



Career Strategies Office

Law Resume Guide

I. Goal of a Law Resume. The primary goal of a law resume is to get you an interview. Your resume should show a prospective employer—as clearly and efficiently as possible—your skills, accomplishments, qualifications, and value for a particular legal position. It is a powerful tool to immediately engage the interest of a potential employer. *It cannot and should not, however, tell the employer everything there is to know about you. Instead, it should entice the reader to want to learn more.* You may tailor your resume differently for different kinds of employers. Remember, it does not need to be an autobiography; you need to explain what you have been doing in your academic and personal life, but *you also need to make choices about what to leave out.*

Your resume also serves as an example of your writing abilities. This is the first sample of your writing an employer will see, and it should highlight your ability to present information in an organized, concise, and visually pleasing manner.

Remember that an employer will likely look at your resume in less than one minute. Every word counts.

Common practices for law resumes, in both style and content, may be different from resumes used in other professions and from resumes used by undergraduates. Follow the principles explained in this guide to craft your law resume; you may also want to use one of the resume templates that are available to download from the Career Planning page of the Earle Mack School of Law website.

II. What is Your Target Audience Looking For? Employers are looking for evidence that you will succeed not only in the intellectual aspect of the job, but also in communication and professional skills. These skills mean that you will be comfortable communicating with different kinds of people in different kinds of environments. Depending on the nature of the job, those people include clients, prospective clients, colleagues, judicial officers, and other lawyers who will be opponents or collaborative partners on cases or transactions. *Highlighting on your resume your experience in interacting with a wide range of people is as important as highlighting your academic achievements.*

Also, employers may be looking for evidence on your resume that you have experience or demonstrated interest in areas of law specific to that employer. For example, public interest employers want to see volunteer or work experience in non-profit organizations. Intellectual property employers want to see an undergraduate/graduate degree in engineering or other hard science. Firms or organizations specializing in international law want to see international experience and foreign language skills. Law firms in general look for a wide variety of experience. Because working for a law firm usually entails business or client development, law firms usually look for evidence of your potential in these areas. Such

evidence can include public speaking, leadership roles, membership in national, regional, or local organizations, ties to corporations, and interests in travel, sports, and government and business issues.

When constructing your resume, ask yourself: (1) what specific experiences of mine demonstrate the qualities this specific prospective employer is looking for?; and (2) what was distinct or notable about my contribution to each particular work or volunteer experience? Just as in legal writing, use specific, concrete, vivid nouns and verbs. Avoid vapid abstractions. Avoid nominalizations (e.g., “I **impacted** the bottom line”.) Do not write in narrative sentences and do not use first person when describing your activities (e.g., NOT: “I reviewed interrogatory responses and requests for admission ...”, but “...Reviewed interrogatory responses...”

III. Principles of Good Legal Resume Design

Font. Choose your font wisely. Use a commonly used professional font like Garamond or Times New Roman. Do not use a font that is too plain (like Arial) or too fancy (any of the script fonts). The size of the font should preferably be 12 point. You can also use 11 point if necessary, but you should never go any smaller than that.

Resume Templates. Microsoft Word has resume templates that are easy to work with, but they may not order the sections in the way you should for law resumes. If you choose a template from Microsoft Word, customize its sections and content according to this guide.

Margins. You should have one-inch margins all around.

Paper. Use white, ivory, or ecru high-quality bond paper.

Proofread for Typos. Attention to detail is an important legal skill that employers look for. Having a typo on your resume signals to a prospective employer that you are not careful about your work and your presentation. Have several people proofread your resume to look for design flaws and typographical errors. *Typos are almost always fatal to a successful legal job search.*

Balance White Space With Text. A resume should be pleasant at first sight. Pay attention to the amount of white space as compared to text. You don't want your resume to look too cluttered, or crowded, nor do you want your text to look isolated on the page surrounded by too much white space.

Spell Everything Out. Common practice in the legal profession is to avoid using using acronyms or abbreviations for states, degrees, or institutions (except for well-known institutions like “**IBM**.”). For example, write “Bachelor of Arts” instead of “B.A.” Write “Philadelphia, Pennsylvania” instead of “Philadelphia, PA.” Write “State University of New York at Buffalo” instead of “SUNY-Buffalo.”

Show Consistency in Effects. On a legal resume, bolding and italics are preferred over underlining for emphasis. Whenever you list the institutions you have attended and the employers for whom you have worked, present them in bold. Similarly, when listing Juris Doctor and the job titles you have held, present them in italics. That way, an employer can very quickly scan your resume and identify where you have been (in bold) and the title of what you have done (in italics). For example:

Earle Mack School of Law at Drexel University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Candidate for *Juris Doctor* May 2012

Dutchess & Snow, LLP, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Paralegal, August 2006 - July 2009

Length. Most law students' resumes can (and should) be kept to one page. Some exceptions to the one-page rule include:

- extensive (more than five years) pre-law school experience;
- intellectual property, where describing technical experience and publications may require more than one page;
- public interest, if you have experiences relevant to the position applied for; and
- academic resumes which would include publications, presentations, and conferences.

IV. Parts of a Law Resume

Law students' resumes usually contain the following sections in this order, and common formatting for section headers is SMALL CAPS:

EDUCATION

EXPERIENCE

Additional sections such as ACTIVITIES & INTERESTS, FOREIGN LANGUAGE SKILLS, or COMMUNITY SERVICE.

Other sections that may be applicable, particularly if you came to law school as a second career, are:

Dividing LEGAL WORK EXPERIENCE from OTHER WORK EXPERIENCE LICENSES AND PUBLICATIONS

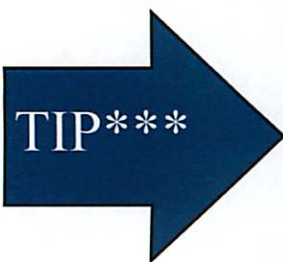
Publications can include law journal, undergraduate or graduate research, and articles for other publications. Use Bluebook format for listing your publications.

Standard format for a law resume is to list your education and experience in reverse chronological order (from present, to most recent, to older).

Attention Second Careerists:
Education comes first on a resume when you are enrolled full-time in law school, even if the C.V. you used prior to law school began with your Experience first.

V. Heading. The heading contains your name, address, telephone number, and email address. It should be well-designed and not take up too much space. **Use horizontal space—spread your name and contact information across the top of the page. Three things to keep in mind:**

- The heading uses the same margins and is in the same font as the rest of your resume, but your name can be two to four sizes larger, and your contact information can be one size smaller.
- Only include two addresses (home and school) if your home address would show some geographical connection to the prospective employer. Otherwise, reduce clutter and only use your school address
- Make sure your email address is professional (e.g., NOT:milliondollarman\$ \$@gmail.com). It's best to use your official school email address. Remove any hyperlink from your email address so that it does not appear in blue or underlined in your heading.



Professionalism Tip: Consider the outgoing messages that you have on your home answering machine and your cell phone. Would you want an employer to hear them? Change outgoing messages to a professional tone, and leave out background music or special effects.

Consider this also: do you have a profile in online social networking sites such as MySpace or Facebook? Would you want an employer to see it? It's a good idea to change these profiles to make them more professional or delete them altogether. Some employers will look at your online profile before deciding whether to hire you. Employers say these are the kinds of photos to take down:

- any of you holding or drinking alcohol;
- any of you wearing a bathing suit; and
- any of you with a friend, colleague or group, unless the other people in the photo know that the photo is on your site and that it may be seen by potential employers.

VI. Objective. Unlike some undergraduate resumes, law resumes do not include an entry for “Objective.” Leave this out.

VII. Education. Law resumes for current law students generally start with an **EDUCATION** section. You should list your education in reverse chronological order (i.e., law school first, and then work backwards). The entry for Drexel Law should look like this:

The Earle Mack School of Law at Drexel University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Candidate for Juris Doctor, May [expected graduation year]

- Or -

Earle Mack School of Law at Drexel University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Juris Doctor Expected, May [expected graduation year]

After the entry for Earle Mack School of Law, list your membership or leadership roles in student groups, along with any scholarships or honors you have received. List them in order of leadership roles or importance. You can choose to do this with a subheading for “Honors and Activities,” or without a subheading and instead with a simple bulleted list:

Earle Mack School of Law at Drexel University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Candidate for Juris Doctor, May 2012
GPA after first quarter: 3.0

Honors and Activities:

- Vice-President, Student Bar Association
- Member, Drexel Health Law Society; Drexel International Law Society
- Recipient of Drexel Board of Trustees Merit Scholarship

- OR -

The Earle Mack School of Law at Drexel University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Juris Doctor Expected, May 2011 GPA: 3.7, Top 10%, Ranked 4/150

- Selected as member of Drexel Law Review
- Awarded “Best Memo” in Legal Methods class
- Member, Drexel Minority Law Students Association
- Study Abroad, Summer 2007: Completed courses at University of Florence, Italy in international trade and environmental law through Penn State The Dickinson School of Law.

Where Do I Put My Co-Op Placement?

If you have been matched for a Co-Op placement but have not yet started that placement, list it under the EDUCATION section like this:

Earle Mack School of Law at Drexel University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Juris Doctor Expected, May 2012 GPA: 2.97

- Member, Drexel Law Criminal Justice Society

Co-Op Placement: Philadelphia District Attorney's Office (to begin November 2010)

Once you have begun working at your Co-Op placement, move it down to your EXPERIENCE section, with a description of your specific duties and experiences.

For other graduate and undergraduate education, follow the same format. If you received your degree with honors, you should list *summa cum laude* or *magna cum laude* after your degree. As with law school, employers expect to see your GPAs from your undergraduate and graduate programs. List your activities, honors, and sports underneath the educational institution. If the names of organizations, groups, honor societies, or awards are not descriptive, provide a brief explanation in italics following the name to explain what it was. Don't overdo this section—limit your activities, honors, and awards in undergraduate and graduate school only to the most important. Include those honors, memberships, and activities in which you played a leadership role or that demonstrate skills pertinent to a law employer. If you wrote a senior thesis or any other papers for publication, include the titles.

High school education should be omitted; if, however, you attended a high school that you believe would show some special connection (geographical or otherwise) to a particular employer, you may briefly include this information.

Should You Include Grades in Your Education Entry?

Employers expect to see your GPA from law school and your other graduate and undergraduate institutions. If it is not there, employers assume that your grades are extremely low, so you should consider that risk when choosing not to include your grades.

Because grading systems vary across law schools, employers like to see as many indicators of academic performance as possible. Therefore, if you are given a class standing (e.g., Top 10%, Top 25%, Top 50%) or a class ranking (e.g., 10/150), include them both in addition to your GPA. For example:

Earle Mack School of Law at Drexel University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
***Juris Doctor* Expected, May 2012 GPA: 3.7, Top 10%, Ranked 4/150**

Depending on the employer, you may also want to demonstrate an upward trend over the course of several semesters, or highlight a particularly good grade in one or more classes (e.g., for a position in the District Attorney's office: "Criminal Procedure: A"). Discuss with a career counselor the best way to present your academic standing on your resume.

To demonstrate an upward trend:

Third Quarter GPA: 3.5 Second Quarter GPA: 3.0 First Quarter GPA: 2.58.

VIII. Experience. Remember this commonly overlooked maxim: a resume is not an autobiography! You should not include every accomplishment or job you have ever held, nor should you list every job duty or project you were responsible for in a given position. Instead, you should include those jobs and accomplishments—and those projects and tasks within a particular position—which best exemplify your skills and show an employer that you can do the job for which you are applying.

List your work experience in reverse chronological order. Depending on the extent and nature of your experience, you may want separate sections for **LEGAL WORK EXPERIENCE, OTHER WORK EXPERIENCE, and VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE**. Do not make distinctions between paid and unpaid work—you should include all law-related positions, both paid and volunteer.

Reader-Friendly Tip: For your past employers whose company names may not be immediately familiar to your target audience for your resume, include a brief description of what that employer does: e.g., “EDS, Inc. (boutique software designer for educational materials)”

Do not just describe your job duties. Highlight your accomplishments, special projects you worked on, and specific things that distinguish you from other employees. Describe what you did (or do) using action verbs (see list of action words at end of this guide).

For non-law-related positions, spend some time crafting your experience in a form that is relevant to a legal employer. Highlight skills that are transferable to law—such as experience in public speaking, communication, problem-solving, negotiation, research and writing. Use plain English. Avoid industry and technical vocabulary, acronyms, or jargon that would be unfamiliar to a legal employer (e.g., **NOT** “Developed expertise in cXML, ebXML, XSLT, XPATH and created authentication and object-flagging modules.”).

You can choose to present your skills descriptions in paragraph form or bullet form (or both). Example:

Ozone Publications, LLC, Red Bank, New Jersey

Editor, Legal and Business, September 2007 – July 2009

Co-creator of start-up magazine focusing on the impact of global warming on corporate, legal and public sectors. Responsible for hiring, training, and supervising three full-time writers, five freelancers, and support staff. Presented at public health conferences in Seattle, New York, and Mexico City. Collaborated with company president on market research and business development. Helped generate \$100,000 advertising revenue in first year.

- OR -

Ozone Publications, LLC, Red Bank, New Jersey

Editor, Legal and Business, September 2007 – July 2009

Co-creator of start-up magazine focusing on the impact of global warming on corporate, legal and public sectors.

- Responsible for hiring, training, and supervising three full-time writers, five freelancers, and support staff.
- Presented at public health conferences in Seattle, New York, and Mexico City.
- Collaborated with company president on market research and business development. Helped generate \$100,000 advertising revenue in first year.

Do not exaggerate your job title, duties, or contributions. If you would not feel comfortable showing the description of your past work to the employer for whom you performed the work, then do not include that description on your resume.

When describing internships or jobs in law firms or judicial chambers, be specific about the legal issues you worked on, the legal documents you prepared, and the size and specialty of the law firm.

NOT THIS:

Dutchess & Snow, LLP, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Law Clerk, Summer 2010

Drafted court documents; attended hearings; interviewed clients.

INSTEAD, DO THIS!

Dutchess & Snow, LLP, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Law Clerk, Summer 2010

Full-time legal intern for law firm of thirty attorneys specializing in commercial litigation. Drafted interrogatories, document requests, and answers. Researched and wrote memos on contract interpretation and non-compete agreement. Drafted brief seeking summary judgment on statute of limitations. Prepared arbitration binder and attended arbitration with firm partner.

Honorable Sybill J. Johnson, Pennsylvania Court of Common Pleas, Philadelphia

Intern, Summer 2010

Conducted legal research on evidentiary issues involving battered women's syndrome and self-defense. Observed criminal arraignments, bail hearings, jury selection, trials, and sentencing proceedings.

IX. Additional Sections. You may choose to include additional sections after your experience to highlight any relevant interests or skills. These sections can be "ACTIVITIES AND INTERESTS," "FOREIGN LANGUAGE SKILLS," "COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES" or "VOLUNTEER SERVICE."

Do not include proficiency with Microsoft Office or with electronic legal databases such as Westlaw, Lexis—employers assume you are proficient in these basic tasks.

Foreign language skills are often relevant, and you should specify whether you are fluent or conversational

Should I Include Things Like Travel & Hobbies?

Some employers value things such as travel, hobbies, sports and other interests; others do not. More often than not, a separate section for INTERESTS can prove valuable in two ways: (1) your listed interests can be great conversation starters in interviews; and (2) by showing an employer things about you separate from your academic and work experience, you are demonstrating a potential for business or client development (i.e., you have interesting things to talk about at a cocktail party or networking event other than your work).

If you do choose to include a separate section for your interests, consider some rules about what to include and what not to include:

- Do not include personal information such as age, marital status, or children.
- Except for limited kinds of employers, do not include affiliations with religious or political organizations.
- More specific information is preferred over the general. (Not: “running.” Not: “travel.” Instead: “2008 Boston Marathon” and “Six-week backpacking tour of South America; climbed Machu Picchu.”)

Your interests should implicitly demonstrate qualities that would be valuable to an employer. For example, running a marathon demonstrates that you set goals and reach them, and that you have strong self-discipline. Participation in group sports demonstrates that you know how to work well in groups and that you can handle stress and competition. By contrast, an interest in something like “collecting X-Men comic books” may not demonstrate qualities that a legal employer would consider valuable.

X. References. Employers will assume that you can provide them with two or three names of former employers, professional mentors, or law school professors who can attest to your abilities, reliability, and performance. It is not necessary to list “References available upon request” on your resume, nor is it standard format that you list your references within the content of your resume.

Instead, create a separate document with one section titled “LIST OF REFERENCES,” using the same heading that you used for your resume. Include the following information for each reference: full name, title, employer, city, state, telephone number, and email address. You should also identify the person’s relationship to you. Use the same font and style as your resume, and print this list on the same paper as your resume. Generally, don’t send this list of references with your resume unless specifically requested to do so. Instead, you should bring them to an interview. Be sure to ask permission before listing anybody as a reference.

Examples:

Professor Terry J. Seligmann

Arlin M. Adams Professor of Legal Writing and Director of Earl Mack School of Law Legal Writing Program

Earle Mack School of Law at Drexel University Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

(215) 571-4718

Terry.J.Seligmann@drexel.edu

Mark Turner, Esq.

Dutchess & Snow, LLP Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

(215) 123-4567

(216) mturner@dutchess.com

I was an undergraduate intern with Mr. Turner when he was an ADA in the Philadelphia District Attorney’s Office and we have maintained a professional mentoring relationship since then. .

RESUME ACTION WORD LIST

Accelerated	Conducted	Formulated	Organized
Accounted for	Constructed	Founded	Originated
Achieved	Consulted	Generated	Oversaw
Acquired	Contributed	Governed	Performed
Adapted	Controlled	Grouped	Planned
Addressed	Converted	Guided	Practiced
Administered	Coordinated	Identified	Prepared
Advanced	Corresponded	Implemented	Presented
Advised	Counseled	Improved	Produced
Allocated	Crafted	Increased	Promoted
Analyzed	Created	Influenced	Proposed
Applied	Critiqued	Initiated	Prosecuted
Appointed	Decreased	Inspected	Recruited
Appraised	Decided	Installed	Regulated
Approved	Defended	Instituted	Represented
Arbitrated	Defined	Integrated	Researched
Argued	Delegated	Interacted	Resolved
Arranged	Delivered	Interpreted	Reviewed
Assessed	Demonstrated	Interviewed	Revised
Assigned	Designed	Introduced	Revived
Attained	Detailed	Invented	Rewrote
Authored	Determined	Investigated	Scheduled
Audited	Developed	Justified	Secured
Briefed	Devised	Keynoted	Selected
Broadened	Directed	Launched	Served
Brought	Distributed	Led	Settled
Built	Drafted	Litigated	Set up
Calculated	Earned	Maintained	Solved
Catalogued	Edited	Managed	Spoke
Chaired	Engineered	Marketed	Sponsored
Closed	Established	Mediated	Staffed
Collaborated	Evaluated	Moderated	Strengthened
Combined	Exceeded	Monitored	Structured
Communicated	Executed	Negotiated	Supervised
Completed	Expanded	Nominated	Surpassed
Compiled	Expedited	Observed	Taught
Composed	Financed	Operated	Trained
Computed	Formed	Organized	