

FREE GUIDE

Get Referred.

The USAJobs Resume Checklist That Makes It Happen.

Everything your 2-page federal resume must have before you hit Apply — so you stop getting screened out automatically.

"One missing field gets your application flagged as ineligible. This checklist tells you exactly what must be present — based on current 2026 OPM and USAJobs requirements."

2 PAGES

OPM limit
since Sept 2025

9+ YRS

Federal
experience

2026

Current OPM
standards

FREE

No credit
card needed

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BEFORE YOU HIT APPLY

The Checklist That Gets You Referred.

This is not a formatting guide. It is a compliance guide. One wrong field — or one field you forgot to remove — can flag your application as ineligible before a single human being reads your name. Use this every time you apply.

QUICK WIN

Build or preview your resume inside the USAJobs Resume Builder before submitting. It enforces required fields automatically and shows your exact page count in real time. If uploading a PDF, verify the page count in your profile preview before you hit Apply.

SECTION 1 · HARD SYSTEM LIMITS

■ **Automatic disqualifiers — fix these before anything else.**

■ Strict Two-Page Limit

Your resume must be exactly two pages or less. USAJobs enforces this automatically — if your resume exceeds two pages, the system blocks the upload or flags your application as ineligible. In effect since September 27, 2025.

■ File Format and Size

Save and upload as a PDF. This locks your formatting and preserves your page count. File must be 5 MB or less. USAJobs also accepts DOC, DOCX, RTF, and TXT — but PDF is recommended.

SECTION 2 · CRITICAL DATA FIELDS

Required for every position listed. HR verifies these before evaluating your qualifications. Missing any of them is a common reason applications are disqualified automatically.

■ Hours Per Week — Every Position

List average hours worked per week for every job. Example: "40 hours/week." For part-time roles, state the exact hours. This is how HR calculates your qualifying experience.

■ Month and Year Dates — MM/YYYY Format

Use MM/YYYY for all start and end dates. Example: 05/2019 to 08/2022. Writing '2019–2022' prevents HR from calculating your time-in-grade. That costs you a referral.

■ Employer Name and Official Job Title

Include full employer or agency name and your exact official job title for every position. For past federal positions, include the specific job series and grade level (e.g., GS-0343-12).

SECTION 3 · WHAT TO REMOVE

➤ Space-saving updates — these belong in your USAJobs profile, not your resume.

■ Supervisor Contact Information

You no longer need your supervisor's name, title, and contact on the resume itself. This belongs in the USAJobs Work History profile blocks. Include it on the resume only if a specific announcement explicitly requires it.

■ Salary, Street Addresses, and Availability

Remove salary history, full street addresses, availability statements, and location preferences. City and state is sufficient. HR pulls salary from your profile. This frees up space for your actual accomplishments.

■ Photos, SSN, Date of Birth, and High School Dates

Never include a photo, Social Security Number, or date of birth. Remove high school graduation dates. These are disqualifying additions, not helpful ones.

■ Graphics, Columns, and Fancy Formatting

Remove all graphics, icons, colored backgrounds, text boxes, and columns. The USA Staffing ATS system does not parse formatted layouts reliably. Plain single-column text only.

■ Outdated or Repetitive Roles

Cut jobs older than 10 years unless directly relevant to this specific position. For career ladder positions, condense into a single entry noting time at the highest grade level.

WHY THESE CHANGES MATTER

The information you're removing — supervisor contacts, salary, street addresses — now lives in your USAJobs profile which HR can access directly. Keeping it on the resume wastes the two pages you need for performance evidence.

SECTION 4 · CONTENT & ATS KEYWORDS

Your resume must survive automated screening before a human ever reads it. These rules determine whether you get referred or filtered out.

■ Mirror the Exact Keywords From the Job Announcement

Open the Job Opportunity Announcement. Find the Specialized Experience section. The exact phrases used there must appear in your resume — not paraphrased versions. If automated screening runs first, it is looking for those exact words. So are human reviewers.

■ Quantify Every Accomplishment

Remove phrases like "responsible for" and "assisted with." Every bullet must be results-oriented — metrics, budget sizes, percentages, team sizes, volume. Example: 'Managed \$2.4M program portfolio across 6 divisions, delivering 100% on-time completion for 3 consecutive fiscal years.'

■ Include Your Most Recent Performance Rating

Under proposed March 2026 OPM RIF rules, performance ratings — not years of service — are being positioned as the primary factor in who survives a reduction in force. If you were rated Outstanding or Exceeds Expectations, include it in your summary or most recent position.

SECTION 5 · FORMATTING RULES

■ Font and Margins — USAJobs Official Standards

Set page margins to exactly 0.5 inches. Use a clean sans-serif font: Lato, Calibri, Helvetica, or Arial — all recommended by USAJobs. Use 10-point font for body text and 14-point for section headings. Do not go smaller than 10pt.

■ Single-Column, Plain-Text Layout Only

No columns, tables, text boxes, or graphics. USA Staffing parses single-column plain text most reliably. Columns and tables break parsing and can cause your experience to be skipped entirely.

■ Apply Within 48 Hours of Posting

Many federal positions close after the first 100 to 200 applications — not on the closing date. If a position receives 200 applications by 1:30pm ET, it closes that same day. Set USAJobs alerts and apply within 48 hours.

MERIT ESSAY REMINDER — ALL FOUR REQUIRED FOR GS-05+

Constitution, Efficiency, Executive Orders, Work Ethic. Each is 200 words maximum. They must be written by you, in your own words, from your own experience. OPM's 2026 fraud detection scans for AI-generated text. Hand-edit every response before submitting.

Need your resume done for you?

HCG done-for-you federal resumes are OPM 2-page compliant, ATS optimized, and keyword matched to your target series. Career pivot and federal-to-private transition packages also available.

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