1. Be sure you meet all of the qualifications.

Know what you are qualified for. There are thousands of jobs; that does not mean you are qualified for each of them. Federal job openings can attract hundreds or even thousands of applicants. What you may not realize is that HR can only put people on this list who meet all of the minimum qualifications in the job announcement. This means HR will be looking very carefully at everything you list in your resume. Make sure you not only meet the qualifications of the announcement but also spell them out clearly in your application.

2. Tailor your resume every time – it's worth it!

It's not uncommon for people to use the same resume to apply to multiple job announcements. Easy right? Wrong. It actually dilutes your chances if you are not meeting the position-specific qualifications required for each job announcement.

One way to make applying to several jobs easier is to create a single "master" resume that includes all of your education, experience, skills, awards, and so on. Don't worry about how long it is – you'll never send out this master resume - use this as your starting point, and revise it for each job announcement by including only what is relevant to that position and cutting the rest.

3. Use keywords.

What is a keyword? Before you begin work on your resume, carefully read the job announcement. If you see a certain word repeated numerous times, it's probably a keyword. For example, if you see "contracting" listed repeatedly in the job announcement, it's safe to assume HR will be looking for someone with contracting expertise.

Other keywords to watch for include specific technical terms or phrases in the job announcement. Before you submit your application, compare your resume with the

keywords in the job announcement one last time and make sure the descriptions and language you've used in your resume clearly align with the position for which you are applying.

4. Vacancy Announcements – it's all there.

Federal vacancy announcements can be confusing if you aren't familiar with the format. They use a common 5-tab format to provide information about the position. It is important to read each section carefully to ensure you fully understand the position, you meet the required qualifications, and you are aware of how your application will be evaluated. Believe it or not, it is the blueprint that determines if HR will find you qualified. Briefly:

Tab 1 - Overview – briefly describes the job and provides basic information regarding salary, who may apply, duty location, open period for acceptance of applications, and job summary

Tab 2 - Duties – cites the major duties and responsibilities of the job

Tab 3 - Qualifications and Evaluations – lists the type of specialized experience, skills and competencies you need to be demonstrate in your resume to be considered eligible for the position and how your experience will be evaluated *(hint: this is the blueprint; ensure your resume is aligned with the specialized experience statement and/or how you will be evaluated)*

Tab 4 - Benefits & Other Information – highlights some of the benefits available to you as an employee

Tab 5 - How to Apply – lists the required application materials and provides instructions on how to submit your application package

5. Be comprehensive.

This means you should include all the relevant experience you would bring to a particular job. This helps HR in two ways. First, HR isn't allowed to fill in the holes or assume anything about your experience, so you need to paint a clear picture. Second, though qualifications may be inflexible, HR does have the ability to accept the sum total of your relevant experience to determine if you do, in fact, meet requirements. For example, HR can combine the ten months you've been a supervisor in your current job with your two months of supervisory volunteer work to meet a required one year of supervisory experience. Last, include ALL experience including volunteer and technical training, or anything else that may have given you the skills you need for the job. It all matters.

If you're applying for your first job, include information in the education section not only about your internships, but also relevant college coursework and recognition you have received.

6. Keep it relevant.

Being comprehensive is extremely important, but being “relevant” is equally so. You should only include information that clearly supports your eligibility for this specific position. Sooooo, unless your first job ten years ago as a snake charmer or body part model exhibits your qualifications for your desired position, leave it out!

7. Emphasize impact.

In addressing the specific qualifications of the position, be sure to emphasize your accomplishments and results from past positions, rather than just a list of the duties you performed. For example, instead of a description like “led a team of 10 for a project,” show the impact you had with something like “led a team of 10 to finish a project ahead of schedule and under budget, resulting in an early launch that helped us meet a key goal for Veteran recruitment.” The difference here is not about including a lengthier description. Rather, it’s about clearly outlining the outcome and impact of your work.

8. Longer resumes are OK, but be concise!

When you’ve tailored your resume, explained in detail all of your relevant experience, emphasized impact, and included keywords, your resume will probably be longer than the 1-2 pages recommended for the private sector. That’s okay. It’s not atypical for an experienced candidate’s Federal resume to be 4-5 pages in length. This does not mean you should go overboard and try to make your resume as long as possible. Remember how many applications HR receives? They need to get a complete picture of your experience, but they always prefer to read fewer pages (wouldn’t you?). Keep your resume overall as concise as possible.

9. Take Away….

- Review the job announcements carefully for key words.
- Use verbs and adjectives (e.g., managed, implemented, created) that match key words identified in the job announcement.
- Eliminate lingo and acronyms (use the whole words).
- Accomplishments, accomplishments, accomplishments!
- Sell yourself! Don’t lie or inflate.
- Focus on the mission of the agency and translate your experiences.
- Your positive attitude and genuine enthusiasm goes a long way