



COMMON TERMS IN FEDERAL HIRING

COMPETITIVE SERVICE

The majority of federal, civilian positions are considered a part of the competitive service. Competitive service employees are hired through the regular application and hiring process outlined by the Office of Personnel Management. Competitive service announcements are open to the general public and must be posted on USAJOBS.

- **Rule of Three:** a strategy within the federal hiring process where only the top three candidates with the highest number of application points are considered for employment. A candidate below the top three scoring applicants may not be selected for the position unless a higher scoring applicant declines or is appointed to the position.
- **Category Rating:** a method of categorizing job applicants and selecting the most qualified individuals based on their set of knowledge, skills and abilities. This alternative rating system does not rely on a numerical rating system and does not have to follow the rule of three (only contacting the top three candidates), thus increasing the amount of top candidates an agency has to choose from.
- **Direct Hire:** when hiring managers make job offers to applicants without having to go through the full application process. Direct hire authority can be used for permanent, nonpermanent or group positions for grade GS-1 through GS-15.
- **Career Transition Assistance Plan (CTAP):** a program intended for federal employees who are being laid off and have been given special preference to find another position in a different part of their agency.
- **Interagency Career Transition Assistance Plan (ICTAP)** – a program intended for federal employees who are being laid off and have been given special preference to find another position at an agency that isn't downsizing the same type of position.
- **Reduction in Force:** a personnel action that moves an employee to a position of lower grade and pay. This may be necessary due to lack of work, shortage of funds, reorganization or a reclassification of an employee's position.
- **Veterans' Preference:** special hiring authority established for veterans who served on active duty for at least two years during a time of war or who were disabled as a result of their time in service. Candidates receive an additional five to ten points on their total application score—five points for preference eligible veterans and ten points for veterans who were disabled as a result of their service. Veterans' preference does not guarantee federal employment.
- **Administrative Careers with America (ACWA) Examining:** assessments for particular positions, such as acquisitions, to determine if candidates have enough competencies and training to be selected for certain administrative entry-level GS-5 and GS-7 jobs.
- **Knowledge, Skills and Abilities (KSAs):** a set of questions designed to establish a job candidate's combination of knowledge, skills and abilities related to the job in which they are applying. KSAs require that several short answer responses to assess soft and technical skills, which help agencies select top candidates.

- **Status Eligible:** current or former federal employees who have held permanent, competitive appointments. These personnel are eligible for noncompetitive movement within the competitive service and can receive an appointment by promotion, reassignment, transfer, or reinstatement.
- **Merit Promotion:** using a process by which federal government promotes and hires employees based on their ability to perform a specific job, rather than their political affiliation. The system is designed to recruit a competent work force and provide equal opportunity for employment.
- **Senior Executive Service (SES):** refers to positions beyond the highest level of the General Schedule (GS-15). Such positions involve heightened managerial and policy making skills and responsibility and are set apart from most other positions in the competitive service.

EXCEPTED SERVICE

Through the excepted service, agencies can use a streamlined hiring process rather than the regular, competitive process to meet a special or critical hiring need. Agencies can use their own evaluation criteria to fill their vacancies. Agencies use this process to hire individuals with specific backgrounds or hard-to-recruit occupations, such as attorneys, chaplains, and medical doctors. Excepted service positions are not always posted on USAJOBS.

- **Schedule A:** used when there are special jobs or situations where it is impractical to use the standard qualification requirements of competitive procedures. These are jobs such as chaplains, doctors, interpreters, and other experts. Other instances where this appointment is used include: a critical hiring need, a temporary or term job in a remote location, when a commission must be rapidly established or when only non-citizens are available to fill the position.
- **Schedule B:** used for candidates that fit the qualification requirements for the position, but are not required to complete the regular application process. For example, students under the STEP and SCEP programs and the Federal Career Intern Program are eligible for this appointment type.
- **Schedule C:** used for the hiring of political appointees, when deemed appropriate by OPM.

APPOINTMENTS

- **Temporary:** a nonpermanent position generally lasting for one year, but may extend to two years. Temporary appointees can earn vacation days and sick leave, but do not qualify for other benefits, such as health insurance. Due to the nonpermanent nature of temporary appointments, these employees cannot be promoted and cannot achieve competitive status. The types of positions involve intermittent or seasonal work schedules.
- **Term:** a nonpermanent position similar to a temporary appointment. Term appointments begin with a trial year where the employee can be let go. After the trial year, the position can last up to four years beyond the initial start date. Term employees earn vacation days, sick leave, health insurance, life insurance and retirement benefits. Like temporary employees, term employees cannot be promoted and do not achieve competitive status.
- **Career Conditional:** in the competitive service (not excepted service or temporary or term appointment), new federal employees work as a career-conditional appointment. An employee must complete three years of substantially continuous service before becoming a full career employee. After 90 days, an individual is eligible for competitive status.