

F&V Programs



Join us for a Webcast!

This Fall, we will hold a one hour live “webcast” during which you can submit questions about resumes, interviews, and the Federal hiring process to a group of knowledgeable panelists from your work computer using Microsoft NetMeeting software.

Look for information on the time and date of this Webcast in the near future.

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Employee Development Newsletter

From the Deputy Administrator . . .

In April, I asked for your input and ideas on Employee Development training, and I received a number of very thoughtful responses. I want to thank you for your terrific ideas, and take this opportunity to let you know what you can expect in the coming months.

This newsletter represents the first of what will be several issues providing you with information on a variety of employee development topics, including resume preparation, interviewing skills, and health and wellness. We will also include information on some of the “paths” that employees take to advance in their careers, such as shadowing, mentoring, and detail assignments. I will work to ensure that the content of this and future issues reflects the valuable input we received from so many of you.

This newsletter deals exclusively with resume preparation that can be used in applications for

positions within the Federal government. In the next issue, we’ll cover interview skills and techniques. I’m starting with these two topics because statistics from the recent *AMS Workforce Plan* indicate that a large percentage of our employees are currently eligible to retire, or will become eligible within the next five years. Losing these knowledgeable employees will be difficult, but will create opportunities for others to advance in their careers. Of course, a new position is never guaranteed—it is the result of a competitive process. It is important to remember that employers are selecting from a number of very qualified people. Oftentimes, the list of potential candidates competing for a job opening includes current government employees along with applicants from the private sector.

The successful candidate must possess the skills and abilities sought by the employer, but he or she must also know *how to present*

those attributes skillfully and professionally on a resume and in a personal interview.

Because we know that many jobs will likely be advertised in the next few years, I thought this would be an opportune time to provide information and helpful tips to our employees on how to prepare a good resume, since that is the starting point of the job search process. A good resume “gets you in the door,” and this newsletter provides a wealth of information on how to write a good one.

I hope that you find this newsletter worthwhile. As always, your comments are appreciated, and can be submitted electronically to our “comment box” found on our F&V Intranet site located at:

<http://insideams.ams.usda.gov/fvintranet/fvindex.htm>

Robert C. Keeney

Preparing a Winning Resume for the Federal Application Process

Resume Formats

There is no “perfect” or “right” resume format. The format you choose will depend upon the job you hope to find and your past experiences. This section shows resume formats. Look them over and determine what format or combination of formats will present you in the best possible light. Remember, the purpose of a resume is to get you a job interview. The interview gets you the job.

General Resume Guidelines

The following guidelines are just that—guidelines for what to include in a good resume. Remember, the function of a resume is to obtain a job interview for you. Use your common sense and imagination

to highlight your background and experience in a well-focused resume.

Length

A one-page resume works well for the recent graduate. If you have an extensive work history, two pages are reasonable. Remember, individuals with extensive work history should limit information to what is pertinent to their current job objective. If you do go to two pages, make sure the most important information is stated on the first page.

Appearance

An organized, readable layout determines whether a resume is read. Direct the reader’s eye with the format. Make sure it is well-organized and concise. Avoid dense text appearance, which is difficult

to read. Use a high-quality white or off-white paper. Always type or word-process your resume and have it professionally copied. Make sure there are no typographical, spelling or grammatical errors.

Content

Design your resume with a particular objective in mind. Present information important to the objective first, and then list your information in descending order of importance. Be selective about what you include in your resume, but never falsify or exaggerate information. Sell yourself— attract attention to your special abilities. Concentrate on the positive and use action verbs to describe your background.

“The following guidelines are just that— guidelines for what to include in a good resume.”



The Top 10 Pitfalls of Resume Writing

1. Too long. One page is often enough. If you have trouble condensing, get help from a technical or business writer or a career center professional.
2. Typographical, grammatical or spelling errors. These errors suggest carelessness, poor education and/or lack of intelligence. Have at least two people proofread your resume. Don't rely on a computer's spell-checkers or grammar-checkers.
3. Hard to read. A poorly typed or copied resume looks unprofessional. Use a computer. Use a plain typeface, no smaller than a 12-point font.
4. Too verbose (using too many words to say too little). Do not use complete sentences or paragraphs. Say as much as possible with as few words as possible. Be careful in your use of jargon and avoid slang.
5. Too sparse. Give more than the bare essentials, especially when describing related work experience, skills and accomplishments that will give employers desired information.
6. Irrelevant information. Customize each resume to each position you seek (when possible). Of course, include all education and work experience, but emphasize only relevant experience, skills, accomplishments, activities and hobbies.
7. Obviously generic. Too many resumes scream, “I need a job—any job!” The employer needs to feel that you are interested in *that* position with *that* organization.
8. Too snazzy. Of course, use good quality bond paper, but avoid exotic types, colored paper, photographs, binders and graphics. More and more companies are scanning resumes into a database, so use white paper, black ink, plain type, and avoid symbols, underlining or italics.
9. Boring. Make your resume as dynamic as possible. Begin every statement with an action verb.
10. Too modest. The resume showcases your qualifications in competition with the other applicants. Put your best foot forward!

15 Hot Tips for Writing Resumes

1. What should the resume content be about?

It's not just about past jobs! It's about YOU, and how you performed and what you accomplished in those past jobs—especially those accomplishments that are most relevant to the work you want to do next. A good resume predicts how you might perform in that desired future job.

2. What's the fastest way to improve a resume?

Remove everything that starts with "responsibilities included" and replace it with on-the-job accomplishments. (See Tip 11 for one way to write them.)

3. What is the most common resume mistake made by job hunters?

Leaving out their Job Objective! If you don't show a sense of direction, employers won't be interested. Having a clearly stated goal doesn't have to confine you if it's stated well.

4. What's the first step in writing a resume?

Decide on a job target (or "job objective") that can be stated in about 5 or 6 words. Anything beyond that is probably "fluff."

5. What if you don't have any experience in the kind of work you want to do?

Get some! Find a place that will let you do some volunteer work right away. You only need a brief, concentrated period of volunteer training.

6. What do you do if you have gaps in your work experience?

You could start by looking at it differently. General Rule: Tell what you WERE doing, as gracefully as possible—rather than leave a gap. If you were doing anything valuable (even if unpaid) during those so-called "gaps" you could just insert THAT into the work-history section of your resume to fill the hole. Here are some examples:

- 1993-95 Full-time parent -- or
- 1992-94 Maternity leave

7. What if you have several different job objectives you're working on at the same time?

Then write a different resume for each different job target. A targeted resume is MUCH stronger than a generic resume.

8. What if you have a fragmented, scrambled-up work history, with lots of short-term jobs?

To minimize the job-hopper image, combine several similar jobs into one "chunk," for example:

- 1993-1995 Secretary/Receptionist; Jones Bakery, Micro Corp., Carter Jewelers -- or
- 1993-95 Waiter/Busboy; McDougal's Restaurant, Burger King, Traders Coffee Shop.

You can also drop some of the less important, briefest jobs. But don't drop a job, even when it lasted a short time, if that was where you acquired important skills or experience.

9. What's the best way to impress an employer?

Fill your resume with "PAR" statements. PAR stands for Problem-Action-Results; in other words, first you state the problem that existed in your workplace, then you describe what you did about it, and finally you point out the beneficial results.

Here's an example: "Transformed a disorganized, inefficient warehouse into a smooth-running operation by totally re-designing the layout; this saved the company thousands of dollars in recovered stock."

10. What if your job title doesn't reflect your actual level of responsibility?

When you list it on the resume, either replace it with a more appropriate job title (say "Office Manager" instead of "Administrative Assistant" if that's more realistic) OR use their job title AND your

better one together, i.e. "Administrative Assistant (Office Manager)"

11. How much experience should I include?

If you're over 40 or 50 or 60, remember that you don't have to present your entire work history! You can simply label that part of your resume "Recent Work History" or "Relevant Work History" and then describe only the last 10 or 15 years of your experience. Below your 10-15 year work history, you could add a paragraph headed "Prior relevant experience" and simply refer to any additional important (but ancient) jobs without mentioning dates.

12. What if you never had any "real" paid jobs—only self-employment or odd jobs?

Give yourself credit, and create an accurate, fair job-title for yourself. For example:

- A&S Hauling & Cleaning (Self-employed)

13. How can a student list summer jobs?

Students can make their resume look neater by listing seasonal jobs very simply, such as "Spring 1996" or "Summer 1996" rather than 6/96 to 9/96. (The word "Spring" can be in very tiny letters, say 8-point in size.)

14. What if you don't have your degree or credentials yet?

You can say something like:

- Eligible for U.S. credentials -- or
- Graduate studies in Instructional Design, in progress -- or

Master's Degree anticipated December 1997

15. What if you worked for only one employer for 20 or 30 years?

Then list separately each different position you held there, so your job progression within the organization is more obvious.

Sample Resume

NAME

Street Address

City, State, ZIP

Phone (include area code)

OBJECTIVE

Be specific.

EDUCATION

Most recent degree first, major, institution, date of graduation. List honors, if applicable and if you believe they are important.

QUALIFICATIONS OR AREAS OF EFFECTIVENESS

In this section, isolate three to five of your strongest demonstrated skills. The skills you select should be essential to the type of job you have identified in your "Objective." For each skill you have chosen, summarize your accomplishments and experiences that pertain. You need not mention the specific job in this section, as you will do so in the "Employment History" section. Be specific in discussing *how* you demonstrated your skills and, whenever possible, concentrate on the results you achieved in using the particular skills.

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

Job title, employer, duties and dates.

ACTIVITIES/LEADERSHIP

REFERENCES

Available upon request.

Hints from APHIS When Applying for a Federal Job Using PEARS (Prospective Employee Application Rating System)

The following addresses the most frequent errors made by applicants when applying for a Federal job using PEARS. Review this list to ensure full consideration.

1. If you choose not to apply on-line, you must request a hard copy of the PEARS application, complete the application, and return it to the Human Resources Office listed on the announcement within the timeframes listed below.
2. On-line and faxed hard copy applications will be accepted until midnight Eastern Time on the announcement's closing date. Hard copy applications that are not faxed will be accepted at the Human Resources Office listed on the announcement until 4:30 P.M. on the announcement's closing date. **We encourage you to apply on-line. Applications received beyond the timeframe listed may not be accepted.**
3. Supporting documentation must be received within two days of the closing date of the announcement, excluding Saturdays, Sundays, or U.S. Government holidays. Supporting documentation must be sent to either the contact address or the fax number listed on the announcement. **Supporting documentation will not be accepted via email, and must include the announcement number.** One set of supporting documentation must be submitted for each announcement for which you submit an application.
4. Because Federal agencies are required to prorate your experience when making qualification determinations, it is necessary for you to provide **complete employment dates (month/year at a minimum) and work schedules (indicate "full-time" or average hours per week) for all periods of employment.** Report the dates for each grade level and position held when listing Federal employment (e.g., Veterinarian, GS-11, 01/01/02 – 01/03/03; GS-12, 01/04/03 – 01/03/04; GS-13, 01/04/04 – 06/01/04). Failure to include this information will exclude this experience from being considered in the qualifications determination and may result in disqualification.



Detailed descriptions of your duties for all previous employment must be provided. We may not assume qualifying experience on the basis of "job title," employer, or employment type. We may only credit experience specifically described.

5. College transcripts, a copy of your college diploma or a list of college courses with grades and credits (indicate quarter or semester hours) **must** be submitted. Copies of current licenses (e.g., a license to practice veterinary medicine conferred by a state Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners) or copies of a certification of membership in a professional organization that are indicative of possessing the educational requirements of this announcement may be submitted in lieu of college transcripts. Applicants qualified on the basis of lists of college courses or copies of diplomas, licenses, or certificates of membership, **must** submit copies of college transcripts before their selection may be confirmed.
6. Standard Form (SF) 50 – Current and former Federal employees **must** submit the SF-50, when requested. Failure to submit the SF-50 will result in exclusion from consideration.
7. DD 214(s) – To receive credit for military service, you must provide a DD 214 showing the exact dates of service for all periods of active duty.

Always read vacancy announcements carefully and provide the information requested.

Want more information? Check out these web addresses:

- www.resume-place.com
- www.fedjobs.com
- <http://jobsearch.about.com/od/>
- <http://www.federaljobsearch.com/>
- <http://www.fedworld.gov/jobs/jobsearch.html>

Information on Upcoming Issues . . .

Based on input that was received from many F&V employees, here is a look at some of the topics we'll cover in future issues of the *F&V Employee Development Newsletter*:



- ⇒ **Job Interviews** — Interview Do's and Don'ts; tips to improve your interviewing skills; what to wear on an interview, etc.
- ⇒ **Health and Wellness** — How to reduce stress; information about long-term care options; results of wellness surveys.
- ⇒ **Communication and Interpersonal Skills**
- ⇒ **Time Management Skills**
- ⇒ **Paths to Career Advancement** — Detail and “shadowing” assignments; mentoring; networking skills.
- ⇒ **Effective Individual Development Plans**

Suggestions?

Do you have ideas on other topics to include in future newsletters? Send them electronically by clicking on the “Comment Box” link on the F&V Intranet site:

<http://insideams.ams.usda.gov/fvintranet/fvindex.htm>