

# NARA's Federal Resume Guide

What You Should Know When Applying for a Federal Career

(2025)



NATIONAL  
ARCHIVES

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# Welcome

Knowing how to write a succinct and compelling resume is a valuable skill to have in today's job market. Your resume is the first impression you give to potential employers. It tells the story of your career, highlights your strengths, and documents your results. Whether you are actively seeking a job at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) or somewhere else, this guide will offer you proven resume tips and suggestions to help you stand out from the crowd.

## Writing Your Federal Resume

### Finding Federal Career Opportunities on USAJobs

Federal agencies advertise their vacancies at [www.USAJOBS.gov](http://www.USAJOBS.gov).

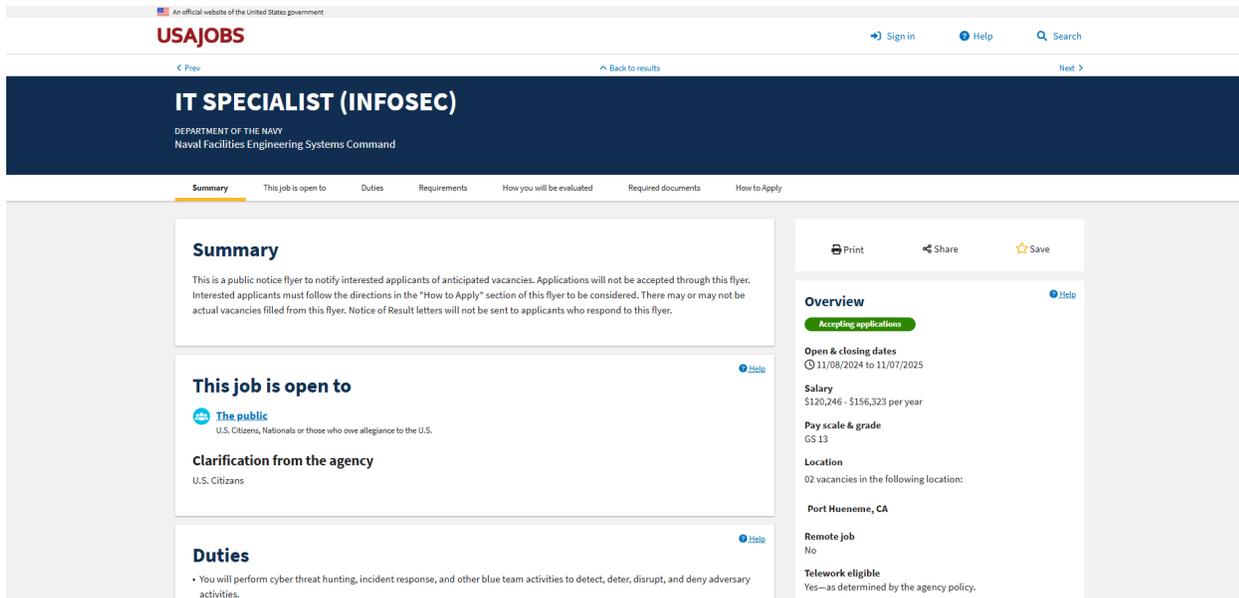
From the USAJOBS site, you can:

- **Create an Account**
  - Build and store up to five distinct resumes.
  - Create and save job searches to receive automatic notifications.
- **Search and Apply for Opportunities**
  - Target specific agencies, occupations, grades, locations, etc.
  - View jobs that are available to the general public and those that are available only to federal employees.
  - Apply to federal vacancies or save them to review later.
- **Learn More About the Federal Hiring Process**
  - Gain step-by-step insights into the application process through OPM's extensive collection of [tutorials](#).
  - Discover targeted hiring programs for which you may qualify.

# Decoding the Job Announcement

*“I’ve found a position and want to apply, but I don’t understand the job announcement.”*

Federal vacancy announcements can be confusing if you aren’t familiar with their format or the terminology they use. Federal vacancy announcements use a common 7-tab format (highlighted in the following example) to provide information about each open position. It is important to read each section carefully. This will help you understand the nature and scope of the position, its qualification requirements, and the evaluation process.



TAB	DESCRIPTION
<p>Tab 1 <b>Summary</b></p>	<p>Describes the opportunity and provides basic information about salary, payscale and grade, the number of available positions, who may apply, duty location, appointment type, and the application period.</p>
<p>Tab 2 <b>This Job Is Open To</b></p>	<p>Indicates who is eligible to apply to the job.</p>
<p>Tab 3 <b>Duties</b></p>	<p>Documents the major duties and responsibilities of the job.</p>

<b>Tab 4</b> <b>Requirements</b>	Provides the conditions of employment and qualifications you need to be eligible to apply for the position.
<b>Tab 5</b> <b>How You Will Be Evaluated</b>	Tells how the hiring agency will evaluate your application.
<b>Tab 6</b> <b>Required Documents</b>	Lists all of the documents that are required as part of your application. The hiring agency may disqualify you if you fail to provide all of the documents that are required to confirm your eligibility.
<b>Tab 7</b> <b>How to Apply</b>	Details the application process and provides the agency's contact information.

## The Information You Will Need to Write Your Resume

Before writing your federal resume, you'll want to source information about your career journey and start documenting your career highlights. Below, you'll find each of the sections of a federal resume and the information you'll need.

### Personal Information

- Your full name
- City and state
- Email address
- Phone number
- Veteran's Preference, if eligible.

For additional information on Veteran's Preference, visit [www.fedshirevets.gov](http://www.fedshirevets.gov) or [www.archives.gov/careers](http://www.archives.gov/careers)

### Objective Statement (Optional)

- Brief statement about the ideal opportunity you are seeking and its alignment with your experiences, strengths, and passions.

### Work Experiences

- Employer names, addresses, and phone numbers
- Start and end dates
- Job title(s)
- Core responsibilities
- Achievements and metrics, if available
- Training

- Awards

## Education

- Schools attended
- Date degree(s) were conferred
- GPAs
- If a degree was not awarded, provide the number of credits received.

## Other Qualifications

- Job-related training courses and skills
- Certifications
- Honors and awards
- Memberships in professional societies and organizations

If you have prior federal service, you will also need to obtain your:

- Most recent SF-50
- Most recent Performance Appraisal

## Start By Building a Comprehensive Resume

Consider creating a comprehensive resume that will contain most, if not all, of your resume-worthy experiences and results in one document. This will ensure that you have a complete record of your career journey captured and maintained in one place. It will also reduce the risk of losing, forgetting, or not finding relevant experiences and results when you most need them.

A comprehensive resume makes developing custom, job-specific resumes easy. Simply make a copy of your comprehensive resume, delete any bullets that do not pertain to the job posting, and tweak or rephrase the bullets that *do* match to ensure their best alignment with the needs of the job for which you're applying.

Taking the time at the front end to develop this type of resume can take a lot of work, yet doing so will allow you to easily customize your resume to each opportunity, and thus maximize your chances of catching a hiring manager's eye.

## Resume Length

On May 29, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) documented a new [Merit Hiring Plan](#) that includes a new **two-page limit** on federal resumes. As a result, your resume will need to succinctly summarize your career story and accomplishments, as they relate to the position(s) you are applying to. Aim to focus on impact, clarity, and alignment with public service values.

## Resume Style Options

You are encouraged to use the USAJOBS Resume Builder tool when applying to a federal vacancy, however, when it comes to resume styles, one size does not fit all. Remember that federal resumes have a new two-page limit. Choose the style that best conveys your career story. Below are four models to consider. Examples of each of these resume styles are provided for your information later in this guide.

Resume Style	DESCRIPTION
<b>Chronological Summary</b>	This type of resume lists your work experience, education, volunteer and community service activity, and awards and recognitions in reverse chronological order, with your most recent job being placed first and your oldest job placed last.
<b>Functional (Competency-Based)</b>	This format identifies your relevant skills and accomplishments and then describes your employment and education in chronological order. It helps highlight skills, abilities, accomplishments, job traits, and personal characteristics (competencies) that employers expect future employees to match.
<b>Targeted</b>	The targeted resume may be any of the two styles listed above with one exception; the resume is tailored for a specific company or position. This type of resume is typically used when you know positions exist at a particular company but are not applying to an advertised vacancy.
<b>USAJOBS</b>	The USAJOBS resume is automatically formatted for you using the information you provide in the USAJOBS Resume Builder.

## Resume Formatting

Although the basic layout of your resume is important, your primary objective is to convey your strengths and accomplishments. A well-formatted, well-organized resume drives an employer to key information about you, such as technical proficiencies, your work history or the awards and promotions you've earned. When formatting your resume, consider margins, font type and size, color and the use of symbols in order to best highlight your strengths and accomplishments.

### Margins

Margins should be set at 1" all around. Even if you're concerned about space, the margins of your resume should not go below 1/2". Doing so creates a visually "crowded" resume. For readability, it is recommended that you use left-aligned margins over block justified text.

### Font Type

The font you choose for your resume should be aesthetically pleasing and easy to read to attract a potential employer's interest. Font types such as Arial, Helvetica, and Calibri all work well. Keep in mind that once you select a font, maintain its consistency throughout your resume.

### Font Size

Choose font sizes that make it easy for people to read your resume, without straining their eyes. Typically, a font size between 10 to 12 is ideal for the majority of your resume's content. Choose slightly larger fonts for your name and section headers to help the reader quickly see your resume's organization.

### Other Tips

**Bolding**, underlining, and *italics* should only be used sparingly and just for emphasis. Abbreviations/acronyms are allowed, once they've been defined earlier in the resume

## Which Goes First? Education or Experience?

The answer to this question depends on whether your education or your experience is your best selling point and/or meets the qualifications of the position to which you are applying. Generally, new graduates list education first, while job-seekers with a few years or more of work history list experience first. When using the USAJOBS Resume Builder, experience is always listed first.

## How Far Back Should I Go With My Resume?

The most important thing is to include your most relevant work experiences. When considering how far back to go with your work history, go as far back as you need to in order to demonstrate your qualifications for the job you're seeking.

Especially with a two-page limit, your most recent positions likely build upon your past roles and experience and you then don't need to list earlier jobs. If you are concerned that this method results in the appearance of gaps in your employment history, you can either list those positions under an "Additional Information" section or list them in order with a brief sentence describing the work you performed.

## Write Succinct and Impactful Bullets

The best way to demonstrate your match with a particular job is to ensure that your resume's bullets clearly and compellingly respond to each of the job's core duties and responsibilities.

When writing your bullets, consider using this formula: "Accomplished [X] as measured by [Y], by doing [Z]." X is an achievement, Y is a success metric, and Z is the action(s) you took. Choose the X-Y-Z order that best conveys your actions and impact. While the ideal bullet will include Y, sometimes, you may not have, or shouldn't share, your metrics.

### Let's try this:

- **Start with the task:** "produced weekly reports for clients"
- **Capture your impact:** "increased client satisfaction ratings by 30%"
- **Describe how you did it:** "by creating automated client dashboards and support documents"
- "Produced weekly reports for clients and increased client satisfaction ratings by 30% by creating automated client dashboards and support documents"

**Example:** You are interested in applying for an Archives Specialist position at NARA that requires knowledge in processing large volumes of records.

In order to draw the reader's eye to your experience with this type of work, use numbers to showcase your qualifications. For example, you may write:

- *Appraised, arranged, described, preserved, and provided access to 700 collections of various types. Collections encompassed 10,000 linear shelf feet, including 4,000 artifacts cataloged online.*

# Applying to Federal Jobs

## What Are Minimum Qualifications?

Minimum qualifications are standards set by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to help ensure that federal employees are qualified for federal employment. You must meet these minimum qualifications to be considered for employment. Minimum qualifications are stated in terms of general or specialized experience.

- **General experience** refers to experiences that provide a foundation for learning the specific skills needed for a job. It's often required for entry-level positions or those with less specific skill requirements. Examples include clerical, office, or other work that demonstrates general administrative or organizational skills.
- **Specialized experience** refers to experiences that directly relate to the duties of the position and provide the specific knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for successful performance. Examples include experiences in a specific field, like accounting, engineering, or teaching, that align with the duties of the target position.

For some jobs, you can qualify based solely on education instead of experience. For other jobs, both education and experience are required to qualify. These requirements will be described in the vacancy announcement.

## What Does “Time-In-Grade” Mean?

Time-in-grade is a requirement that applies to the promotion of current and former federal employees. Generally, employees must serve one year at the next lower grade level. Time-in-grade restrictions do not apply to former federal employees who have had a break in service of more than one year, current federal employees on temporary appointments, or current federal employees not holding a General Schedule (GS) position. Time-in-grade also does not apply to applicants who have no federal work experience.

## What is the Occupational Questionnaire or Assessment?

When applying for federal jobs, two types of assessments may be required as part of the application process: occupational questionnaires and assessments. Note that while basic information about each of these is available below, as of July 2025, OPM is still in the process of developing additional guidance for questionnaires and assessments used in federal hiring.

### Occupational Questionnaires

An occupational questionnaire is a list of questions designed to solicit information about how well your knowledge and skills match the experience required for the job. The questionnaire

is a self-assessment tool. Generally, you can preview questions by clicking on the “How to Apply” section/tab within the job announcement and scrolling down to the “How You Will Be Evaluated” section. Many agencies offer a “View Occupational Questionnaire” (or similarly worded) link to view the questions in advance of applying.

There are no “right” or “wrong” answers to the occupational questionnaire. You should respond honestly to all questions. You should also give yourself credit when deserved. Be careful not to inflate your self-ratings, yet take credit for your accomplishments. Most occupational questionnaires require you to provide responses to questions that will evaluate whether you meet the minimum qualifications of the position as well as other job specific assessment questions that are either task- or competency-based.

Once you complete the questionnaire, a score will be assigned to your application. That score, in combination with the assessment(s) (described below) will determine whether or not you will move on for further consideration in the selection process.

## Assessments

Per Executive Order 13932, signed on June 26, 2020, self-ratings like those used in occupational questionnaires cannot be used as the sole determinant in ranking applicants’ competitiveness for federal positions. Instead, assessments that measure applicants’ skills and competencies are used to help determine which individuals are highly qualified enough to continue through the selection process.

These assessments can take several forms, including technical assessments (such as job knowledge tests, skill and aptitude batteries, and similar) as well as manual assessments conducted by subject matter experts (SMEs) including but not limited to structured interviews or resume reviews.

As with the occupational questionnaires, any assessments’ scores will be assigned to your application. Those scores, in combination with your score from any occupational questionnaire, will determine whether or not you will move on for further consideration in the selection process.

## What Else Will I Need to Submit?

### Required Documents

Read the vacancy announcement and the “Required Documents” section carefully, and follow all instructions. At minimum, many agencies, including NARA, require applicants to submit a resume and an online self-assessment questionnaire. In many instances, additional documentation will be required. This may include your:

- most recent performance appraisal;
- college transcripts;
- proof of bar membership or similar certificates/ licenses; or,
- Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty (Form DD-214 page 4).

## Essays for GS-5 or Higher-graded Positions

As part of the new requirements for most federal positions at a GS-05 and above, applicants will be asked to complete four essay questions. Responses cannot exceed 200 words per question.

1. How has your commitment to the Constitution and the founding principles of the United States inspired you to pursue this role within the Federal government? Provide a concrete example from professional, academic, or personal experience.
2. In this role, how would you use your skills and experience to improve government efficiency and effectiveness? Provide specific examples where you improved processes, reduced costs, or improved outcomes.
3. How would you help advance the President's Executive Orders and policy priorities in this role? Identify one or two relevant Executive Orders or policy initiatives that are significant to you, and explain how you would help implement them if hired.
4. How has a strong work ethic contributed to your professional, academic or personal achievements? Provide one or two specific examples, and explain how those qualities would enable you to serve effectively in this position.

## What Should I Do Before Submitting My Application?

As a final step before submitting your application package, take a moment to review these basic, yet very important guidelines when applying for a career at the National Archives or other federal agencies.

Do	Don't
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Quantify whenever possible. Use numbers and data points to illustrate success.</li><li>● Use active verbs to describe actual work performed.</li><li>● Be specific. Use your own words when writing a resume.</li><li>● Be concise. Edit your resume to reduce fluff and make every word count. Set your resume aside for a few days and then come back to it again with a fresh perspective.</li><li>● Proofread your application package for misspellings and typographical errors.</li><li>● Review your application package to</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Make things up or inflate your level of responsibility, accomplishments, or skills.</li><li>● Use personal pronouns (I, my, me).</li><li>● Be humble and minimize your contributions and achievements.</li><li>● Use an acronym unless you are certain everyone knows what the acronym means.</li><li>● Include personal information, other than your contact information (examples: hobbies, height, weight, age, date of birth, place of birth, marital status, ethnicity, health, reason for leaving previous jobs, etc.)</li><li>● Use the same resume for every</li></ul>

<p>ensure that it contains all of the required documentation listed under the “How to Apply” section of the vacancy announcement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Submit your application in a timely manner.</li></ul>	<p>application. Spend time tailoring your resume for each position.</p>
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## What Happens After I Submit My Application?

Once you submit your application, a Human Resources (HR) Specialist will review your package for its completion, ensure that you meet the basic qualification requirements, verify your self-assessment ratings against the information you provided in your resume, and forward the list of “Best Qualified” applicants to the hiring manager for consideration.

The hiring manager will select applicants from the “Best Qualified” list and conduct interviews. Once interviews have been completed, an HR Specialist will extend a tentative job offer.

Pending the outcome of a background investigation, a final job offer may or may not be made.

To determine the status of your application, activate the notification option from your USAJOBS profile to receive automatic alerts when there are status changes.





# Sample Resume: TARGETED

## John Q. Smith

123 Any Street, Washington, DC 12345

(123) 456-7890 | johnqsmith@email.com

**Objective:** To obtain a responsible and challenging archivist position at the National Archives & Records Administration where my work experience will have valuable application and utilization of my opportunity for advancement.

### Career Achievements:

- Collections and archives internships and projects affording exposure to bibliographic, electronic archiving, cataloguing, and collection management techniques and technologies.
- Key areas of experience and study include:
  - Collection Cataloguing & Management
  - Historical Research & Interpretation

### Professional Experience:

National Museum of History, Washington, DC

Archivist

August 2000 – Present

- Directed filing and cross indexing of selected documents in alphabetical and chronological order in manual or computerized database systems.
- Advised government agencies, scholars, journalists, and others conducting research by supplying available materials and information according to familiarity with archives and with political, economic, military, and social history of period.
- Selected and edited documents for publication and display, according to knowledge of subject, literary or journalistic expression, and techniques for presentation and display.

Maryland State Archives, Annapolis, MD

Assistant Archivist

July 1999 – August 2000

- Assisted the archivist and curator in building and maintaining four permanent collections including the library (50,000 titles), manuscripts (1.5 million items), photographs and prints (50,000 images), and museum (10,000 items) for a thriving historical society with 5,000+ members and 12,000 annual visitors.
- Authored two articles published in the quarterly newsletter; first article focused on the Shenandoah campaigns of 1864 and the second showcased historical perspectives of World War II from common soldiers.

### Education:

1997–1999 Masters in Library and Information Science

UMD, College Park, MD

1993–1997 BS in History

UMD, College Park, MD

### Associations/Organizations:

Council of State Archives (CoSA), Member

Society of American Archivists, Member

# Action Verbs

## Creative

acted  
adapted  
began  
combined  
conceptualized  
condensed  
created  
customized  
designed  
developed  
directed

displayed  
drew  
entertained  
established  
fashioned  
formulated  
illustrated  
initiated  
instituted  
integrated  
introduced

invented  
modeled  
modified  
originated  
performed  
photographed  
planned  
revised  
revitalized  
shaped  
solved

## Communications

addressed  
advertised  
arbitrated  
arranged  
articulated  
authored  
clarified  
collaborated  
communicated  
composed  
condensed  
conferred  
consulted  
contacted  
conveyed  
corresponded  
debated  
defined  
delegated  
described  
developed

directed  
discussed  
drafted  
edited  
elicited  
enlisted  
explained  
expressed  
formulated  
incorporated  
influenced  
interacted  
interpreted  
interviewed  
involved  
judged  
lectured  
listened  
marketed  
mediated  
moderated  
negotiated

observed  
outlined  
participated  
persuaded  
presented  
promoted  
proposed  
publicized  
reconciled  
recruited  
referred  
reinforced  
reported  
resolved  
responded  
solicited  
specified  
spoke  
summarized  
synthesized  
translated  
wrote

## Data

adjusted  
allocated  
analyzed  
appraised  
assessed  
audited

balanced  
calculated  
computed  
corrected  
determined  
developed

estimated  
forecasted  
managed  
marketed  
measured  
planned

programmed  
projected

reconciled  
reduced

researched  
retrieved

## Helping

adapted  
advocated  
aided  
answered  
arranged  
assessed  
clarified  
coached  
collaborated  
contributed

cooperated  
counseled  
demonstrated  
diagnosed  
educated  
encouraged  
ensured  
expedited  
facilitated  
familiarize

furthered  
guided  
intervened  
motivated  
provided  
presented  
resolved  
simplified  
supplied

## Leadership

approved  
assigned  
attained  
authorized  
chaired  
considered  
consolidated  
contracted  
controlled  
converted  
coordinated  
decided  
delegated  
developed  
directed  
eliminated  
emphasized  
enforced

enhanced  
established  
executed  
generated  
handled  
headed  
hired  
hosted  
incorporated  
increased  
initiated  
inspected  
instituted  
led  
managed  
merged  
motivated  
organized

originated  
overhauled  
oversaw  
planned  
presided  
prioritized  
produced  
recommended  
reorganized  
replaced  
restored  
reviewed  
scheduled  
streamlined  
strengthened  
supervised

## Organizing

approved  
arranged  
cataloged  
categorized  
charted  
classified  
coded  
collected  
compiled  
corresponded

distributed  
executed  
filed  
generated  
implemented  
incorporated  
inspected  
logged  
maintained  
monitored

obtained  
operated  
ordered  
organized  
prepared  
processed  
provided  
purchased  
recorded  
registered

reserved  
responded  
reviewed  
routed  
scheduled

screened  
set up  
submitted  
supplied  
standardized

systematized  
updated  
validated  
verified

## Technical

assembled  
built  
calculated  
coded  
computed  
conserved  
constructed  
converted  
debugged  
designed  
determined

developed  
engineered  
fabricated  
installed  
maintained  
operated  
overhauled  
programmed  
rectified  
regulated  
remodeled

repaired  
replaced  
restored  
solved  
specialized  
standardized  
studied  
upgraded  
utilized

## Other

achieved  
adjusted  
allocated  
analyzed  
appraised  
assessed  
audited  
awarded  
balanced  
calculated  
completed  
computed  
corrected  
determined

developed  
estimated  
exceeded  
expanded  
forecasted  
gained  
improved  
learned  
managed  
marketed  
measured  
pioneered  
planned  
programmed

projected  
promoted  
reconciled  
reduced  
researched  
resolved  
restored  
retrieved  
spearheaded  
succeeded  
surpassed  
transformed  
won

# Resources

## Government-specific Guidance

- [Federal Resume Guidebook, 7th Ed: First-Ever Book on Federal Resume Writing Featuring the Outline Format Federal Resume](#)
- [USAJOBS Tutorials](#)

## Resume Writing Tips

- [archives.org: Guide to Effective Resumes: Resources for Archivists and Records Managers](#)
- [indeed.com: How To Explain Gaps in Employment on Your Resume](#)
- [How to Write a Great Resume and Cover Letter | Harvard Extension School \(2:44\)](#)
- [How to Write a Resume That Stands Out | Harvard Business Review \(7:54\)](#)
- [How to Write a Cover Letter That Sounds Like YOU \(and Gets Noticed\) | Harvard Business Review \(8:00\)](#)
- [What Makes a Great Resume | Harvard Business Review](#)
- [Combination Resume Tips and Examples | Indeed](#)
- [Harvard Business Review Template](#)

## Interviewing Tips

- [Body Language Experts Break Down Job Interview Etiquette | WIRED \(9:38\)](#)
- [How to Ace an Interview | 5 Tips from a Harvard Career Advisor \(5:00\)](#)
- [How to Answer the Question, “Tell Me About Yourself” | Christine vs. Work | Harvard Business Review \(6:43\)](#)
- [Stand Out in a Job Interview | The Harvard Business Review Guide \(10:06\)](#)
- [38 Smart Questions to Ask in a Job Interview | The Harvard Business Review Guide \(9:24\)](#)



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