

THE WINNING RESUME

This article sets forth an overview of DO's and DON'Ts you should keep in mind when writing your resume.

A resume should be viewed as a marketing document and not as an obituary that simply recites your life's chronology. From a marketing perspective, your resume should emphasize the value you can offer to the organization you are seeking to join, without compromising the truthfulness or completeness of your academic and professional history.

A resume must be drafted with an awareness of your overall value, consisting of 1) your academic record, 2) your experience, including where you have been trained and what type of work you've been doing, and 3) the current demand for your practice specialty and experience level.

FORMAT

A resume need not be in any one format exclusively. The key is that both in content and in format it is easy for a potential employer to read and find items about your background that make him want to call in for an interview. Always consider how the resume will appear physically to your reader.

1. Keep your resume to one page. This rule applies for most resumes for law positions, regardless of your level of experience.

If you absolutely cannot keep the resume to one page, don't assume that all potential employers will bother to read subsequent pages - put your most compelling information on the first page. If your relevant experience is so rich that you don't want to skip a thing, consider writing a one page overview resume and then a "Deal Sheet" that gives greater detail for those who are interested.

2. List items in reverse chronological order. You want people to read about your most relevant experience in each category first because that is what they want to know most.

But what if you did not follow the traditional path: What if law is your second career? What if you left a firm to work for the government? What if you ran someone's political campaign? What if you traveled around India after one year of practice and then came back to your firm? If so, you may need to create categories to help the reader see the connection between seemingly disparate elements. For example, let's say that you are an intellectual property lawyer who attended law school after working for several years as an engineer and in that capacity you filed patents for your employer's inventions. To make it more complicated, let's also say that you joined your present intellectual property firm after three years of general practice. Why not lead with a category called "Intellectual Property Experience: Legal and Business" under which you may include your current law firm and your pre-law engineering work. Follow that category with "General Legal Experience" under which you include your general practice firm. There are many examples of using creatively defined categories to create themes in your resume.

3. Beginner lawyers generally put their academic record first (including where you studied law, your grades if they help you and any honors received). Your experience is generally less important to a potential employer than your academic accomplishments and potential employers expect to train you. You don't have to list every school you attended. There is no reason to list your high school unless it is a school that will make people want to hire you.

4. Once you've worked for two years or more, your experience should come first. That is the main reason that employers wish to hire you and they want to see your experience right away.

However, any good rule has its exceptions. Be sensitive to what is most compelling in your background and try to highlight that in the format of your resume. Therefore, in drafting your resume you should highlight those items that will appeal most to your targeted employers. If you believe that your target employer will be most impressed by your academic record, even though you graduated five years ago, then put it first to catch the reader's attention.

5. Use linear chronology but don't be a slave to it. If the most striking result of the linear chronology is that it highlights the number of different jobs you have had, you need to reformat the document. The document should not convey a sense of chronic unhappiness and peripatetic job-hopping. You can counteract this visual impression by creating theme categories that tie jobs together. If a resume might otherwise be confusing, create easy-to-follow categories (i.e. Intellectual Property Experience, General Corporate Experience, Litigation Experience, Law Firm Experience, Company Counsel Experience)

6. CONTENT

Every word in your resume should be there for a reason. Eliminate unnecessary and complicated explanations. Create bullet points to avoid cumbersome, clause-ridden sentences. Use action verbs to preface accomplishments (drafted. . . , negotiated. . . , appeared in court. . .).

Some of the more common language and style mistakes include:

1. Listing general categories of work with no explanation. Some people resist speaking about professional accomplishments for fear that it makes them sound boastful or obnoxious, but if you don't present your accomplishments no one else will. No matter whether you have been practicing law for one year or one decade, describing your experience without explaining what you've done won't make anyone want to call you in for an interview. Don't say that you practiced "civil commercial law" without describing what you did, including the types of documents you drafted (if you're a labor lawyer, don't forget to mention whether you represented management or employees, the kinds of court papers you drafted, that you appeared in court and drafted employee option agreements, etc.). Emphasize your drafting, negotiating and language skills as well as the level of responsibility you were given.

2. Don't get bogged down in minutia. While you want to give explanations and details about what you've done, don't write intricate details about issues that are irrelevant. You should come out somewhere in between. While it important to give show the kinds of agreements you drafted (software licensing, distribution, due diligence, nondisclosure) you don't have to list every single nondisclosure agreement you wrote or to list deals in which your main job was to order the coffee and listen.

3. Telling (instead of showing) the reader how wonderful you are. Self-proclaimed personal assessments invariably generate skepticism on the part of the reader and tend to undermine your credibility. "A goal-oriented professional who brings entrepreneurial zeal and legal analysis to the problems at hand." "A team player who thrives on challenges and problem solving." A better approach is to show the reader your unique value by reciting accomplishments that allow inferences consistent with your analysis of your overall value to the potential employer and to save your accolades for the recommendations you offer.

4. Having a One-Size-Fits-All Approach. Most people don't buy many "one size fits all" shirts or pants. Similarly after practicing law for several years, you have grown beyond being the fungible candidate for fungible jobs. If you are applying for an international corporate/commercial law job, list those deals that highlight your international experience. Conversely, if it is a labor law spot you want, give more emphasis to your employment agreements and litigation experience. When applying for highly competitive positions that draw upon certain aspects of your background, you should think about what you have done that is relevant to the particular position you want to obtain.

RESUME OPTICS

The visuals will draw the reader to certain elements on the page, independent of the content (like a Rorschach test or an impressionistic painting).

Make sure your typeface and layout attract the reader's eye to what distinguishes you from similarly situated professionals. Do key elements stand out on the page, enabling the resume to be visually scanned without requiring an in-depth reading? If not, the recruiter or employer may not bother to read the document if the text looks too dense

or the choice of language requires effort. Even worse, the reader may ascribe these negative qualities to you. Some of the more common "optical" mistakes include:

1. Writing your resume by hand or hand writing in corrections or changes. In the age of computers there is no excuse for your resume not being typed –if you don't own your own computer then borrow one. If you want to be hired as a lawyer your job is to draft documents; this is the most important document you have to draft right now. Nobody will want to hire you if your document looks sloppy, if it has mistakes or if you write it by hand instead of typing it. This may sound trivial or obvious but it's not!

2. Wasting critical space under your name with a prominent display of your address and phone number. If an employer wants to find you, he will make the effort to read your contact information; the trick is making them want to find you in the first instance.

The top of the resume is where the reader's eye is drawn first. There is no reason to write "Curriculum Vitae" as it is obvious from the content. Don't waste your opportunity to catch a potential employer's attention by filling that space with information about your date of birth, bar affiliations, languages, etc. Any vital personal information can be left for the end of the c.v.

3. Making margins so wide that text is forced into narrow columns. Some resumes have such a wide column for dates and subject headings that corresponding text is squeezed on the other side of the page. This layout creates narrow text columns difficult for the eye to decipher and also results in dead space and excess pages. The visual priorities are backwards. The reader remembers when you worked at a particular firm, but may not recall what you accomplished during that time. You are better off using two lines of normal page width for the name of your firm/company, its location and your position and dates. Following a brief description of your responsibilities, use bullet points to describe your accomplishments in greater detail. Normal margins broken up by bullet points create a document that is easier to read.

4. Using a Small Font. Some people think that they can make their resume shorter by using a small font. The better approach is to edit the document so that you don't need to miniaturize the text. The resume should not be an eye test for the reader. Many of the people making hiring decisions are over 40 and need reading glasses for small print. Use at least an 11 point, preferably 12 point, type.

5. Putting a photograph on your resume. No matter how physically attractive you may be, a photo looks tacky and may make people take you less seriously as a professional. If you want to convey the physical energy that you project, present your athletic victories at the end of the resume.

6. Using a Scripted Font. Some people think a scripted font (italicized) looks more elegant. In our experience, scripted fonts (just like photos on resumes) attract the wrong kind of attention, suggesting that you have something to hide. It is better to use fonts that create a clean, professional appearance like Ariel or Times New Roman.

7. Using bold typeface for standardized categories. We often see resumes where the categories Education, Professional Experience, Bar Admission, etc. appear in bold while the names of universities, law school, firms and corporations appear in standard type. This is simply backwards. Bold text initially captures the reader's attention. The reader will more likely retain a visual imprint of what appears bolded on the page. Accordingly, use bold typeface for name, school, company and position and anything else that is distinguishing about you. Why waste precious attention on standardized elements that are common to you and everyone else.

We always appreciate feedback. Please email us with thoughts, questions, anecdotal experiences or insights. E-Mail: info@lawjobs.co.il