



LEGAL RESUME WRITING

- ❖ **Assumption by employer:** Cover letter and resume are a representation of your best work. If there are errors in these documents, it's unlikely you'll proceed to the interview

Resumes are an individual expression of who you are. They are also your one chance to make a great first impression. The idea is to set yourself apart from the rest of the crowd, while still maintaining the traditional professionalism required in the field of law.

Remember, the resume is **not** a complete autobiography. It is a prospectus for the future. Its main task is to convince prospective employers to contact you for an interview. A good resume should:

- Be eye-appealing
- Highlight your significant accomplishments
- Be logically displayed for a 30-second (or less) review

IDENTIFY YOUR SKILLS

It is sometimes difficult to fully and effectively inventory and evaluate your own skills. Ask yourself: "What special abilities have I developed which allowed me to perform successfully in my previous activities/jobs?" Do not be concerned that you have little or no previous experience in legal jobs. The key is to identify **transferable job skills**. Try to think of the types of skills you would need to have to be a successful lawyer, and identify those abilities in your resume. For example, the communications skills learned in a retail position will be useful in your future legal career when counseling clients. Categorize your skills as follows – all three categories are important and highly valued by employers.

- 1) **Technical/Professional Skills** – skills related to performing a job and acquired by education, training, reading, and/or hands-on experiences (i.e., internships, clerkships, volunteer opportunities). These skills are often listed in advertised job postings: e.g., legal research abilities, writing skills, working knowledge of a certain area of law (e.g., Uniform Commercial Code).
- 2) **Functional Skills** – skills related to people, information, and things that are transferable from one field to another (e.g., organization, communication, management, leadership). These abilities are easy to overlook or downplay, but are highly valued by prospective employers and crucial to successful workplace performance.
- 3) **Personal/Adaptive Skills** – skills often referred to as personality and/or character traits (e.g., patience, decisiveness, team player, self-starter, quick learner, detail-oriented, work well under pressure).

INVENTORYING YOUR EXPERIENCES/RESUME CONTENT

- **Heading** (name, address, email, telephone).
- **Education/Honors/School-Related Activities** (reverse chronological order).
- List degree/year obtained or expected; names and locations of schools.
- Include your GPA if 3.0 or higher; class rank if in the top one-third.
- Include whether or not you received a “High A” in a particular class.
- **Certificates/Licenses/Bar Admission(s).**
- **Professional/Work Experience.**
 - Be specific! Include title, months and years of employment, name and location of employer.
 - **Volunteer, Clinical, or Extern/Internship Experience:** This may be your *strong point!* Always consider how you can “put your best foot forward” and present yourself as an experienced, capable candidate. Just because you did not get paid does not exclude the skills you’ve gained.
- **Catch All Category**
 - Professional Memberships/Activities/Publications
 - Special skills (fluency in a foreign language; advanced computer skills if truly beyond those skills expected)
 - Unrelated Volunteer/Activities/Interests (extracurricular activities, hobbies, interesting pursuits)

LEGAL CONVERSION: Often students struggle to convert past experience into something helpful in the practice area of law. Focusing on specific skills and pairing that with a specific job duty can be a helpful aid in creating powerful and focused sentences.

It can be helpful to break the text of the job description into two columns. Column A are the skills a student feels they exhibit, Column B is a list of job duties or tasks they achieved while holding a position. Pairing a specific skill (column A) with a duty (column B) can serve as a method to create a sentence which both demonstrates a transferrable skill and a concrete explanation as to how that skill was obtained or how it can be objectively shown.

STEP 1: Draw from the skills listed on *Lawyering Skills and Values* and identify skills that you exhibit. Create clear list of job duties or tasks achieved while in a particular position.

STEP 2: Assign skills to specific jobs/positions (2-3 skills per job).

STEP 3: Use the PAR method to establish how you gained the experience and subsequent skill.

Sample Matching:

Skills (Column A)	Job Description (Column B)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Initiative; Willing to take charge• Team Player• Public Speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Worked as an Intern for a Senator; Led tours• Wait staff at a local grill; Coordinated multiple tables, led the staff through closings• Volunteered for the Humane Society; Maintained record books, and coordinated the schedule

It may be helpful to describe each experience using a **P-A-R (Problem-Action-Result)** formula. Describe the **Problem** (or challenge/responsibility) you faced in the position, **Action(s)** you took to reach an objective/goal, and the **Result** or accomplishment. Contrast the effectiveness of these two statements:

Basic/Generic Description	Using P-A-R Formula
Performed legal research and drafted a response to a motion for summary judgment	Drafted successful opposition to pivotal motion for summary judgment in personal injury case involving more than \$10 million in damages

Instead of automatically listing job duties for each job, try to write "**accomplishment statements**" that single out and spotlight your major achievements. Accomplishment statements are far more compelling than a list of job duties and responsibilities. Think back on your previous positions and highlight any experiences that represent achievements. To pinpoint achievements, some people think in terms of baseball and ask, "What were my triples and homeruns in that job?" Once you identify the triples and homeruns, write out an explanation of what you did.

List **job duties** where accomplishment statements are not feasible. Obviously, no one hits triples and homeruns in every job. If you don't have any significant achievements in a particular job, it is perfectly acceptable to list your job duties and responsibilities, but it need not be an exhaustive list. Stick to the more significant ones that will be meaningful to the reader. A list of sample phrases for job duties as well as accomplishment statements is included below.

Use action verbs to start each statement and omit personal pronouns (i.e., "I" or "my"). A list of action verbs is included below. Quantify number of people, products, profits involved (e.g., "Supervised 15-20 community volunteers").

FORMAT

- One page (unless you have *significant* work experience, e.g. career before law school, high level responsibility, etc.) (Note: This rule does not apply for some employers and does not apply to resumes for international positions. Check with the career services office for any tips on what particular employers might prefer).
- Professional, clean, easy-to-read typeface.
- Standard 12 pt. font (the absolute smallest font you should use is 11 pt).
- Recommended fonts: Times New Roman, Cambria, Verdana, Georgia and Calibri.
- Reasonable margins (0.75 to 1 inch), you may go as low as .5, but absolutely not lower (unless in the header with some exception).
- Printed on high quality paper (white paper preferred) (Note: This rule does not apply if you are submitting your resume by fax or by e-mail).
- Use space and formatting to highlight information and make it easy to read.
 - Employer needs to know:
 1. *Where* you have been, and
 2. *What* you did while you were there.

TIPS AND TRAPS

- Tailor your resume to the specific employer.
 - See materials for Clerkships, JD Advantage, and other case specific positions.
- Be sure to include skills and experience sought by the employer.
- Proofread (for accuracy, grammar, punctuation, and correct telephone number).
- Do not include personal information (i.e., marital status, children, etc.).
- Have two other people proofread (perfection is key).
- Before including anything on your resume, ask yourself this: Does this information *significantly* contribute to your presentation? If not, exclude it.

- Exclude photograph.
- Make sure that your e-mail address and your voice-mail message are both professional and appropriate.
- You can list references on a separate sheet that has your name and contact info at the top. It is important to select people as references who are familiar with your work skills. Ask former employers or colleagues if they are willing to be a positive reference for you prior to listing him or her on your list. Include the full name, job title, address including phone number and e-mail address for each reference. Law school professors and legal employers are the preferred references when applying for a legal job.

SAMPLE LEGAL CONVERSION PHRASES FOR PRIOR EXPERIENCES

- SKILL: Public Speaking and Interpersonal skills; JOB: Admissions Tour Guide
 - Honed public speaking and interpersonal skills through leading guided tours of prospective students, parents and administrators around campus, answered questions and directed inquiries as appropriate.
- SKILL: Multitasking; JOB: Wait staff at restaurant
 - Coordinated multiple duties while serving customers with prompt, friendly attention. Developed focus and capability to address numerous demands efficiently and effectively.
- SKILL: Teamwork; JOB: Construction
 - Collaborated with a 10 man crew in the construction of residential and commercial buildings. Coordinated deadlines, code considerations and daily tasks to competently complete projects on time.

SAMPLE JOB DUTY PHRASES FOR LAW CLERK AND GENERAL LEGAL EXPERIENCE

- Researched issues pertaining to pending motion to dismiss in complex civil litigation case.
- Researched and drafted memoranda on discrete issues of law including ... (piercing the corporate veil, Securities Act of 1933, securities regulations, CERCLA, etc.).
- Assisted in discovery including drafting deposition questions, interrogatories and requests for production of documents.
- Drafted settlement letters.
- Drafted and edited articles of incorporation, by-laws and articles of merger.
- Communicated with opposing counsel and clients.
- Attended federal pre-trial conferences and court proceedings.
- Attended depositions in commercial foreclosure proceedings.
- Attended various client meetings regarding x, y, and z.
- Drafted corporate resolutions and partnership agreements.
- Drafted lease agreements.
- Prepared due diligence for complex civil litigation case.
- Researched and drafted bench memoranda, orders and opinions on various issues of criminal law, such as ... (preliminary injunctions, order to produce documents, etc.).
- Reviewed motions, researched relevant case law, prepared summaries of legal arguments and assisted in preparation of court rulings.
- Prepared and filed documents in (dependency and neglect proceedings, probate case).
- Conducted in-take interviews of prospective clients.

SAMPLE ACCOMPLISHMENT STATEMENTS FOR LAW CLERK AND GENERAL LEGAL EXPERIENCE

- Drafted complaint in complex contract case involving dispute over multi-million dollar parcel of real estate.
- Prepared settlement agreement to resolve \$30,000 construction contract case between general contractor and property owner.
- Drafted and edited successful motions to dismiss and motions for summary judgment defending claims for workers' compensation involving potential liability for permanent, total disability payments.
- Investigated and developed factual basis for motion for restraining order for victim adopted by assistant district attorney in presenting case and relied on by court in issuing order.
- Successfully represented indigent, Spanish-speaking woman from Columbia in all aspects of a two day asylum hearing before a federal immigration judge; client granted asylum as a result.
- Wrote and edited a legal manual on domestic violence distributed to law enforcement officers and battered women's shelters throughout the state.

- Drafted speeches on x, y, and z delivered in committee and subcommittee meetings by Congressman.
- Argued more than a dozen sentencing and bond reduction hearings for misdemeanor defendants resulting in favorable decisions by the court in all cases.
- Obtained a sentence reduction for client in criminal case from one year to ninety days in jail.
- Researched and drafted successful motion to suppress evidence in criminal case resulting in dismissal of several charges.
- Drafted motion for partial summary judgment that was filed in case involving the Endangered Species Act resulting in the inclusion of a species of Colorado trout on the endangered species list.
- Developed factual and legal premise to support dismissal of frivolous trespassing suit, saving client potential damages exceeding \$10,000.

ACTION VERBS FOR RESUMES

A list of action verbs to assist you in describing your experiences and accomplishments:

accelerated	accomplished	achieved	acquired	activated
adapted	adjusted	administered	advised	allocated
analyzed	annotated	anticipated	applied	appraised
arranged	articulated	assembled	assessed	assigned
authored	balanced	briefed	budgeted	built
catalogued	categorized	chaired	clarified	clear coded
collaborated	compared	compiled	completed	composed
computed	conducted	consolidated	constructed	contacted
continued	contracted	convened	conveyed	coordinated
corresponded	counseled	created	critiqued	decided
defined	delegated	delivered	demonstrated	derived
designed	detected	determined	developed	devised
directed	distributed	drafted	edited	educated
effected	elicited	encouraged	established	evaluated
examined	executed	exhibited	expanded	expedited
experienced	experimented	explained	explored	facilitated
figured	financed	focused	forecasted	formed
formulated	fostered	founded	functioned	generated
governed	grouped	guided	helped	identified
illustrated	immunized	implemented	improved	increased
informed	initiated	instituted	instructed	interpreted
interviewed	introduced	invented	investigated	judged
led	listened	maintained	managed	marketed
mastered	measured	mediated	modeled	modified
molded	monitored	motivated	named	negotiated
observed	obtained	operated	ordered	organized
originated	outlined	oversaw	perceived	performed
persuaded	planned	planted	presented	presided
printed	produced	protected	provided	publicized
questioned	raised	recommended	recorded	recruited
reduced	rendered	repaired	reported	represented
reproduced	researched	resolved	responded	restored
retained	retrieved	reviewed	revised	rewrote
routed	scheduled	searched	selected	served
shaped	shared	showed	simplified	solicited
solved	specified	spoke	stimulated	structured
studied	supervised	supported	synthesized	targeted
taught	tested	trained	transferred	tutored
updated	utilized	verified	wrote	

Help! I'm not in the top 10% of my class!

You are not alone. Realize that in a class of 80 students, only 8 people will be in the coveted "top 10%." While grades *do* matter to the big firms, most employers are looking for more than grades, e.g.:

- Enthusiasm (as Kimm Walton, author of Guerrilla Tactics for Getting the Legal Job of Your Dreams, says, "*Enthusiasm is the equivalent of having great credentials.*")
- Work experience (volunteer, for credit/extern, and paid internships)
- Participation in clinics, moot court, competitions and writing competitions
- Leadership skills
- Professionalism
- Excellent writing skills
- Cite-checking and other detail-oriented skills
- Legal research skills (both electronic and paper resources)
- Language skills
- Honors and awards (including undergraduate academic achievements)
- Volunteerism / Civic Involvement

...the list goes on...

The number one thing that grades can impact is your feeling of self-worth. Don't let it. Remember: You are more than your grades.