

Federal Resume Guidebook

Strategies for Writing a Winning Federal Resume

FIFTH EDITION

Kathryn Kraemer Troutman

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Foreword

One of the advantages associated with the four decades I've spent working on federal workforce issues is that it becomes easier to put new developments into perspective. That's why I'm actually quite impressed with where the federal government is right now in its ongoing quest to create an effective, modern, and applicant-friendly approach to hiring. It's not that the government has yet achieved that goal—it hasn't—but it has made improving the hiring process a top priority and real progress is being made! This is good news for the American public. The daunting challenges facing our nation make attracting and hiring a highly talented workforce an absolute imperative for the federal government, and improving the federal hiring process will certainly help in that regard.

The news for potential applicants for federal jobs, however, is mixed. The good news is that it is slowly becoming easier to find and apply for a federal job. Further, with more than 80,000 federal employees retiring or otherwise leaving the federal government each year, there are many jobs that need to be filled. The less positive news for potential applicants, however, is that there will still be stiff competition for most of those jobs. And while the quantity of information that must be submitted to apply for a federal job is less than in previous years, the quality of that information may need to be higher in order to be successful. And that's where this fifth edition of Kathryn Troutman's *Federal Resume Guidebook* comes in.

Let me elaborate just a bit. To be sure, there have been other substantial changes in the federal hiring process over the last 40 years. For example, in the '70s almost all job candidates submitted their applications to the U.S. Civil Service Commission (which became the U.S. Office of Personnel Management in 1978) under a centralized approach to screening job applicants. Today, recruiting and examining is almost totally decentralized. Each federal department and agency has been delegated authority to recruit and assess job applicants for their positions. However, almost all of the changes that occurred prior to this time focused on the needs and administrative process requirements of the agencies. What is different now is that the focus has shifted to take into account the impact of the hiring process on the applicant. This shift is driven by an understanding that some of the best potential candidates for any job will simply not bother to apply if the process is too onerous, time-consuming, or lacking in transparency.

A memo dated May 11, 2010, from the President of the United States directed the heads of each federal department and agency to make substantial changes to their hiring process by November 1, 2010. The memo made it clear that those changes were to also make the process more applicant-friendly. For example, among the directed changes was the elimination of any requirement that applicants start the process by writing essay-style answers to questions about their relative knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs). Further, individuals must now be able to apply for a federal job by submitting a resume and cover letter or by completing a "simple, plain-language" application.

This is great for applicants, but it has created a challenge for at least some federal agencies. Those agencies that have been relying heavily on the information provided in the KSA essays to help guide their selections now need to find alternative ways to get the information they need. This means that the savvy job applicant has to find ways to make it as easy as possible for those federal agencies to find out everything they should know about their personal qualifications and their "fit" for the job. But they have to do that in a very concise format.

So—what's the savvy job applicant to do? Clearly, they will need to do their homework and pay close attention to the relevant details about the job and the application process contained in the announcement for each federal job in which they are interested. Simply submitting the same boilerplate resume and cover letter to every job one sees is not going to be nearly as successful as a carefully tailored response that speaks to the specifics of each job.

Finally, another action the savvy job applicant can take is to seek out those who have spent considerable time and effort in studying the federal hiring system and who have some helpful advice to offer. The really good news in this last regard is that if you are reading this foreword, you already hold in your hands (or are looking at on your screen) some really good advice on how to enhance your chances of being hired for a federal job. Kathryn Troutman has literally made a career out of understanding and tracking the evolution of the federal hiring system and translating that understanding into practical advice for the job seeker. The federal government and the public it serves have a vested interest in ensuring that federal jobs are carried out by highly talented, motivated employees. If you have the talent and an active interest in being one of those employees—I commend this book to your attention!

—John M. Palguta, Vice President for Policy, Partnership for Public Service

Acknowledgments

I am thankful for our clients, who teach us with every federal resume request how to write the best federal resume targeted toward a USAJOBS announcement in 3,000 characters. Your career challenges are our federal resume writing challenges. We do our best to follow every rule in this book to make sure the resume matches the announcement and stands out as Best Qualified!

The sample federal resumes in this book were contributed by real federal job seekers who were translating their skills into the USAJOBS federal resume. Thank you so much to Phyllis Day, Tim Shea, Angella Greaves, Greg Hall, Sonia Neblett, Louise Rubin, Lisa Casillas, Anlecta L. Kenney, Chris Troutman, David Raikow, and Harrell Watkins.

Thank you, RP writing team! The Resume Place Certified Federal Resume Writers are magicians and miracle workers with our career-change federal resumes. They are expert analysts, listeners, coaches, writers, and editors. They created the outstanding federal resumes in this book, which resulted in new federal careers for our clients.

Thank you to my government training coordinators who trusted me to teach their employees federal resume writing and ECQ writing. This book was used as a text in most of these federal resume and KSA writing and ECQ writing workshops throughout the U.S. and Europe. Special thanks to Joan Guidinas from HQ AFPC/DPIFDA, Randolph AFB; Glovinia Harris from USN CNREURAFSWA, Naples; Ron Rothberg from NAVSEA Workforce Development Branch; Kari Hurlburt, 19FSS/FSFR Section Chief, Little Rock AFB; Sandra R. Nichols, DAF, Airman, Family & Community Operations Branch, Directorate of Personnel Services, Headquarters Air Force Personnel Center; Kenneth Elstein, Organizational Change and Communications Specialist, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Research and Development/OARS; Dominique Mitchell, Government-wide Internship Programs, Department of Interior University; Scott L. Cromwell, Chief, DHS/FEMA, Distribution Center Frederick, Frederick, MD; Brigitte Keels, WASO Learning and Development, Washington, DC; Teresa Shipman, Army Community Service, Employment Readiness Branch Manager, Ft. Hood, TX; Lenora Challenger, NSWC PHD, Port Hueneme, CA; Venis V. Mathews, Training Coordinator, VA Health Eligibility Center, Atlanta, GA; Tamika Beverly, Patent and Trademark Office, Equal Employment Office, Alexandria, VA; Loretta Gladden, USDA-AMS, Washington, DC; and Sandra Smith from the BRAC Center, Arlington County, VA.

Thank you, CFJST Ten Step Trainers from Navy, AF, USCG, USMC, ANG, universities, and veteran's centers for believing in the curriculum for your customers! The Certified Federal Job Search Trainers and *Ten Steps to a Federal Job* trainers are my colleagues and help me follow all of the hiring reforms, hiring programs, and veteran/spouse challenges.

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Thank you to Lori Cates Hand and Heather Stith from JIST, who had amazing patience to edit and organize this complicated guide with dozens of samples, charts, keywords, and references. Thank you for your detailed and expert professional editorial help!

This book is dedicated to the current and future federal civil servants who provide safety and excellent services for the American public every day. Your accomplishments do make a difference to Americans!

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Karen Silberstein is an experienced federal resume and KSA writer and coach. She came to The Resume Place with more than 12 years of professional writing experience and more than five years in educational publishing, designing and implementing training, education, and professional development programs. She also has experience in outreach and communications on Capitol Hill. Using her skills in writing, research, and analysis, Karen helps clients identify strengths and accomplishments to create competitive, successful resumes and present polished applications with superlative materials. Karen holds a Ph.D. from Columbia University in French literature. Prior to working for The Resume Place, Karen taught French language and humanities classes for more than 10 years to college students in New York City.

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Carla Waskiewicz is an experienced Resume Place writer and has created federal application packages for federal and private-sector employees with a wide variety of occupational backgrounds and career interests. Carla has been a contributing writer for a number of Resume Place publications. She wrote the chapter on administrative positions for the *Federal Resume Guidebook*. Her administrative resumes are among the examples on the CD-ROM for this book. Her presentation format for administrative resumes is very popular, and it is used all over the country. Her resumes appear in two of Kathryn Troutman's latest books: *Creating Your High School Resume*, Second Edition, published by JIST, and *Ten Steps to a Federal Job*, Second Edition. A number of her private-sector resumes were selected for inclusion in the 2006 edition of *Resumes For Dummies* by Joyce Lain Kennedy. Carla is recognized by the Professional Association of Resume Writers and Career Coaches as a Certified Professional Resume Writer (CPRW) and has also earned the professional designation of Certified Federal Resume Writer and Coach (CFRWC). She earned her B.A. in Communications from Penn State University, and she has completed postgraduate work in business management at the University of Baltimore.

Brian Wolak is a seasoned technical writer with experience in marketing, communications, and management in his career with T. Rowe Price. As a communications and marketing specialist, Brian wrote on a variety of topics, including tax implications, investments, and legal matters. As a supervisor, he managed the work of up to 15 employees per department, working with various departments within the company. Brian has invaluable experience in the hiring process. He is a skilled interviewer from the perspective of a technical writer interviewing subject-matter specialists and of a supervisor interviewing potential employees. At T. Rowe Price, he developed a new and consistent approach to interviewing and hiring employees, created a guide for interviewers, and developed a packet for prospective employees to provide information on job qualifications and job expectations. Brian received his B.S. in English and Philosophy from Towson University and his M.A. in English from the College of Notre Dame of Maryland.

Introduction

The fifth edition of the *Federal Resume Guidebook* has three objectives: first, to teach you how to target your resume content toward a specific position; second, how to add accomplishments so your resume will stand out and hopefully get referred to a supervisor; and third, to help you format your content for the best readability for the USAJOBS resume builder.

President Obama's Hiring Reform—enacted on November 4, 2010—was exciting and resulted in a number of changes in this book toward the last minute.

Part 1 is all about successful writing strategies for the federal resume. Chapter 1 has a sample of a USAJOBS resume and a paper federal resume. Chapter 2, about what happens to your resume, is all new and was added because of Category Rating and Hiring Reform. Federal job seekers want to know how applications are scored and what happens to their federal resume. Chapter 3 introduces the highly successful Outline Format resume, which could be one of the most important things in the book. The federal human resources specialists really like this format because it is so easy to read and see the top skills they need for their jobs. Because of Hiring Reform, the KSAs are now proven in the resume with accomplishments. The federal resume samples in this book include KSA Accomplishments in the resume. The matching strategies and KSA accomplishments added into the federal resume can help you get Best Qualified and Referred. The keyword chapter is better and shorter than ever. Nowadays we are looking for 10 keywords for each announcement and resume. This entire section is a *must read* for anyone who wants a federal job.

Part 2 will help you write your federal resume with the best possible language. Being concise, positive, professional, and interesting is important in getting your federal resume read by both federal human resources specialists and supervisors. Chapter 8, "Researching the Agency's Core Competencies," is becoming more critical than ever. HR specialists and supervisors are looking for basic core competencies in their new hires, including customer services, creative thinking, and interpersonal skills. These competencies are important and should be included in your federal resume.

Part 3 is about the second part of the federal application. This section covers Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities narratives. Yes, the KSAs are supposed to be eliminated, but they are still written on the vacancy announcements, covered in the questionnaires, and even sometimes included in required narratives. KSA Accomplishments are critical to the success of your resume. In almost all cases, the total federal application should include the federal resume and a questionnaire. The questionnaire is a multiple-choice self-assessment of your skills. And with Hiring Reform, now cover letters are accepted along with your resume, questionnaire, and other documents. The cover letter needs to be persuasive, informative, and impressive.

Part 4 covers how to apply for federal jobs. We look at the language and instructions in the vacancy announcements and questionnaires. It's all about the details and following the directions. The federal resume is the critical application, but if you do not submit your transcripts, or submit them on time, you will lose consideration for the job. This chapter reviews the USAJOBS resume builder so that you know the character limits and what to expect.

Part 5 is written to inspire job applicants in certain occupational series. Each of the series we selected for the book has a certain challenge for writing. Scientists are challenged to write a resume that the human resources specialist *and* the expert hiring manager can understand. IT specialists do not think of projects or competencies. Contract specialists don't remember that they are negotiators and business representatives, and manage customer services. Administrative assistants don't give themselves enough credit. Management analysts analyze, give briefings, create Excel reports, write, and analyze programs for managers; this is a very popular job series in government. Engineers need help with describing specific projects and core competencies. Human resources specialists need to know that the Engineering series is technical and specific—and they are hiring!

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Part 6 covers special applications for Senior Executive Service, DOD Priority Placement Program employees, military personnel who are seeking federal careers, and military spouses who would like to begin a stable federal career while accompanying their spouse around the world. And this edition includes a new chapter for federal job seekers with disabilities; this part gives excellent insight into using Schedule A to find positions with special accommodations that are targeted for people with disabilities. Each of the chapters in Part 6 includes an excellent sample federal resume to help job seekers see the writing strategies discussed.

Part 7 covers the all-important behavior-based interview. It is an amazing opportunity to be invited to the federal job interview. It is imperative that you get prepared and practice for the interview. The interview is a test and you will be scored. This requires practice. Chapter 27 gives you practice questions and ideas for the best answers.

Overall, this federal career text is dedicated to federal job seekers who are persevering, determined, and deserving of an outstanding career. Good luck with your applications and follow the directions! Thank you for purchasing this book and following the samples in it. The HR specialists will appreciate your effort when they are reviewing resumes.

—Kathryn K. Troutman, author, kathryn@resume-place.com

