

How to Fine Tune Your Resume and Interview Skills

TIPS & TAKEAWAYS

The first steps to securing a government job are applying and interviewing for it — and both stages are tricky. At a recent GovLoop in-person training, an expert offered tips on how to create your resume and successfully interview for a position. We harvested the wisdom in this helpful tip sheet.

Resume Tips

Why don't you love your resume?

"I feel confined by trying to keep it short."

?!?!?

"I'm not sure what I should put on there."

"I don't know what format to use."



Your resume has its own job. Is it to...

- ☒ Tell everything about your career history
- ☒ Comprehensively explain what you are doing
- ☒ Be as brief as possible
- ☒ Define you as a problem solver
- ☒ Be visually accessible for reviewers
- ☒ Showcase your most valuable experiences

Be a Problem Solver:



Try to see the employer point of view: what problems they might face, what solutions might help.



Understand how your potential role relates to those challenges.



In prominent parts of your resume, showcase how you've solved similar problems.

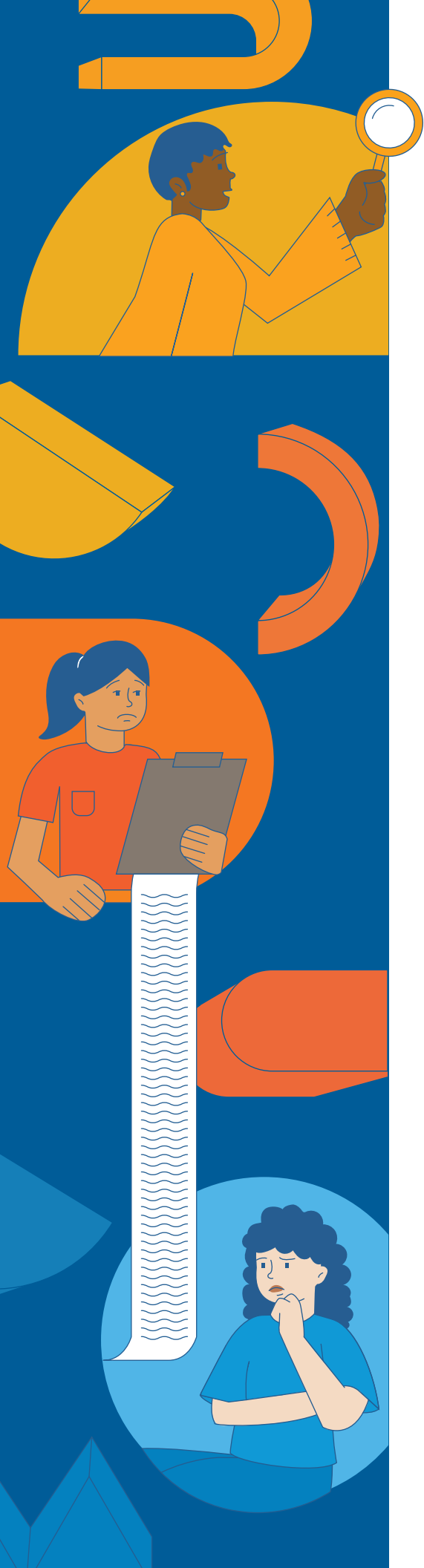
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“Recruiters, hiring managers [and] decision-makers have a problem they’re trying to solve, as quickly and easily as they can get it done.”



Susan Gygax, Talent Acquisition Consultant at Spectacle Talent Partners

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Who reviews your resume, and how:

- Reviewers will scan the document before reading it.
- They look for how you might solve a problem their organization has. Initially, that may be the only thing they look for.
- The reviewer may be a person or it may be artificial intelligence. Make your resume accessible for both. For humans, remember that eye strain matters: Your font must be readable.
- The vast majority of reviewers will look at your resume digitally.

How long should a resume be?

Long enough to convey the quality of your experience.

Does it matter how I organize things?

Yes! Put your relevant experience front and center — the first third of your resume is prime real estate. Think of it as “CliffsNotes” of who you are as an employee. A hiring manager wants to learn your capabilities, competencies and knowledge from the first few items.

How do I know what experience is valuable?

Consult bullet points from the job description and match them with your career experiences, expertise and supporting details. List any security clearances early on: They’re attractive to busy hiring managers. Volunteer experience counts.

How should I characterize my expertise?

Be authentic: Don’t pretend to be an expert in everything. But when you do have expert knowledge and skills, acknowledge that. Don’t downplay what you can do.

Should I write a cover letter?

It never hurts. A cover letter is an opportunity to meet someone in a different way, through writing, and a place where someone can know you better. The letter shouldn’t repeat your resume; it should convey more meaning or significance about what’s there.

How do I learn if the job posting really reflects the job?

Sometimes agencies are contractually stuck with job descriptions and titles that have existed for years. For more insight into what the job entails, take the extra step and reach out to the hiring manager.

Interview How-To



How should I prepare for an interview?

First, celebrate that you got it! And know that you deserve it.

Review your most invigorating and relevant experiences.

Remember what made you excited about those projects so you can convey that to the interviewers.

Check out resources such as the Department of Labor's [Interview Tips](#), a [tip sheet](#) by the Department of Energy and [this guidance](#) by the International City/County Management Association.

Learn as much as you can about the agency. Carefully review its website and look for external news sources as well.

Practice, practice, practice. A comfortable conversation is a productive conversation, and the more you practice articulating your thoughts about yourself, your career history and the position, the more comfortable you will be.

Try to have a relaxed, positive attitude about the interview. Think of it as a balanced conversation where you learn more about the agency and they learn more about you. Identify what you most want to know about the agency or position.

Remember that an interview is not just about experience. It's a chance to show emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills, as well as career intelligence. So, prepare to connect with people.

For additional interview tips, check out these GovLoop articles:

[11 Questions to Ask When Interviewing for a New Position](#)

[Interviews: 5 Ways to Ace Them Before Stepping Through the Door](#)

[Interviewing Internally? Avoid These Mistakes](#)

[How Soft Skills Can Help You Land Your Next Job](#)

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“One of the keys to having a productive interview is feeling comfortable.”



Susan Gygax

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