

THE ADULTING VAULT

The Federal Resume Guide

How to Write a Two-Page Federal Resume That Actually Gets Reviewed

Everything They Forgot to Tell You

Federal hiring changed more between 2025 and 2026 than it had in the previous thirty years. The long-form resume is gone. A hard two-page ceiling is enforced by the system itself. Four essay questions now sit inside the application flow, and they carry a criminal certification most applicants never read. This guide walks you through all of it — what the rules actually say, how a human resources specialist reads your document, and how to compress a full career into two pages without erasing what makes you qualified.



How to Use This Guide

Read Part One before you write anything. Everything else you can use out of order.

This guide has three kinds of pages. Chapters explain how the system works. Worksheets give you space to draft. Checklists let you audit a finished document before you submit it.

IF YOU ARE STARTING FROM NOTHING

Work front to back. Part One through Part Four give you the rules and the raw material. Part Five is where the resume actually gets built.

IF YOU ALREADY HAVE A LONG FEDERAL RESUME

Go straight to Part Five. Your existing document is not wasted — it becomes your master file, the archive you cut each targeted two-page version from. Then use the audit in Part Nine.

IF YOU ARE COMING FROM THE PRIVATE SECTOR OR THE MILITARY

Part Four matters most to you. Federal resumes require specific data fields that commercial resumes omit, and leaving them out is one of the most common reasons a qualified applicant is rated ineligible.

A WORD ABOUT SCOPE

Federal hiring rules change. Dates, exemptions, and required fields in this guide reflect published Office of Personnel Management guidance as of mid-2026. The job announcement you are looking at is always the controlling document. When this guide and the announcement disagree, follow the announcement.

Part One: What Changed

The rules you learned five years ago will now get you rejected.

The two-page limit is real and it is enforced

As of September 27, 2025, federal agencies accept resumes of two pages or less. This came out of the Merit Hiring Plan issued by the Office of Personnel Management in May 2025, implementing Executive Order 14170. The plan explicitly ended the long-form federal resume structure that had been standard for decades.

The enforcement is what surprises people. This is not a preference and it is not a tiebreaker. The USAJOBS system will not let you upload or build a resume longer than two pages. The limit applies to every resume in your job seeker profile, every new upload, anything built in the USAJOBS resume builder, and searchable resumes in the Agency Talent Portal.

THE FAILURE MODE THAT ENDS APPLICATIONS

If the only resume an agency receives from you is longer than two pages, you are ineligible for further consideration. The system does not trim your document to fit. It removes you from the pool.

Applicants who try to route a longer resume in through the "other documents" upload, without the announcement specifically inviting that, do not get a second read. Only the compliant two-page resume goes to the hiring manager.

Who is exempt

A small set of positions sits outside the limit. Do not assume you are one of them — confirm it in the announcement text.

Category	Status
Title 38 and Hybrid Title 38 positions	Exempt. Largely clinical roles at the Department of Veterans Affairs and similar health systems.
Medical and research roles requiring a CV	Agencies may request a curriculum vitae with specified content instead.
Non-Title 5 agencies, judicial and legislative branch	May accept longer resumes, but only if the announcement includes explicit instructions for submitting one.
Everything else, GS-05 and	Two pages. No exceptions granted at the applicant level.

Category	Status
above	

Why the change happened

The stated rationale was to bring federal applications closer to private sector norms and to put hiring managers in front of relevant experience rather than a career archive. Whether or not you find that persuasive, understanding it tells you what to keep.

The old federal resume rewarded completeness. A human resources specialist needed to see everything in order to make a qualification determination, so applicants documented every duty of every job going back fifteen years. The new format rewards relevance. You are no longer proving that you did a lot. You are proving that you did the specific things this announcement asks for.

REFRAME THE TASK

You are not shortening your resume. You are writing a new document, once per announcement, whose only job is to demonstrate the specialized experience that particular posting requires.

Applicants who treat this as a deletion exercise produce thin, generic documents. Applicants who treat it as a targeting exercise produce sharp ones.

Part Two: How Federal Hiring Actually Works

Your resume passes through at least two very different readers. It has to satisfy both.

The path your application takes

1. You apply through USAJOBS against a specific job opportunity announcement. Your application is tied to that announcement number only.
2. A human resources specialist screens for minimum qualifications. They are checking whether your documented experience meets the specialized experience statement in the announcement. This is a compliance review, not a judgment of talent.
3. Qualified applicants are rated and ranked, often against an occupational questionnaire you completed during application.
4. The top group is placed on a referral certificate and sent to the hiring manager. Veterans preference is applied at this stage where it applies.
5. The hiring manager reviews the referred packet, which may now include your essay responses, and selects candidates to interview.

The two readers

The human resources specialist is looking for evidence against a checklist. They will not infer, assume, or give you credit for something implied. If the announcement requires one year of specialized experience at a particular level and your resume does not clearly show it with dates and hours, you are screened out — even if you obviously have the experience.

The hiring manager is looking for someone who can do the job. They read for impact, scope, and judgment. They are the reason your bullets need results in them, not just duties.

DESIGN IMPLICATION

Page one has to satisfy the specialist. Dates, hours per week, series and grade, and language that visibly matches the specialized experience statement.

Both pages have to satisfy the manager. Scope, numbers, outcomes, and evidence of judgment.

A resume that only does one of these fails. Beautiful narrative with no compliance data never reaches a manager. Perfect compliance data with no substance reaches a manager who passes.

Specialized experience is the whole ballgame

Nearly every qualification decision turns on a single paragraph in the announcement, usually labeled Specialized Experience. It reads something like: one year of specialized experience equivalent to the GS-11 level performing the following.

Then it lists three to six things. Those things are your outline. Not a suggestion — your outline. If the statement names five capabilities, your resume should visibly evidence all five, using recognizable language, with enough date and hour detail to prove the one-year duration.

THE EQUIVALENCY QUESTION

If you have not worked in the federal government, "equivalent to the GS-11 level" is not a barrier. It describes a level of independence, complexity, and scope, not a job title. What it means in practice: work performed with limited supervision, on problems without established answers, with consequences that extend beyond your own team. Your job is to make that level visible in how you describe the work.

Part Three: Decoding the Announcement

Twenty minutes here saves you from a rejection you will never get an explanation for.

Before you write a word, pull the announcement apart. Read four sections closely: Duties, Qualifications, Specialized Experience, and How to Apply. The Duties section tells you the daily work. Qualifications and Specialized Experience tell you what you must prove. How to Apply often links a preview of the assessment questionnaire, which is the closest thing to an answer key you will ever get.

Worksheet: Announcement Breakdown

Photocopy or reprint this page. Complete one per announcement.

Field	Entry
Announcement number	
Position title, series, grade	
Agency and duty location	
Closing date	
Open to (public / status / veterans)	
Promotion potential	

SPECIALIZED EXPERIENCE — BROKEN INTO PARTS

Copy each requirement from the announcement into the left column. In the right column, name the specific job and accomplishment that proves it.

Requirement, in the announcement's own words	My evidence — which job, what I did, what resulted

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WORDS AND PHRASES THE ANNOUNCEMENT REPEATS

Terms that appear more than once are almost always scored. Write them down and get them into your resume honestly.

REQUIRED DOCUMENTS CHECKLIST

- ☐ Resume, two pages or less
- ☐ Transcripts, if education is qualifying
- ☐ SF-50, if applying as a current or former federal employee
- ☐ DD-214, member copy 4, if claiming veterans preference
- ☐ SF-15 and supporting documentation, if claiming derived or ten point preference
- ☐ Performance appraisal, if the announcement requests it
- ☐ Other documents named in the announcement:

Part Four: The Required Elements

Omitting one of these fields is the most common self-inflicted rejection in federal hiring.

Commercial resumes leave out data that federal screening depends on. If you are transitioning from the private sector or from military service, this is the section that will save your application.

Required for every position in your work history

Element	Why it is required	Format
Employer name	Identifies the organization and its scale	Organization, not just division
Job title	Establishes the nature of the role	Actual title held
Start and end dates	Proves duration of specialized experience	Month and year, both ends
Hours per week	Converts duration into creditable time	Numeric, e.g. 40
Series and grade	Establishes level equivalency	Federal positions only, e.g. 1102-12
Description of work	Demonstrates you can perform the duties listed	Specific enough to map to the announcement

THE HOURS-PER-WEEK TRAP

Part-time experience is credited proportionally. If you worked twenty hours a week for two years, that is one year of creditable experience, not two.

If you leave hours off entirely, a specialist may be unable to credit the experience at all. Include the number on every entry, including full-time roles.

What the announcement may additionally require

- Active security clearance and level
- Language proficiency, with a stated level
- Licenses or certifications, with issuing body and currency date
- Citizenship status
- References, if specifically requested

What no longer belongs

Under a two-page ceiling, everything that does not earn its space is costing you a qualification you could have proven instead.

- A long career summary paragraph. Two or three lines maximum, or none at all.
- A skills matrix listing every software tool you have touched.
- References, unless the announcement asks.
- Hobbies, interests, and personal information.
- Full social security number, photograph, date of birth, or marital status. These have never belonged on a federal resume and can create bias concerns.
- Jobs older than roughly ten to fifteen years, unless they carry the specialized experience.
- Anything the announcement did not ask about.

Part Five: Building the Two-Page Resume

A page budget, a structure, and a compression method.

Keep a master file

Do not throw away your long resume. Keep a master document that holds everything — every role, every accomplishment, every number you can substantiate. It never gets submitted. It is the quarry you cut each targeted two-page version from.

This single habit is the difference between spending four hours per application and spending forty minutes.

The page budget

Two pages is roughly seven hundred to nine hundred words in a readable layout. Spend it deliberately.

Section	Budget	Notes
Contact block	3–4 lines	Name, city and state, phone, email, clearance if relevant
Positioning statement	0–3 lines	Optional. Only if it names the target role and top qualification
Most recent relevant role	35–45% of space	This is where the specialized experience gets proven
Second relevant role	20–25%	Supporting evidence and depth
Third and older roles	10–15%	Compressed. Title, employer, dates, hours, one or two lines
Education	2–4 lines	Degree, institution, year. Transcripts carry the detail
Certifications and clearance	2–4 lines	Only current and relevant

Compression, in order

6. Cut whole jobs before you cut bullets. A role that does not touch the specialized experience can become a single line, or disappear into an earlier-career line.
7. Cut duties, keep accomplishments. Anything a reader would assume from your job title is not earning space.
8. Merge related bullets. Three bullets about the same project become one bullet with the strongest result.

- 9. Cut adverbs, hedges, and throat-clearing. "Responsible for helping to coordinate" becomes "Coordinated."
- 10. Only then adjust formatting. Margins and font size are your last resort, not your first. A document squeezed to eight-point type reads as desperate and may not survive conversion.

FORMATTING THAT SURVIVES THE SYSTEM

Standard fonts, ten to twelve point. Margins no tighter than half an inch. Simple bullets. No tables, no columns, no text boxes, no headers or footers carrying content, no graphics.

Anything visually clever risks scrambling in parsing. The document that reads cleanly as plain text is the document that gets read.

Worksheet: Page Budget Plan

Complete before drafting. Decide what gets space before you write.

Section	Roles or content included	Lines allotted

Part Six: Writing Bullets That Earn Their Space

The difference between "managed projects" and a bullet that gets you referred.

The problem with duty statements

Most resumes describe responsibility. "Managed projects." "Oversaw contract administration." "Responsible for budget planning." These tell a reader what you were assigned. They say nothing about whether you were any good at it, and they do not distinguish you from every other applicant with the same title.

Compare: managed a \$2.4 million infrastructure modernization spanning three agencies, delivered on schedule and under budget. Same job. One version proves capability.

The formula

ACTION + SCOPE + METHOD + RESULT

ACTION — a strong verb naming what you actually did

SCOPE — the size of the thing: dollars, people, systems, sites, records, transactions

METHOD — briefly, how, when it demonstrates a required skill

RESULT — what changed: time saved, cost avoided, error rate, compliance outcome, decision enabled

Not every bullet needs all four. Every bullet needs at least action, scope, and result.

CCAR, for the harder ones

When a bullet needs to carry more weight — a signature accomplishment, or the evidence for a specialized experience requirement you are thin on — build it with CCAR and then compress.

Element	Question it answers
Challenge	What problem or condition existed?
Context	What were the constraints, stakes, and environment?
Action	What did you specifically do? Not the team — you.
Result	What measurably changed?

Write the full CCAR version in your master file. Compress the submitted version to one or two lines, keeping the action and the result. The full version becomes your interview answer later.

Finding numbers when you think you have none

Applicants in administrative, analytical, and support roles routinely believe their work is unquantifiable. It rarely is.

- Volume — how many, how often, over what period
- Value — dollars managed, obligated, saved, or avoided
- People — team size, stakeholders, audience, end users served
- Time — cycle time before and after, hours recovered, deadlines met
- Quality — error rate, audit findings, rework, compliance rate
- Scope — sites, systems, offices, states, organizational levels
- Firsts — things that did not exist before you built them

IF YOU TRULY CANNOT MEASURE IT

Name the consequence instead. "Identified a documentation gap that would have delayed award" is a result. "Briefed findings that changed the acquisition strategy" is a result.

Do not invent numbers. A figure you cannot defend in an interview is worse than no figure.

Translating military experience

Military résumés fail federal screens for one reason above all others: the reader cannot map the work onto the announcement because the vocabulary is opaque. Keep rank and unit for context, translate everything else.

Instead of	Write
NCOIC of a section	Supervised a team of N performing [function]
Property book / hand receipt holder	Accountable for \$N in equipment across N locations
Conducted PMCS on assigned equipment	Maintained readiness of N systems at N% availability
Served as unit training NCO	Designed and delivered training for N personnel
S4 / J4 operations	Logistics planning and supply chain management

Instead of	Write
Wrote OPORDs and FRAGOs	Developed and issued operational plans and change directives

Worksheet: Bullet Builder

Draft three bullets for your most recent relevant role. Fill the grid, then write the compressed line beneath it.

BULLET 1

Action	Scope	Result

Compressed version:

BULLET 2

Action	Scope	Result

Compressed version:

BULLET 3

Action	Scope	Result

Compressed version:

Part Seven: Keywords Without Keyword Stuffing

Mirror the announcement's language, honestly.

A human resources specialist is matching your document against a written standard. When you describe the same work in different words than the announcement uses, you create friction — and under time pressure, friction reads as absence.

So mirror the language. If the announcement says "acquisition planning," write acquisition planning, not "procurement strategy development." If it says "stakeholder engagement," use that phrase somewhere it is true.

THE LINE YOU DO NOT CROSS

Mirroring means using the announcement's vocabulary to describe work you actually did. Stuffing means claiming experience you do not have because the words appeared in the posting.

The first is good writing. The second is a false statement on a federal application, and it surfaces in the interview at best and in an investigation at worst.

Method

- 11. Paste the Duties and Qualifications sections into a document.
- 12. Highlight every noun phrase naming a skill, function, system, or authority.
- 13. Sort them: things you have done, things you have partially done, things you have not done.
- 14. For column one, use the announcement's exact phrasing in your bullets.
- 15. For column two, describe the adjacent experience precisely and let the specialist judge. Do not overstate.
- 16. For column three, leave it out. Trying to cover a gap you cannot support wastes space you need elsewhere.

Worksheet: Keyword Sort

Have done — use their words	Partially — describe precisely	Have not — omit

Have done — use their words	Partially — describe precisely	Have not — omit

Part Eight: Three Worked Examples

What a compliant two-page federal resume actually looks like at three levels.

Each of these fits inside two pages, carries every required field, and mirrors the vocabulary a real announcement would use. Read the notes after each one — they explain the decisions, which is the part you can actually transfer to your own.

A NOTE ON SALARY AND SUPERVISOR DETAILS

Traditional federal resumes carried salary and supervisor contact information for every position. Current guidance on whether they remain mandatory is genuinely inconsistent — some sources list them among the required fields, others describe them as optional since 2026, and requirements vary by agency and by announcement.

These examples put both on the same line as the dates and hours, which keeps the whole compliance block to one line per role rather than three. On a two-page document that difference is worth several bullets.

For federal positions the series, grade and step satisfies the pay field. For military service, rank does. Notice that the current role in each example says DO NOT CONTACT and past roles say may contact — you are not obliged to let a prospective employer call your current supervisor, and saying so plainly is normal.

The announcement and the USAJOBS resume builder are controlling. If the builder asks for a field, fill it. If an announcement names a required element, provide it regardless of what any guide says.

WHAT EVERY ONE OF THESE DOES

Month and year on both ends of every date range, and hours per week on every entry.

Series and grade on federal positions.

Space allocated by relevance rather than recency.

Numbers in almost every bullet, and none that could not be defended in an interview.

Example One: Entry Level

Recent graduate targeting Management Analyst, GS-0343-07.

The difficulty at this level is that the experience section is thin, so everything else has to carry weight. The answer is not padding — it is treating an internship and a campus job as real work and describing them with the specificity you would use for a career position.

EXAMPLE 1 — GS-07 TARGET

MAYA OKONKWO

Columbus, OH 43201 · (614) 555-0177 · m.okonkwo@email.com · U.S. Citizen

SUMMARY

Recent public administration graduate with hands-on experience in data analysis, process documentation, and stakeholder reporting. Analyzed program performance data for a county agency serving 40,000 residents and produced the recurring report used in monthly leadership review. Seeking a Management Analyst position, GS-0343-07.

SKILLS

Analysis: Program evaluation, data analysis, process improvement, requirements gathering
Tools: Excel (advanced: pivot tables, Power Query), Tableau, SharePoint, Microsoft Project
Written products: Standard operating procedures, briefing materials, performance reports

EXPERIENCE

Program Support Intern | Franklin County Department of Job and Family Services, Columbus, OH

June 2025 – August 2025 | 40 hours per week | \$19.50/hr | Supervisor: T. Alvarez, (614) 555-0120, may contact

- Analyzed case processing data across three program areas covering 40,000 residents, identifying a documentation gap that had added an average of 6 days to determinations.
- Built the monthly performance dashboard adopted by the division director for leadership review, replacing a manually compiled spreadsheet.
- Documented and standardized two intake procedures, producing the written SOPs now used to train new caseworkers.

Research Assistant | The Ohio State University, John Glenn College of Public Affairs, Columbus, OH

September 2024 – May 2026 | 15 hours per week | \$16.00/hr | Supervisor: Dr. P. Nakamura, (614) 555-0134, may contact

- Collected and cleaned data for a faculty study on municipal service delivery across 22 jurisdictions.
- Produced literature summaries and briefing memos used in two published working papers.

Shift Supervisor | Northside Coffee, Columbus, OH

May 2023 – August 2024 | 25 hours per week | \$15.75/hr | Supervisor: K. Boyd, (614) 555-0166, may contact

- Supervised a team of six, handling scheduling, cash reconciliation, and customer escalations.

EDUCATION

Bachelor of Arts, Public Affairs — The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH, May 2026, GPA 3.7

Relevant coursework: Public Program Evaluation, Public Budgeting, Quantitative Methods

WHY THIS WORKS

- It runs to roughly one page, and that is correct. The two-page limit is a ceiling, not a target — padding an entry-level resume to fill it reads exactly as padding. The examples that follow do fill two pages, because those candidates have the material.
- Hours per week appear on all three entries, including the 15-hour research post and the 25-hour retail job. Part-time work is credited proportionally, so stating it accurately is what allows it to be credited at all.
- The coffee shop stays. Supervising six people is genuine supervisory experience and it closes a gap in the timeline. It gets one line, not four.
- The summary names the target series and grade explicitly. At entry level that removes any ambiguity about what she is applying for.
- Coursework is listed because at this level it is legitimately qualifying. It comes off the resume within two years.

Example Two: Mid-Career, Military Transition

Separating Army NCO targeting Contract Specialist, GS-1102-12.

The obstacle here is vocabulary rather than qualification. This candidate is well qualified and would be screened out by a specialist who cannot map the language onto the announcement. Notice that rank and unit remain for context and everything else is translated.

EXAMPLE 2 — GS-12 TARGET, VETERANS PREFERENCE

DEREK SANTIAGO

Killeen, TX 76541 · (254) 555-0192 · d.santiago@email.com · U.S. Citizen · Active Secret Clearance

SUMMARY

Logistics and acquisition professional with nine years managing government property, vendor performance, and requirements development. Managed \$14.2M in equipment and services across three installations, and developed the requirements packages supporting 40+ procurement actions annually. Seeking Contract Specialist, GS-1102-12. Veterans preference documentation attached.

SKILLS

Acquisition: Requirements development, market research, vendor performance management, property accountability, government purchase card

Regulatory: Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) familiarity, government property regulations, audit and compliance documentation

Systems: GCSS-Army, Excel (advanced: pivot tables, lookup functions), SharePoint, Microsoft Project, Defense Property Accountability System

Supervision: Performance counseling, training development, scheduling, and evaluation for teams of up to 24

Credentials: Certified Professional Contracts Manager (CPCM) candidate; Lean Six Sigma Green Belt (2024)

EXPERIENCE

Senior Logistics Supervisor (Platoon Sergeant) | U.S. Army, 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Cavazos, TX

March 2022 – Present | 40 hours per week | E-7, Sergeant First Class | Supervisor: 1SG M. Deloatch, (254) 555-0101, do not contact

- Direct supervisor for 24 personnel across three sections, accountable for performance, training, and development.
- Accountable for \$14.2M in government property across three sites with zero losses over four consecutive annual inventories.
- Developed requirements packages and market research supporting more than 40 procurement actions annually, coordinating directly with contracting personnel on specifications and delivery schedules.
- Managed vendor performance for six recurring service agreements, documenting deficiencies that resulted in two corrective action requests and one non-renewal.
- Rewrote the property accountability process for the brigade, reducing monthly reconciliation time from 3 days to 6 hours.
- Serve as the primary point of contact between the unit and the supporting contracting office, translating operational requirements into performance-based specifications suitable for solicitation.
- Conduct market research for recurring requirements, comparing pricing and capability across an average of 4 vendors per action and documenting findings for the contracting officer.
- Built and maintain the tracking system for all open procurement actions, providing weekly status to the commander and reducing overdue actions from 11 to zero within two quarters.
- Wrote and delivered training on requirements development to 18 supervisors across the brigade, now part of the standard onboarding for incoming section leaders.

Logistics Supervisor (Squad Leader) | U.S. Army, 3rd Sustainment Brigade, Fort Cavazos, TX

June 2019 – March 2022 | 40 hours per week | E-6, Staff Sergeant | Supervisor: SFC R. Okoye, (254) 555-0188, may contact

- Supervised 9 personnel executing distribution operations supporting 800 end users.
- Managed government purchase card account with an annual value of \$180,000, maintaining a clean record across nine consecutive quarterly audits.
- Sustained 96% equipment readiness across 42 systems during a 9-month overseas deployment with no resupply reachback.

- Coordinated the transfer of \$2.4M in equipment between two units during a relief in place, completed with full accountability and no loss.
- Identified a recurring billing discrepancy with a service vendor and documented it for the contracting officer, recovering \$31,000 in overcharges.
- Selected as the brigade representative to a process improvement team that redesigned the requisition workflow, cutting average approval time from 9 days to 4.

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Logistics Specialist | U.S. Army, Fort Liberty, NC

August 2017 – June 2019 | 40 hours per week | E-5, Sergeant | Supervisor: SSG L. Brennan, (910) 555-0143, may contact

- Processed an average of 320 supply transactions monthly at 99.4% accuracy across a 1,200-person organization.
- Served as unit hand receipt holder for \$3.1M in assigned equipment across two storage sites.
- Prepared and submitted the monthly status of supply report reviewed at battalion level.
- Maintained the authoritative property database for \$3.1M in assigned equipment, reconciling discrepancies within 48 hours of identification.
- Coordinated inbound and outbound shipments with three external vendors, tracking delivery performance against contract terms.

ADDITIONAL RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

Contracting Officer's Representative (COR) duties performed as an additional duty, March 2023 – Present: monitored performance on two service contracts valued at \$840,000 combined, documented deficiencies, and submitted monthly surveillance reports to the contracting officer.

Unit Purchase Card Approving Official, June 2021 – March 2023: reviewed and approved transactions for four cardholders, conducted monthly reconciliation, and maintained audit documentation.

EDUCATION & TRAINING

Bachelor of Science, Business Administration — American Military University, December 2024

Advanced Leader Course, U.S. Army (2022) · Government Purchase Card Certification (2020)

WHY THIS WORKS

- Rank is kept in parentheses after a translated title. A specialist reads "Senior Logistics Supervisor" and understands the work; the rank supplies context without being the headline.
- "Coordinating directly with contracting personnel on specifications and delivery schedules" is the single most valuable line for an 1102 announcement. It maps his experience onto the specialized experience statement using the announcement's own vocabulary.
- The clearance appears in the contact block, not buried at the bottom. It is one of the few things that is immediately valuable to a hiring official.
- The 2017 role is compressed to one bullet. Space follows relevance.
- Veterans preference is flagged in the summary so nobody has to hunt for it, and the documentation is attached separately as the announcement requires.

Example Three: Senior, Current Federal Employee

GS-13 seeking Supervisory Program Manager, GS-0340-14.

At this level a reader assesses scope before anything else — people, budget, and reporting line. Detail about how the work was done belongs in the interview. Notice that this resume says almost nothing about tools.

EXAMPLE 3 — GS-14 TARGET, INTERNAL PROMOTION

ROSALIND CHEN

Denver, CO 80202 · (303) 555-0148 · r.chen@email.com · U.S. Citizen · Active Secret Clearance

SUMMARY

Program manager with 12 years of federal service leading multi-site programs and cross-agency initiatives. Currently manage a \$31M program portfolio and a team of 18 across two locations. Took a program that had missed milestones for three consecutive years to full schedule compliance within 18 months. Seeking Supervisory Program Manager, GS-0340-14.

SKILLS

Leadership: Supervision, performance management, hiring, organizational design, change management

Program: Program and portfolio management, milestone and risk management, budget formulation and execution, cross-agency coordination

Governance: Congressional and executive reporting, audit response, policy development, executive briefing

Acquisition: Requirements development, performance work statements, contract oversight, Contracting Officer's Representative duties

Analysis: Performance measurement, data governance, evaluation design, cost and schedule variance analysis

EXPERIENCE

Program Manager, GS-0340-13 | U.S. Department of the Interior, Denver, CO

July 2021 – Present | 40 hours per week | GS-0340-13, Step 6 | Supervisor: A. Whitfield, (303) 555-0102, do not contact

- Manage a \$31M program portfolio and a team of 18 across two locations, reporting to the Deputy Assistant Director.
- Restored a program that had missed milestones for three consecutive years to 100% schedule compliance within 18 months by restructuring the governance cadence and rebaselining scope.
- Led a cross-agency working group spanning four bureaus, producing the shared data standard now in use across all four.
- Formulated and executed annual budget submissions; delivered three consecutive years within 2% of plan.
- Resolved two audit findings from a prior cycle and closed both ahead of the required remediation date.
- Selected and onboarded 7 staff; developed 3 employees who have since been promoted.
- Rebuilt the risk register and governance cadence for the portfolio, moving from quarterly ad hoc reviews to a monthly cycle with defined escalation thresholds.
- Prepared and delivered 6 briefings to Senior Executive Service leadership and 2 responses to Congressional inquiries, all within required deadlines.
- Negotiated a revised interagency agreement that resolved a two-year funding dispute and secured \$4.1M in reimbursable authority.
- Chaired the bureau's hiring review panel for 0343 and 0340 positions, standardizing assessment criteria across three divisions.
- Represent the division on the Department's data governance council, with responsibility for implementing standards across a 400-person organization.

Supervisory Program Analyst, GS-0343-12 | U.S. Department of the Interior, Denver, CO

September 2018 – July 2021 | 40 hours per week | GS-0343-12, Step 4 | Supervisor: J. Mbeki, (303) 555-0177, may contact

- Supervised a team of 6 analysts supporting a \$12M program area.
- Designed the performance reporting framework adopted region-wide across 9 offices.
- Served as acting Program Manager for 5 months during a vacancy, with no disruption to milestone delivery.
- Rewrote the division's performance work statements for three recurring support contracts, tightening deliverable definitions and measurable standards.

- Managed the annual data call for the region, consolidating submissions from 9 offices and delivering the regional package 12 days ahead of the deadline.
- Trained 14 analysts on the new reporting framework and wrote the reference guide still issued to new staff.

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Program Analyst, GS-0343-11 | U.S. Department of Agriculture, Fort Collins, CO

June 2014 – September 2018 | 40 hours per week | GS-0343-11, Step 3 | Supervisor: C. Iverson, (970) 555-0119, may contact

- Analyzed program performance across 14 field offices and produced the quarterly report delivered to regional leadership.
- Led the regional transition to a new grants management system affecting 200 users, completed on schedule with no lapse in award processing.
- Developed the standard operating procedures for grant closeout still in use across the region.
- Reviewed an average of 120 grant applications annually for completeness and eligibility, maintaining a 3-day average turnaround.
- Resolved a backlog of 46 aged closeout files inherited from a predecessor, clearing all within one fiscal year.
- Represented the region on a national working group that produced revised reporting guidance adopted agency-wide.

ADDITIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

Detail assignments: Acting Branch Chief, GS-0340-14 equivalent, March – August 2023 (6 months), managing 31 staff and a \$52M portfolio during a vacancy. Served on the Department's reorganization planning team, January – June 2022.

Awards: Superior Service Award (2024); two Special Act Awards (2022, 2019) for program turnaround and audit remediation.

Training: Federal Executive Institute, Leadership for a Democratic Society (2024); OPM Supervisory Development Program (2020).

EDUCATION & CERTIFICATIONS

Master of Public Administration — University of Colorado Denver, 2018

Bachelor of Science, Environmental Policy — Colorado State University, 2014

Project Management Professional (PMP), 2020 · Federal Acquisition Certification for Program and Project Managers (FAC-P/PM), Mid-Level, 2022

WHY THIS WORKS

- Headcount, budget, sites, and reporting line all appear in the first bullet. That is what a selecting official reads first at GS-14.
- Series and grade appear on every federal position, which is required and which also makes her progression legible at a glance.
- "Developed 3 employees who have since been promoted" is the most persuasive line on the page for a supervisory announcement, because it is the hardest thing to fabricate.
- Acting in the role during a vacancy is stated explicitly. For an internal promotion that is direct evidence she has already done the job.
- No tools section. At this level software proficiency is assumed and the space is worth more elsewhere.

What All Three Have in Common

Pattern	Why it matters
Hours per week on every single entry	Without it, a specialist may be unable to credit the experience at all. It is the most commonly omitted required field.
Month and year on both ends of every date	Duration of specialized experience is calculated from these. Year-only dates create ambiguity that is resolved against you.
Series and grade on federal positions	Required, and it makes level equivalency immediately legible.
Compliance block on one line	Dates, hours, pay and supervisor all on a single meta line under the job title. Three lines saved per role, which is several bullets on a two-page document.
"Do not contact" on the current role	You are not obliged to let a prospective employer call your current supervisor. Saying so explicitly is normal and expected.
A number in nearly every bullet	Scope is what distinguishes candidates. Dollars, people, sites, transactions, percentages, time.
Space allocated by relevance	The most relevant role gets the most lines even when it is not the most recent.
Clearance in the contact block	Immediately valuable and frequently buried at the bottom where nobody sees it.
Older roles compressed to one or two lines	They establish progression. They do not need to argue a case.
DO NOT COPY THESE They are patterns, not templates. A resume assembled from someone else's phrasing reads as assembled, and it will not survive the interview where you are asked to expand on a bullet you did not write. Use the structure, the field discipline, and the level of specificity. Supply your own facts.	

Part Nine: The Four Essay Questions

Read this part before you start typing into the application. There is a certification attached.

Competitive service announcements open to the public at GS-05 and above now include four short free-response essay questions, standardized by the Merit Hiring Plan. They are capped at roughly two hundred words each. Teacher, Wage Grade, and seasonal positions are excluded, and agencies may exempt other positions at their discretion.

A detail that catches people out: the questions do not appear in the announcement text. They surface inside the application flow after you begin applying. Applicants who read a posting top to bottom and see no essays are frequently surprised mid-application, with the closing date approaching.

The four topics

Topic	What it asks for
Commitment to the Constitution	How that commitment led you to pursue this role, with a concrete example from professional, academic, or personal experience
Government efficiency and effectiveness	How you would use your skills in this role to improve outcomes, with specific examples of processes improved, costs reduced, or results changed
Executive Orders and policy priorities	One or two relevant Executive Orders or policy initiatives significant to you, and how you would help implement them
Work ethic	How a strong work ethic has contributed to your professional, academic, or personal achievements

The certification — read this twice

YOU MUST WRITE THESE YOURSELF

When you submit these responses, you certify that you did not use artificial intelligence tools or outside consultants to generate them. That certification is made under 18 U.S.C. 1001, the federal false statements statute.

Knowingly making a false certification on a federal application is a federal crime carrying fines and potential imprisonment.

This is not a formality and it is not unenforceable. Do not paste these questions into

any AI writing tool. Do not hire anyone to draft them. Do not adapt sample answers you found online.

This guide therefore contains no model answers, and you should be skeptical of any product that sells them to you. What follows is preparation material — thinking prompts and a structure — so that what you write is genuinely yours.

Preparation, not drafting

The most effective preparation is a story bank. Before you sit down to write, collect the raw experiences. Then, in the application itself, write from them in your own voice, in one sitting, without a template in front of you.

STORY BANK PROMPTS

Describe a time you upheld a rule, standard, or principle when it would have been easier or more popular not to.

Describe a process you changed. What was wrong with it, what did you do, and what measurably improved?

Name a policy area or initiative you have actually followed and care about. Why does it matter to you, and what could you contribute to it in this role?

Describe something you finished that most people would have abandoned. What kept you in it?

A STRUCTURE TO HOLD IN YOUR HEAD

Two hundred words is about three short paragraphs. A workable shape: one or two sentences answering the question directly, then a concrete example with enough specificity to be verifiable, then one sentence connecting it to the role you are applying for. Plain language. First person. No slogans.

PRACTICAL NOTES

Answering is generally your choice; agencies are required to include the questions, but the responses are optional and are typically reviewed by the hiring manager and agency leadership rather than scored during qualification screening.

A blank response is not a violation. A fabricated certification is. Weigh that accordingly.

Because the questions are standardized government-wide, the same four stories can serve every application you submit — but write fresh each time.

Part Ten: The Pre-Submission Audit

Run this every time. It takes ten minutes and it catches the errors that end applications.

COMPLIANCE

- ☐ Two pages or fewer, confirmed in the actual PDF or in the USAJOBS builder
- ☐ Every position has employer, title, start and end month and year, and hours per week
- ☐ Federal positions show series and grade
- ☐ Every required document from the announcement is attached
- ☐ Applying to the correct announcement number, before the closing date
- ☐ No photograph, date of birth, marital status, or full social security number

TARGETING

- ☐ Every element of the specialized experience statement is visibly evidenced
- ☐ The announcement's own vocabulary appears where it is truthful
- ☐ The most relevant role occupies the most space, regardless of recency
- ☐ Nothing on the page is there only because it was on the last version

QUALITY

- ☐ Every bullet has a result, not just a duty
- ☐ Numbers appear throughout, and every one is defensible in an interview
- ☐ No acronym appears without being spelled out on first use
- ☐ No military or agency-internal jargon a general reader would miss
- ☐ Read aloud once, start to finish, for typos and dead sentences

MECHANICS

- ☐ Standard font, ten to twelve point
- ☐ No tables, columns, text boxes, graphics, or content in headers and footers
- ☐ Saved and reviewed in the format the announcement requires

- ☐ Filename is professional and identifies you

ONE LAST THING

Log the announcement number, the closing date, and the version of the resume you submitted. Federal timelines are long — a call can come months later, and you will want to know exactly what that manager read.

Part Eleven: Paths Other Than the Front Door

Competitive announcements are the most crowded way in. They are not the only way.

Veterans preference and veteran appointing authorities

Preference adds points or places you in a higher consideration group on competitive announcements, but it is not the only mechanism. Separate hiring authorities exist that let agencies appoint eligible veterans without competition. These are distinct from preference and are worth understanding as a separate track — the documentation requirements differ, and eligibility depends on service characterization, disability rating, and time since separation.

- Confirm which authorities you qualify for before you apply, not after
- Keep a clean, current DD-214 member copy 4 and any VA rating documentation ready to attach
- Announcements sometimes open only to specific authorities — filter for them deliberately

Other routes worth knowing

Route	What it is
Direct hire authority	Agencies fill hard-to-staff occupations without the usual rating and ranking. Fast, and often less crowded.
Schedule A	Non-competitive appointment for individuals with qualifying disabilities, with its own documentation requirements.
Excepted service agencies	Some agencies hire outside the competitive service entirely, with their own processes and their own resume norms.
Term and temporary appointments	Shorter commitments that frequently convert, and that build the federal experience competitive announcements ask for.
Contractor to federal	Supporting an agency as a contractor builds directly relevant specialized experience and internal visibility.
THE STRATEGIC POINT	
Applicants who only chase public competitive announcements are competing against the largest possible pool for the smallest possible share of openings. Every hour spent	

Route	What it is
	understanding which alternate route fits your situation is worth ten applications.

Closing

The two-page limit felt to many federal applicants like a door closing. In practice it has been a leveling. The applicant with fifteen years and an eight-page archive no longer has an automatic advantage over the applicant who can state clearly, in seven hundred words, exactly why they meet the standard.

That skill is learnable. It is mostly a matter of reading the announcement more carefully than feels necessary, keeping a master file so you never start from zero, and being willing to cut things you are proud of because they do not serve this particular application.

Federal timelines are slow and the feedback is thin. You will send applications into silence. Track what you send, improve the next one, and keep the master file growing. The process rewards persistence more than it rewards perfection.

SOURCES AND CURRENCY

The rules described here reflect the Merit Hiring Plan issued by the Office of Personnel Management on May 29, 2025, implementing Executive Order 14170, together with subsequent OPM implementation guidance and USAJOBS help documentation current as of mid-2026.

Federal hiring policy changes. Verify current requirements at usajobs.gov and opm.gov, and treat the job opportunity announcement as controlling in every case.