

# Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) Positions – Great Opportunity

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The Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) position is one of the most highly sought after jobs by attorneys in the private sector and federal service alike. The reason is that ALJs are paid on a scale comparable to Senior Executive Service (SES), but are allowed to arrive at decisions with total independence. An ALJ has no supervisor and is not required to supervise any employees. The only judges seated by a merit-based selection process, ALJ appointments are selected from scores achieved in a comprehensive testing procedure that includes submission of a lengthy “Accomplishment Record,” a four-hour “Written Demonstration” and an oral “Structured Interview” given before a three-person panel.

## **New Demand for ALJ Applicants**

The federal government is growing its cadre of ALJs because of the increasing needs of agencies like the Social Security Administration (SSA) and the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). A strong candidate is one that has experience as a trial attorney or litigator in private practice, military service, or the federal sector, and has significant knowledge of Administrative Law. Applicants are not required to have prior judiciary experience or any political connections. Veterans are awarded applicable preference points. See the ALJ pay scale here.

## **Apply for ALJ positions**

A federal ALJ application includes the Accomplishment Record (six narratives based on ALJ competencies), a federal resume (usually about 5–7 pages long), and two additional narratives detailing the candidate’s administrative law and litigation experience. The Administrative Law Judge application process is managed by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) for all of the 30 agencies that employ them. Candidates can only apply during the brief and infrequent open period, which typically occurs about once every 12–14 months. The application is completed online and must be submitted by midnight of the date when a designated number of applications (this has varied from 600 to 1,200) is received. During the 2009 exam, the open period lasted less than 40 hours, and more than 1,200 attorneys applied. Advance planning for the Accomplishment Record is critical.

## **Understand the Audience**

To be competitive, your application materials must be completed before the exam opens. Your Accomplishment Record must rate high in order to be invited to the Written Demonstration and Structured Interview, making it a vital component of the examination—of more import than the resume itself. One potential pitfall with the application writing is that many candidates do not know which key words to use, or how to best showcase their relevant accomplishments. The Accomplishment Record is rated by Human Resources professionals, not fellow attorneys or sitting ALJs. The use of legal jargon and complicated language can hurt your application. Plain language that can be understood by a lay person or professional alike is proven to yield good results. The six competencies assessed in the Accomplishment Record have not changed over the past three examination periods, and remain a good point of preparation for potential candidates. If the proper key words for the ALJ position are used in the writing, even if the rated competencies vary in the future, the narratives will be relevant and can easily fit into new categories.

## **Help is Available**

Our team has some of the most experienced ALJ application writers in the country who understand the complex selection process as well as the stringent writing requirements. We have the expertise to develop your comprehensive federal ALJ application package so that you can be ready for the next ALJ examination.