

PREPARING AN EFFECTIVE RESUME

Purpose

The first representation of your image is the quality, clarity and relevance of your resume. Conservative, brief, accurate and concrete are the key words for the tone of a legal resume. Do not allow your busy schedule to pressure you into presenting anything less than a perfect resume. It is imperative that your resume highlight the qualifications you bring to the table for each individual employer.

The surest way to sabotage your chances of getting an interview is by having typos on your resume. Proofread. Line by line. Again and again. Ask at least two other people to proofread your resume. If you are not a native English speaker, ensure that you ask at least one, and preferably two, native English speakers to review your resume. Then, ask a Career Services counselor to review your resume.

Your Resume Should:

- ✓ Highlight the academic and work experiences that make you a qualified applicant for that particular employer or job announcement;
- ✓ Demonstrate relevant additional skills and achievements;
- ✓ Present substantive information in an organized, succinct and eye-catching manner; and
- ✓ Represent your ability to write well and pay close attention to detail.

Your Resume Should Not:

- ✗ Include a detailed biography;
- ✗ Be a document for all occasions, all jobs, all employers; or
- ✗ Be a compilation of all previous job descriptions.

Format

The outline format is the standard legal format preferred by employers when reviewing resumes. Do not use your resume to give lengthy summaries or narratives. You will have ample opportunity in the interview to expand upon the information in your resume.

Effective use of headings, spacing and indentation will enhance the visual appeal and flow of your resume. Do not overuse font types, underlines, or boldface type. Do not use over the top font styles. They look unprofessional and are a good way to make sure that your resume ends up in the “no” pile. A good rule of thumb when choosing a font style, is to use a style that you would use on a legal memoranda/brief or an academic paper.

We recommend using only one font style throughout your resume. However, if you are going to use more than one font style, ensure that you treat all similarly situated items consistently, i.e., all headings, dates, and accomplishments are in the same typeface and formatted similarly.

Use the past tense when referring to your previous job(s) and present tense for a current position. Keep your descriptions in the active voice by using action verbs to describe your duties (see list of Action Words for an Effective Resume at the end of this section).

Naturally, your resume should emphasize your legal experience. However, you may want to separate Legal Experience from Additional Professional Experience or Academic Experience. It is appropriate to use completely separate headings to emphasize different areas of expertise.

Paper

Legal resumes should always be printed on 8 ½ x 11" paper. Use bond paper (25% cotton content is sufficient) that is white or off-white (light grey is also acceptable but is not preferred). *Do not* use dark-colored paper, as many employers will make copies of your resume to distribute to others, and dark-colored paper does not copy well. Your resume does not need to be professionally printed, but it should be done on a quality printer. The Career Services Office has a laser printer available for student use.

Length

Except in extremely rare and extraordinary cases, your resume should be no more than *one page* in length. If the essential information can be presented on one page, it is unlikely that any additional information you put on page two would improve your chances for an interview. In some cases, it may be appropriate to have a two page resume. However, a two page resume is almost never appropriate for a law student or even an attorney with several years of experience. If you are having trouble restricting yourself to one page, make an appointment to meet with a career counselor.

Content

Heading: Put your name, address, telephone number, and email-address at the top of your resume. If you are applying to employers in your home state or country, you may wish to include both your school and permanent addresses. Generally, however, use only your current school address. Do not print "Resume" at the top of your heading.

Job Objective: A legal resume does not include a job objective.

Education: List "Education" under your name and contact information. Begin this section with Rutgers University School of Law - Camden, and, in reverse chronological order, list all graduate and undergraduate degrees, as well as study abroad or certificate programs, although these should not be emphasized. For each institution, indicate the year of graduation (not years in attendance, unless you are listing a law school from which you transferred) and the degree obtained or expected. You should not list high school unless it establishes a geographical connection or carries significant influence in that community.

If applicable, you should include subsections for Honors and Activities.

Grades - Although there is no bright line rule on listing GPA, grades generally should be included unless they fall below a 3.0. You should list your GPA as it appears on your transcript, i.e., do not round up. However, you may round to the nearest one-hundredth of a point if you wish (e.g., 3.14 if your GPA is a 3.137). Keep in mind, if you are submitting a transcript with your resume, the employer will see your unrounded GPA anyway, and may penalize you for rounding up on your resume. If your grades improve over time, you might consider breaking down your GPA by semester or year to reflect your improvement.

Experience: The next section should be titled “Experience”, “Professional Experience”, or “Legal Experience” as appropriate. List your experience in reverse chronological order, beginning with the most recent position. For each position, include the name of the employer, the location of the position, your job title, and the dates of employment. Generally, you should list 2-4 duties, making the description as specific as possible. Keep in mind who your audience will be and tailor the description to the skills and areas the reader is searching for. Also, the older the experience the less significant it will probably be, unless it is relevant to the job for which you are applying.

Speciality Categories (Publications, Affiliations, Languages, Volunteer Activities, Personal Interests): The purpose of these sections is to highlight specific skills, activities or interests that make you more competitive in the job market. Bar memberships, community service, relevant activities, personal interests, or publications should be listed here. Fluency or proficiency in a language should always be included in your resume, preferably in a separate “Languages” category. Volunteer activities indicate community involvement and commitment, and they are particularly useful if directly relevant to positions for which you are applying.

References

You should create a separate reference page to include with your resume when appropriate. You should always take your reference list to an interview. The reference list should include the individual’s name, affiliation, title, and preferred mode of contact, such as a phone number and/or e-mail address.

Your references should be varied and include individuals who are able to speak politely regarding your professional abilities and interpersonal skills. On average, you should have three professional references. Always contact your references in advance to notify them that potential employers will be contacting them. Once you have completed your job search, make sure to contact all references to update them on your success.

Your reference list also should include your name and contact information so that if it is separated from your resume, the employer can still identify you as the applying candidate.