

skip navigation links

TSA Career Coaching Service



Transportation
Security
Administration

tsacareercoaching.tsa.dhs.gov

Home Career Coaching Services Career Resources Career Assessments Site Map Contact Us



Preparing a Federal Resume

By Fred J. Hecklinger, Ph.D., National Certified Career Counselor, TSA Career Coach



Application Form

Not long ago, the standard federal employment application was the SF-171, which often constituted a life history and could be many pages long. This application was replaced by the OF-612 in 1995. While the OF-612 remains an acceptable application form, it is rapidly being replaced by a federal resume. Virtually all federal agencies give the applicant the choice of using the OF-612 application or a federal resume. It is advisable in most cases to use a federal resume in place of the OF-612 for the following reasons:

- The OF-612 is a form, with the inherent limitations of any form. Your information must be entered in a standard format, which often requires addendums. This makes the form difficult to read.
- A federal resume gives you flexibility in presenting your qualifications in a variety of formats, as long as certain information is included. If properly written, a federal resume is much easier to read than the OF-612.
- A federal resume allows you to present your most important qualifications up front in a profile statement or qualifications summary, while the OF-612 has no provision for such a statement.



Application Guidance

The most widely used resource for writing a federal resume is the **Federal Resume Guidebook**, by Kathryn Kraemer Troutman. This book, now in its fourth edition, published in 2007 by JIST Works, Indianapolis, IN, provides guidelines for creating a federal resume and different formats for federal resumes. It also has sections on strategies for moving up in government, how to read federal vacancy announcements, practical guidelines for writing a resume, and information on electronic resumes, cover letters, and KSAs.

Federal versus Private Sector Resumes

A federal resume is very different from a resume written for employment in the private sector. Much more basic personal

information is required. In addition, more detail on job responsibilities and accomplishments is expected, especially those that are relevant to the position for which the application is being prepared. Therefore, a federal resume can be much longer than a traditional resume. However, the same guidelines that are used in preparing a good resume apply for both private sector and federal resumes: use plain words, create short sentences, use the "I, understood" format, use action verbs, focus on accomplishments, limit acronyms and technical jargon, and focus on experience and accomplishments that are most relevant to your goal.

Information Required For A Federal Resume

In the federal government, the purpose of the resume is to describe your qualifications so that you can be certified by the Office of Human Capital. This means that your resume needs to include more specifics and language similar to the vacancy announcement because the Human Resource Specialist must determine if you meet the specialized or directly related experience requirements for the position for which you are applying.

- **Job Information:** announcement number, title, series, and grade of the job for which you are applying
- **Personal Information:** full name, mailing address, day and evening phone numbers, e-mail address, Social Security number, country of citizenship, veteran's preference, and Federal Status (highest civilian grade held). TSA employees with at least one year of continuous service with TSA under a permanent appointment are eligible for Federal Career Status and must include the following statement on their federal resume: **The Interchange Agreement between TSA and OPM, dated February 1, 2005, makes me eligible to apply as a status candidate (under your Merit Promotion/Internal Selection procedures).**
- **Education:** high school (name, city, state, zip code, date of diploma or GED) and colleges or universities (name, city, state, zip code, majors, type and year of any degrees received)
- **Work Experience:** job title, employer's name and address, supervisor's name and phone number, starting and ending dates, hours per week, salary, whether current supervisor may or may not be contacted, description of duties and accomplishments, including results or outcomes
- **Other Qualifications:** job-related training courses, skills, certificates and licenses, honors, awards and special accomplishments, publications, memberships in professional or honor societies, leadership activities, public speaking, and performance awards

Applicants frequently ask how much history their federal resume should cover. The requirement is to include at least the past 10 years. More attention should be placed on

describing the jobs that are most current or most relevant to the position for which you are applying. **If you have relevant experience that is more than 10 years old, be sure to include it because it could help you become certified.**

How long should your federal resume be? That depends on the amount of experience that you have. Typically, three to six pages are sufficient. Your goal should be to provide enough information to demonstrate your qualifications, yet avoid overwhelming or boring the reader.

General Guidelines for Writing a Federal Resume

- Emphasize your accomplishments. Show the amount and quality of your experience. Whenever possible, use numbers to quantify your experience.
- In addition to your accomplishments, describe your major responsibilities. Draw special attention to those responsibilities that are relevant to the position for which you are applying.
- Avoid long paragraphs. Use bullets and boldface type to draw attention to your accomplishments and responsibilities. Be consistent in your use of indentations, bullets, boldface, italics, and capitalization. Try to keep margins at approximately 1" on all four sides.
- Carefully describe your accomplishments and experience in a complete but concise presentation. Avoid going into extensive descriptions of responsibilities.
- Use the "I, understood" format. Begin your sentences with action verbs such as managed, supervised, coordinated, created, etc. Avoid using "I."
- Check for grammar, syntax, and spelling. Use spell check, but don't depend on it. Proof your resume and have at least two other people proof it.
- Avoid extensive use of abbreviations and acronyms unless they are very relevant to your goal. Use simple terms rather than complex ones. When using abbreviations, be consistent.
- Use 8 ½" x 11" quality bond paper in either white or a light neutral color. Or good quality copy paper.
- Use a clear font, such as Arial, Antigua, Bookman Old Style, or Times New Roman, in a readable size (11 or larger for text, 12 or larger for headings are recommended). Leave plenty of white space to make reading and scanning easy.
- Generally, single space between lines and double space between sections.
- Pay careful attention to tense. Use present tense for your current job and past tense for previous jobs.
- If you are mailing your resume, do not fold it. Mail it flat in a 9" x 12" envelope. Do not use a government

envelope.

- In writing a federal resume, include your salary for your present federal position and all previous non-federal positions.
- Avoid self-congratulatory language, such as “Wrote an excellent report.” Instead, indicate if you received a commendation on what you wrote or if your report was accepted and influenced policy.
- Number each page after the first page and put your name and Social Security number on each page, either on the same line as or near the page number.

Components of a Good Federal Resume

1. Heading:

Include your name, address, day and evening telephone numbers, and e-mail address. This is a good place to include the required information for federal applications: Social Security number, veteran’s preference, country of citizenship, federal status (highest civilian grade held). Consider making your name at least one font size larger than the other information and use boldface type. If you include an academic degree or professional certificate, place it after your name.

2. Objective:

Your objective should include the vacancy title and number of the position for which you are applying. If you are a TSA employee with at least one year of continuous service with TSA under a permanent appointment, you are eligible for Federal Career Status and must include the following statement on your federal resume: **The Interchange Agreement between TSA and OPM, dated February 1, 2005, makes me eligible to apply as a status candidate (under your Merit Promotion/Internal Selection procedures.)** This is a good place to include this statement. If you are applying for a position within TSA, you do not have to include this statement.

3. Profile:

This is a concise statement of what you have to offer an employer **now**. You may want to change it for different types of positions. A general guideline is to use three to six sentences, which include the name of the career field, your level of experience, the number of years of relevant experience, where the experience has been applied, specialized skills and experience, and your knowledge, training, and/or education relating to the position. You may also wish to include special certifications or clearances if they are relevant to your goal.

The most important function of a Profile, which could also be called a Qualifications Summary, Career Profile, Executive Summary, Professional Summary, Skills Summary, or a professional title, such as Intelligence Analyst or Trade Expert,

is to place up front in your resume a brief summary of your qualifications that are most relevant to your goal. For an example of profile, see the attached resume.

4. Chronological presentation of experience:

This type of resume, by far the most common, is the format employers normally expect, and is appropriate when your most recent experience is your most qualifying experience.

Possible titles for this section of your resume include Experience, Professional Experience, Professional Experience and Accomplishments, Work Experience, Work History, Career History, Employment History, and Professional Highlights.

A federal resume requires much more information as you describe each position that you have held. The usual order of basic information for each position is: position title, name of employer, address, including zip code, and dates of employment given in months and years. There is no need to right-justify dates. In addition, you should give the number of hours that you work per week and the name and telephone number of your supervisor. Provide your salary for your current federal position and all previous non-federal positions. For your current position, you must indicate whether your supervisor may be contacted.

List your experience in reverse chronological order. You do not have to include all of your experience. Go back at least ten years, but you should definitely go back further if that experience is relevant to your goal. When describing your experience, emphasize your accomplishments. Quantify and give results if possible. Describe your major responsibilities, but avoid the extensive use of job description language that would apply to anyone holding the position. Emphasize the special contributions that you have made in your career.

5. Chronological and functional presentation of experience:

This format may be helpful if you want to place up front a summary of your skills and accomplishments that are especially relevant to your goal. It is particularly useful when the skills that you have used in your most recent position are not as relevant to your goal as the skills that you used in previous positions.

After your profile, use the heading of "Professional Accomplishments" or something similar for this section of your resume. You may wish to use two to four subheadings to describe your accomplishments that are most relevant to your goal. For example, if you are applying for a position that involves both supervision and project management, you can create subheadings for both areas and list accomplishments under each.

While your most relevant accomplishments will be featured in the categories that you have created, it is still important to list your experience in reverse chronological order and to include all information required for a federal resume, including a description of your major responsibilities and other

accomplishments that you have not previously described.

6. Education

After describing your experience, list your education in reverse chronological order. The usual order for listing basic educational information is degree, major, school, city, state, zip code, and year of graduation. For a federal resume you must include high school information. If you have a substantial number of college credits but no degree, you should list the number of credits, the name of the program, major, and the years of attendance.

If your education is your most qualifying experience, you may want to put it on the first page of your resume, following your profile statement. For example, if you are applying for a financial management position and have just completed a bachelor's degree in accounting, you may want to put your education before your experience.

7. Professional training:

You may want to have a separate category for training. Be sure to include the training that is relevant to the position for which you are applying. List the training, with the year of completion, in reverse chronological order. If you have special skills, clearances, and certifications that are relevant to your goal, you can create a special category. You may wish to include information on publications, licenses, certifications, computer skills, professional affiliations, military service, community service, presentations, and awards, if this information is relevant to your goal.

8. Awards:

If you have received awards, group them by type and list them in reverse chronological order. If there is a special award that you have received, you may want to describe it. Remember that you could refer to an award in the work experience section of your resume, to illustrate one of your accomplishments.

9. Military experience:

Be sure to include your military experience here, including rank and dates, unless you have included it under your work experience.

[PDF Software](#)