RESUMEYOURWAY

Federal Application Rules Checklist

Current as of November 2026

Six rules that decide whether your application gets read. Every one is quoted from the government's own published guidance, with the date on its source. Check your announcement against this before you submit.

1 Your submitted resume is two pages.

IN EFFECT SINCE SEPTEMBER 27, 2025

> *"This Merit Hiring Plan will prohibit the current longform Federal resume structure. Instead, there will be a 2-page limit on resume length."*
> Merit Hiring Plan memorandum, May 29, 2025

Two things enforce it. USAJOBS will not let you upload or build a resume longer than two pages, and HR removes anyone who gets past that.

> *"If the only resume received by an applicant is longer than two pages, the applicant is ineligible for further consideration."*
> OPM, Agency Guidance on the Two-Page Limit, September 12, 2025

Check: your resume is two pages before you upload it. Not trimmed after a rejection.

2 VA Title 38 and Hybrid Title 38 roles are exempt. Read the announcement before you cut.

VA CAREERS, CONFIRMED LIVE JULY 21, 2026

> *"New Federal resume requirements under the Merit Hiring Plan do not apply to applications for Title 38 or Hybrid Title 38 positions."*
> VA Careers

Hybrid Title 38 is wider than most people expect. VA's own occupation roster, updated December 19, 2024, covers social workers, psychologists, pharmacists, physical and occupational therapists, dietitians, chaplains, biomedical engineers, and medical support assistants. VA also notes that the same series can land on either side depending on the duties performed.

Some internal merit-promotion postings exempt themselves too, in writing, inside the announcement.

Check: read "How to Apply" and "Required Documents" on your specific announcement before you cap anything at two pages.

3 Short essay questions. You write them, and you certify that.

MANDATORY GS 5 TO GS 15 AND SL/ST SINCE APRIL 30, 2026

The questions are set by OPM, plus one each agency writes. Each answer is capped at 200 words, and they are not scored or rated. Senior Executive Service, teacher, seasonal, and Wage Grade positions are excluded.

> *"In all cases, an applicant must not be disqualified or screened out for not answering the questions."*
> OPM essay bulletin, April 30, 2026

The certification is the part that matters most:

> *"Applicants will be required to certify that they are using their own words, and did not use a consultant or AI (such as a large language model [LLM])."*
> Merit Hiring Plan memorandum, p.10

Check: the words are yours. Anyone offering to write these answers for you is asking you to sign a false certification. Coaching is fine. Ghostwriting is not.

4 Questionnaires still screen you. They no longer rank you.

IN EFFECT SINCE SEPTEMBER 30, 2025

> *"Self-assessments (e.g., occupational questionnaires) may still be used for qualification and eligibility determinations, but not as a basis for ranking or rating candidates in the selection process."*
> OPM, Guidance on the Use of Self-Reported Assessments, February 2026

Ranking now comes from a validated skills assessment: USA Hire, a structured interview, a work sample, a skills test, or a structured resume review.

Rating yourself higher than your application supports can get your answers adjusted or get you excluded.

Check: every questionnaire answer is backed by something a reader can point to in your resume.

5 SES: five ECQs, demonstrated inside a two-page resume.

OPM ECQ PAGE UPDATED OCTOBER 1, 2025

The five current Executive Core Qualifications are Commitment to the Rule of Law and the Principles of the American Founding, Driving Efficiency, Merit and Competence, Leading People, and Achieving Results. Fifteen competencies sit across those five.

> *"There is NO requirement to prepare a separate narrative statement specifically addressing the Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs) or the Technical Qualification (TQ)."*
> Live competitive SES announcement

Since FY 2026, OPM assesses the ECQs through a structured interview as part of the QRB certification process.

Check: if a guide has you writing a 10-page ECQ packet, it is describing the system that was retired. Older OPM reference pages still serve it.

6 None of this is a keyword scan.

RULE OF MANY FINAL RULE, SEPTEMBER 8, 2025

Category rating still exists, and it still sorts applicants into quality categories. Alongside it, the Rule of Many scores candidates numerically, lists them in rank order, and lets agencies certify a set number. Veterans preference is built into the scoring.

Neither method reads your resume for keywords. Both read it against the announcement's specialized experience statement. And copying that statement into your resume backfires:

> *"Do not copy and paste the duties, specialized experience, or occupational assessment questionnaire from this announcement into your resume as that will not be considered a demonstration of your qualifications ..."*
> Live Direct Hire Authority announcement

Check: every requirement in the announcement is answered somewhere in your resume, in your own words, with your own evidence.

WHERE THESE RULES COME FROM

OPM, USAJOBS, the Federal Register, and VA. Primary sources only. No blogs, no summaries, no guesswork. Federal hiring rules changed repeatedly across 2025 and 2026, and the guidance stream is still running.

WHAT WE PROMISE

We always check agency requirements, GS-level requirements, and OPM's most up-to-date guidelines so every resume we deliver is in 100% compliance at the time it's written. The two-page cap applies to the resume you submit. Every federal client also gets a comprehensive Master Resume, the full career record you keep for life.

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