



John S. McCain Strategic Defense Fellowship Program

Federal Resume Writing Tips

Writing a federal resume is slightly different than your typical resume. The most effective resumes when applying for federal positions are those that clearly articulate how an applicant’s skills and experiences align to the selection criteria defined by the job opportunity announcement. Applicants should always tailor their resumes to the job opportunity to which you are applying. Consider these tips in ensuring you’ve created and are using the most effective resume.

Do you qualify?

Read the entire job announcement. Focus on the following sections to understand whether or not you qualify for the position. This critical information is found within Duties and Qualifications. Look for level and amount of experience, education, and training to evaluate if you are qualified.

What should your federal resume include?

Federal jobs often require that you have experience in a particular type of work for a certain period of time. You must show how your skills and experiences meet the qualifications and requirements listed in the job announcement.

<p>Job Information to which you are applying to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job title, Series, Grade <p>Personal Information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full Name • Mailing Address • Phone number and email • Citizenship • If applicable to you, your military status <p>Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Type of Degree(s) and major of study • Graduation/Anticipated Graduation Date • GPA • If the position requires a certain number of credit hours, list the relevant courses 	<p>Work Experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job Title • Employer’s name and email / phone number • Supervisor’s name and email / phone number • Beginning and ending dates of employment (month/day/year) • Hours worked per week • Detailed description of job duties, skills, accomplishments, and responsibilities (both paid and unpaid positions) • Series and grade or equivalent (if a federal position) • Clearance level (if a federal position) <p>Skills, Awards, and Training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Related knowledge, skills, attributes • Certifications and training • Volunteer work • Publications
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- Wrote news releases.
- Wrote 25 news releases in a three-week period under daily deadlines.

The second statement carries more weight, because it uses numbers to quantify the writer’s accomplishment. It provides context that helps the reader understand the degree of difficulty involved in the task. The goal is to write your experience as clearly and as simply as possible while effectively quantifying your successes on your resume. Focus on qualify and substantive content, rather than length.





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The Sales Pitch

It is crucial that your resume effectively sells your credentials. Key selling points need to be prominently displayed at the top of the first page of the resume and directly address each question that is asked. For example, if an advanced degree is an important qualification, it shouldn't be buried at the end of a resume.

Hiring managers receive dozens or hundreds of resumes for certain positions and quickly skim through submissions to eliminate candidates who are clearly not qualified. Look at your resume and consider whether the hiring manager can see your main credentials within the first 10 to 15 seconds. Do you effectively sell yourself at the top quarter of the first page?

Formatting your resume and additional resume writing tips

A key element to consider when you write your federal resume is its format.

Highlight your transferable skills.

Highlight relevant knowledge, skills, and competencies from your previous employment, internships, clubs, school activities, and volunteer experiences that may transfer to the job you are applying to. Identify the skills you used to be successful in previous roles. Don't simply list the skills, instead you should provide a brief detailed description of 1-3 accomplishments to demonstrate those skills. For example:

“Coordinated with team members on the receipt of 15,000 grant applications and oversaw processing. Exceeded processing deadlines by 18%.”

Not only does this demonstrate teamwork and organization, it demonstrates how those transferrable skills made you successful. Transferable skills may increase the level at which you are qualified for the job you are applying to.

Organize your resumes to make it easy to understand

You need to organize resumes to help agencies evaluate your experience. Use reverse chronological order to list your experience – start with your most recent experience first and work your way back. Use either bullet or paragraph format to describe your experiences and accomplishments. Use correct grammar and ensure there are no spelling errors.

Be concise and add at least a blank line between sections with headings for each section. Be consistent with your spacing. This allows for an easy read for the hiring manager.

Tailor your resume to include information relevant to the specific position

Customizing your resumes helps you match your competencies, knowledge, skills, and experience to the requirement for each job. Do not send the same resume for every position.





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Formatting your resume and additional resume writing tips (Continued)

Use similar terms and address every required qualification

Your experience needs to address every required qualification in the job announcement. Look for “buzzwords” in the job announcement and use similar terms. Hiring agencies will look for specific terms to ensure you have the experience they’re looking for.

For example, if the qualifications section say you need experience with “Microsoft Word”, you need to use the words “Microsoft Word” in your resume.

Do I need to keep my resume to one page?

No, there is no length limitation. However, the general rule of thumb is one-to-five pages, depending upon your level of experience. Be sure to include page numbers.

Federal Resume Dos and Don'ts

Dos

- List your work hours (e.g., 40 hours per week) for each work experience. This is important since the amount of experience credited toward minimum qualification requirements is determined based on the hours worked.
- Specify if this was a full time or part time job and include the yearly salary.
- Study the Job Announcement.
- Customize your resume to each job.
- Use action words.
- State the facts. Avoid belief or judgement statements.
- Provide sufficient detail, but use concise language.
- Use headings to guide the reader.
- Write in plain language.
- Use spelling and grammar checks.
- Have someone review your resume.
- Apply as early as you can.

Don'ts

- Include information that does not add substance.
- Include acronyms, unless you spell them out first.
- Use of civilian industry or company jargon.
- Copy and paste the specialized experience from the job announcement. Use your own words to describe your experience, qualifications and accomplishments.
- Inflate your experience.
- Include a photo of yourself or any Personally Identifiable Information (PII).
- Assume HR Specialists know who you are and/or what you have done at previous positions.

Important Websites

- <https://www.usajobs.gov/Help/faq/application/>
- <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/classification-qualifications/>

