



# Federal Career Experts

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## The Top Résumé Mistakes

There are many more résumé mistakes than the eleven that are listed below. However, these eleven are some of the most common and most egregious.

### 1. Listing responsibilities rather than skills and results.

This is perhaps the biggest problem with résumés and applications, whether they are for federal jobs or for private sector jobs. When you tell someone the duties for which you were responsible, all they know is what you were supposed to do. They do not necessarily know the specific skills you used in executing those responsibilities, nor do they know what results you achieved. In short, they won't know if you were the best, the worst, or just average in your position.

### 2. Not being specific enough as to what you have accomplished.

The more concrete information you can include in your résumé, the better it will be. Try to measure as many of your accomplishments as you can. If an innovation you introduced saved the government money, how much did it save? If you reduced processing time for cases, by what percentage did you reduce it?

### 3. Not including keywords.

As more and more résumés and applications are submitted electronically, or are scanned by a computer, the importance of using the correct keywords increases. A keyword is a noun (or noun phrase) that describes a skill or an area of knowledge that is needed in the job for which you are applying. You will find the keywords for a position in the "duties and responsibilities" area of the job description.

### 4. Ignoring soft skills.

Many résumés and applications list "hard" job specific skills, almost to the exclusion of transferable, or "soft", skills. Your ability to communicate, or to work well with difficult people, or to effectively negotiate, can be just as important to the hiring official as your technical skills.

### 5. Omitting required information.

This can be an issue for people who have never before applied for a federal job. A federal application requires information that is not found on a typical private sector résumé. A résumé or application without the required information often will not be considered. When applying for a federal job, the "How to Apply" section lists the required information.

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## **6. Using an objective, rather than a career summary.**

An objective is a waste of space. It tells the employer what you are interested in. Do you really think that employers care what you want? No, they are interested in what they want! Take the space that an objective would take in your résumé and fill it with a career summary. A good career summary is a brief (three to four sentence) summary of your career that contains a lot of keywords. A good career summary will make the hiring official want to read further.

## **7. Including outdated or irrelevant information.**

All information in your résumé or application should be relevant to the job for which you are applying. If you are applying for a job that is somewhat different than your current job, it is up to you to draw a connection for the résumé reviewer, so that they will understand how your skills will fit in their organization. In addition, there is no requirement (as there was with the old SF-171) that you list everything you ever have done. Most résumés go back ten or fifteen years.

## **8. Being overly modest.**

Although your mother probably told you that modesty and humility were virtues to be cultivated, she was not thinking of résumé writing when she told you that. Do not assume that a résumé reader understands the skills you bring to the table, or the results you achieve; spell them out. Bragging is OK as long as you are telling the truth.

## **9. Exaggerating or lying.**

On the other hand, do not stretch the truth or lie. This is important everywhere, but it is even more important in a federal résumé or application. Background investigations are conducted for almost all federal positions, and any untruths are likely to be uncovered. Lying on an employment application is the most common reason newly hired federal employees are fired during their probationary period.

## **10. Assuming the reader will make connections.**

The person who reviews your paperwork will not be a mind reader. Be as clear as you possibly can about how the items you include in your résumé or application relate to the duties of the job for which you are applying. This is very important. A résumé reviewer may review dozens of résumés over the course of the day and their eyes may have just about glazed over by the time they pick up yours.

## **11. Using a format that makes it difficult for the hiring official to identify your skills, results and responsibilities.**

Speaking of eyes glazing over, nothing can cause it more easily than a poorly formatted and organized résumé. This is more important for paper résumés than electronic ones, but the proper formatting can make it easier in both cases for reviewers to identify your strengths and skills.

Federal Career Experts offers individual résumé consultations and other career advising services. For more information, visit our website at [www.federalcareerexperts.com](http://www.federalcareerexperts.com). In addition, John Grobe, President of Federal Career Experts has written a book, *The Complete Guide to Writing a Federal Résumé*, which can be ordered from FEDweek at [www.fedweek.com](http://www.fedweek.com).

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