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Ten Tips for Letting Federal Employers Know Your Worth

So, you found the job you want. And it's with the Federal Government. Congratulations! You're embarking on an exciting journey with dynamic opportunities that Federal jobs provide. You're also competing with some of the best candidates around. How do you know you've shown future employers' your worth?

First, read the job announcement carefully and acquaint yourself with what the Federal agency is looking for.

Then, check your resume to ensure it's complete and includes all the required information for the job you want. Next, capture how your experience matches the competencies and/or knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA's) required for that job. Remember: Federal agencies base their decisions on merit so, follow these 10 tips carefully when describing you experience and skills.

1. Use words wisely.

Today, the key to a good application is getting the right information to the agency representative in a fast, readable style. How do you do this? By using *minimum* words to provide *maximum* information. Just look at this example:

In this position, it was my responsibility to assist the program director on evaluating health care programs. Due to the fact that most of these centers were in rural areas, it was important that I traveled at least 3 days a week.

It's full of useless words and phrases such as *due to the fact, it is important, and it was my responsibility* that block your point. Cut them out for a stronger, easy-to-access message:

In this position, I assisted the program director on evaluating health care programs. Because most of these centers were in rural areas, I traveled at least 3 days a week.

Repeats can slow your message, too. Look at this line:

I worked with new law enforcement officers who were just entering the force and needed to learn techniques for identifying and interrogating suspects who they suspected of illegal activity. In my capacity, I trained them on these techniques.

Notice that *new law enforcement officers* and *who were just entering the force* say the same thing? So does *suspects* and *suspected of illegal activity*. Less obvious is the repeated *work with* and *trained*. The revision would read:

I trained new law enforcement officers on techniques for identifying and interrogating suspects.



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2. Keep sentences short and clear.

Short, direct sentences help the agency get your point. But remember, don't duplicate your resume. Rather, you're elaborating on significant points in full sentences. This line is so long:

My 12 years as a customer service representative have given me the opportunity to become comfortable speaking to virtually anyone and to answering questions calmly and professionally even when the person I am speaking to is upset.

It practically leaves the reader out-of-breath. By breaking up sentences, your point is more flowing:

My customer service representative experience provided opportunities to sharpen my skills. For example, I am comfortable speaking to virtually anyone. I can answer questions calmly and professionally, even when the person I am speaking to is upset.

3. Make your message stand out.

Paragraphs that are easy-to-see are more than *nice* – they can make or break your message. So remember, keep your paragraphs brief, usually between 5 and 10 lines depending on content. Put important points first – where they're most visible. Here are some possibilities:

Short paragraph

While an associate editor for Agricultural Magazine, I selected each month's special features on scientific findings and agricultural economics; hired five diverse new writers, all with scientific backgrounds; and reviewed all copy to ensure a style accessible to readers ranging from rural farmers to university researchers.

Subheaders

While an associate editor for Agricultural Magazine, I was responsible for:

Critical content decisions. *I selected each month's special features on the relationship between scientific findings and agricultural economics, among other articles.*

Quality of articles. *I reviewed all copy to ensure the style was accessible to readers ranging from rural farmers to university researchers*

4. Focus on outcome.

What is the most important aspect of your work experience? The answer may be a surprise: the outcome. In fact, you'd be amazed by how many people forget to mention this critical aspect of



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their experience altogether. When discussing outcome, be sure to discuss the *whats, the hows, and the breadth and scope of your experiences*:

- a. **What occurred.** Did you improve the workplace? Perhaps you refined technology tools, created programs, or organized procedures. Regardless, let the agency know *what* occurred. Use brief examples to best illustrate your point whenever possible.
- b. **How much and how many.** Did you start new projects? How many? Did you save your previous office money? Time? How much? Don't forget percentages, numbers, and degrees that apply.

Notice how this example falls flat because it ignores the outcome:

As a supervisor at Early Start, I oversaw the development of grant proposals. While in this position, I put systems in place to ensure that my employees provided the government with the exact information it needed.

While this revision is more revealing...and competitive:

As a supervisor at Early Start, I oversaw a team of 10 employees who developed grant proposals. While in this position, I developed a template-based system to help my coworkers anticipate requirements. This helped us meet all deadlines a week in advance and create proposals that won us two grants more than the previous year.

5. Showcase your role.

Did you work on your own? As part of a team? In a supervisory capacity? As a team leader? Let the agency know your role in the projects. For example, this response:

I helped put together conferences. Among my responsibilities were sending invitations, calling potential guests, and preparing the conference materials. would be stronger if worded this way:

As part of a team of five employees, I helped put together conferences. My responsibilities included sending invitations, calling potential guests, and preparing the conference materials.

Were you promoted while working on a project? If so, mention that too. Note, for example, this response doesn't mention a promotion:

In my last position, I spent 2 to 3 months at a time in the field collecting samples for the study. The following year, I spent most of time in the lab, only going to the field occasionally.



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while this revision does:

In my position as Project Manager, I spent 2 to 3 months at a time in the field, overseeing 5 specialists who assisted me in collecting samples for the study. The following year, I was promoted to Senior Project Manager which required that I spent more time in the lab. As a result, I only went to the field occasionally.

6. Remember - timeframes count.

Timeframes count so be sure to address these questions: what were the dates or length of time you worked on a project or job? Did you work full-time or part-time? If part-time, what percentage of your time did you do that work? For example, this candidate could have worked in his position for a few months as a part-time employee:

I served as a contractor for the agency. I regularly produced educational videos and IVT training sessions.

This response is stronger worded this way:

From 7/1999 -10/2002, I served as a full-time contractor for the agency. I spent at least 30% of my time producing educational videos and IVT training sessions.

If you didn't spend substantial time in a particular position, include the dates anyway. Other information such as the outcome of your experience or the scope and depth of your work will underscore its value.

7. Value your experience.

Many experiences illuminate your significance as a candidate. For example, you may have published relevant articles in your college newspaper or a local publication. Or you may have gained valuable experience through:

- *Leadership positions.* Were you president of your sorority or fraternity? Did you lead a team either as part of your classroom experience or a volunteer group? Mention these positions and the outcome of your efforts.
- *Extracurricular activities.* Perhaps you volunteered or belonged to a club that gave you valuable experience. Let the agency know specifics including projects, dates, and how your experience applies to the field.
- *Internships.* Never underestimate the importance of hands-on education, especially internships, whether during the summer or over an entire semester.

Regardless, mention them!



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8. Show and tell.

Telling about your experience is great but be sure to use examples, too. See how this candidate's job sounds pretty blasé:

As a maintenance mechanic, I often worked in settings that required I maintain control of every move in the operation.

Look at the difference a few specifics can make:

As a maintenance mechanic, I often worked in settings that required I maintain control of every move in the operation. For example, for 16 months I worked on renovation projects in the Smithsonian Institutions where I had to move priceless museum exhibits using forklifts, cranes, skids, and rollers.

9. Resist additions

You may be tempted, but *please* resist sending an additional package with copies of awards, publications, training certificates, letters of recommendation, lengthy job descriptions, writing samples, or a photo unless the agency *specifically requests* it. Instead, keep important information where it belongs – in your application or resume.

10. Illuminate your resume – don't repeat it.

When writing about your experience to describe how it matches the competencies or KSA's required by a job, don't simply repeat your resume but illuminate important facts or give examples to shed new light on the breadth and scope of your experience. Notice how this resume sample provides an overview of the candidate's experience – in this case as a trainer for law enforcement officers:

Scheduled and conducted training and maintained training records of all law enforcement personnel.

When writing about her experience, however, the candidate added these details:

While a supervisor in the training department I conducted sessions in anti-terrorism techniques, security and protection procedures, and suspect interviewing strategies. I also trained react teams and counter-terrorism units, operated weapons ranges, and conducted fitness tests.

This gave the agency fresh information about the experience she could bring to the job. Whatever your education and experience, it deserves to be highlighted in your resume, competencies, and KSA's. Follow these tips for guidance in presenting your strengths to potential Federal employers.

