CAN ACCESS THE PUBLICATION WITH THE EPSO E-TRAY SAMPLE  
EXERCISE INCLUDED HERE:

[AMAZON.CO.UK](#)

[AMAZON.DE](#)

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you can purchase your copy here:

[THE EPSO E-TRAY EXERCISE \(WITH SAMPLE TEST INCLUDED\)](#)

