

RÉSUMÉ WRITING

- **PURPOSE:** Your résumé is a tool used to present your qualifications and credentials, to obtain the prospective employer’s attention, and to secure an interview. A résumé must be a clear, directed, and persuasive communication; however, it is not an exhaustive list of everything you have done. A résumé should be aesthetically pleasing and should make the employer want to meet you.
- **RULES OF THUMB:**
 - **BE FOCUSED AND SELECTIVE:** Each item on your résumé should be carefully chosen to support your career direction.
 - **ONE PAGE IS IDEAL:** The general rule is no more than one page of résumé for each ten years of relevant and substantive work experience. If your draft exceeds one page, we will help you edit your résumé. Sometimes, a two-page résumé is acceptable; however, a second page should be used only by those with significant past experience or accomplishments relevant to the position sought.
- **WRITING STYLE:** The writing style must be active.
 - **JOB DESCRIPTIONS:** When writing job descriptions, use active verbs and descriptive terms; avoid using phrases such as “responsibilities included.” *See the attached **Key Words** list for help with writing job descriptions.*
 - **Example:** You were responsible for legal research and writing during your 1L summer clerkship position. Your job description would read as follows: “**Researched legal issues and wrote memoranda.**” You can improve this statement by adding an element of interest: “**Researched law governing corporate liability and the violation of human rights; drafted memoranda presenting certain human rights and environmental issues.**” Now, your job description describes your responsibilities and lends some interest by identifying the issues involved.
 - **Quantifying Language Lends Interest, Substance, and Project Accomplishment:** For example, “**maintained client contact,**” can be stated as follows, “**maintained case load of twenty clients.**” Similarly, the phrase, “**assisted attorneys in medical malpractice suits**” can be rephrased as “**provided research to support five attorneys involved in a multi-million dollar medical malpractice suit.**”
 - **Avoid the Use of Personal Pronouns:** You are implied as the author of the résumé. For example, do not say, “I drafted...,” just say, “Drafted...”
 - **Use of Paragraphs or Bullets:** If using paragraphs, they should be easy to read and quickly scan; therefore, they should be no more than

three or four lines. If your thought surpasses four lines, then construct a full paragraph and break it into several components. Use bullets as an alternative to paragraph format. Bullets should break job/skill descriptions into easy-to-read component parts that begin with eye-catching action verbs.

- **OTHER GUIDELINES:** Your résumé should be aesthetically pleasing. Employers generally scan résumés to determine whether the candidate is qualified. Thus, résumés should be organized to carry the eye from one major point to the next. The following techniques are useful in creating an easily scanned résumé:
 - **Fonts:** Choose a simple, conservative font, such as Times New Roman or Arial. Do not combine several fonts on one résumé.
 - **Margins:** Margins should be at least one inch and spacing should be used to provide an organized look.
 - **Highlighting:** Significant points may be highlighted in some way (underline, ALL CAPITAL LETTERS, *italics*, or **bolding**).
 - **Consistency:** Place information consistently, allowing the reader to anticipate where certain information will be found. The most relevant and significant information (names of employers, job titles) should be on the left side of the page. Less important information (dates and geographic locations of employment) may be placed on the right.
 - **Paper:** Use standard-sized 8 ½ x 11 bond paper in a neutral tone. Use the same paper for cover letters and reference lists for a coordinated, professional look.
- **FORMATS:** **Reverse chronological** (i.e., most recent first) format is generally used in the legal employment market. This format is most effectively used by those who have established/are establishing credentials within a particular field, or whose credentials show career growth and direction within one particular employment sphere.
 - **Contents of a Legal Résumé by Section:**
 - **Identification:** This section should be centered at the top of your résumé. Include **name, address, phone number, and email address**. Accurate information is critical so that an employer may contact you to schedule an interview or ask for additional supporting materials.
 - **Address:** Use your current address unless you are applying to a position in your home state (if so, then use both your current and home addresses). Using that address shows ties to the area. However, make sure you list a phone number where you can be reached.
 - **Education:** If currently in school, this section goes first.
 - **List Schools Attended in Reverse Chronological Order:** List the name of the institution, city and state, and date the degree

was conferred in reverse chronological order. The specific degree obtained should also be listed, **for example:**

- **Vermont Law School**, South Royalton, VT
Juris Doctor expected, May 2010
- **Gettysburg College**, Gettysburg, PA
Bachelor of Arts, *cum laude*, English, May 2007
- **Secondary School Information:** This information should be **excluded**, unless you attended a well-known school, and you are hoping to make an alumni/geographic connection with an employer.
- **Grade Point Average (GPA) and Class Rank:** The general rule is that if your GPA is below a 3.0 for any degree you received (or are in the process of receiving), then all GPAs should be left off the résumé. For example, if the undergraduate GPA is a 3.2 and the law school GPA is a 2.91, then both GPAs should be left off of the résumé. You do not want to highlight the fact that you did well in one program and not as well in another. Also, if you are in the top 1/3 of the class, then you can (but need not) list class rank; otherwise, it should be left off. If you are uncertain, discuss it with a career counselor.
- **Academic Achievements:** As a bullet under the educational institutions, include academic awards and achievements (national honor society, nationally-recognized scholarships). Lesser-known honors and awards, such as Dean's Fellow may require additional explanation.
- **Non-Academic Extracurricular Activities:** These activities may be listed under the educational institution or included in the Community Involvement/Personal Interests section. See a career counselor if you are uncertain as to the best route.
- **Experience:** Include full-time, part-time, summer, temporary, educational internship, or practicum information (Semester in Practice). The experience may be paid, voluntary, or for academic credit. Salary information should not be disclosed on a résumé; **employers place importance on experience gained, not on whether the position was paid or unpaid.** Jobs should also be listed in reverse chronological order.
 - **How to Describe the Job/Employment:**
 - **Go Beyond Simple Detail:** Express the substance of the employment in terms of significance of responsibility, success of performance, and specific accomplishments (see attached **Key Word List**). Do

not assume the reader is familiar with activities usually performed by law clerks, legal interns, and judicial clerks. An effective résumé conveys a uniqueness of credentials that is not achieved by listing a set of duties. Describe how you performed the duties rather than just what duties you performed.

- **Language:** Language should be descriptive, vivid, and interesting. Unless a job is current, **use active past tense verbs** to describe skills developed. For example, a description should read as follows, “Researched and wrote memoranda on...” rather than “Duties included researching and writing memoranda...” Again, avoid using a narrative voice in the explanation, such as, “I researched the law and then wrote memoranda.”
- **Publications (Optional):** The practice of law requires solid writing skills; thus, evidence that you write well is important. Publications, including those outside the legal profession, can be impressive and may selectively be included in your résumé. However, several listings outside the legal profession might suggest a particular interest or career path. Some balance in perspective should be maintained by selecting only those publications that best support the predetermined legal career direction. Moreover, avoid listing several research projects/thesis completed as part of degree requirements (that were not published), unless one of the projects is particularly relevant to a position to which you are applying.
- **Professional Associations/Licenses (Optional):** This information may further support your capabilities in a certain field. This is where bar admission would be displayed, however, for 1L, 2L, and 3Ls who have not sat for a bar, this section is where qualifications, such as Certified Public Accountant and Series 7, would be listed.
- **Languages (Optional):** **Languages may be indicated in a separate section or under the Community Involvement/Personal Interests/Skills section.** A language may be extremely relevant to certain positions; however, it’s very important that you accurately represent your language ability. There are several ways to state your language ability; generally, one is either a **beginner, intermediate, conversational, or fluent.** Be sure to accurately represent your speaking, reading and writing ability. Also, if you have been tested and given a language score by the US government (score 1-5), this should be indicated, especially if you are applying to a position with the federal government. If you are currently taking a language class,

this should be indicated under the Community Involvement/Personal Interests/Skills section, not under a separate language section.

- **Community Involvement/Personal Interests/Skills (Optional):** Personal interests can help to create an image of the applicant, and, during an interview, frequently serve as “ice-breakers.” Likewise, community involvement/volunteer work may give a prospective employer insight into your work habits, leadership potential, motivation level, and community ties. Most résumés should not exceed one page; therefore these sections may be combined as follows: **Community Involvement & Personal Interests**. Items typically included in this section include, significant sports achievements, substantial travel, language ability, and volunteer activities. Keep in mind that in this section, while you are expressing who you are, it’s important to strike a balance. Everyone exercises or reads; only include things that are unique or to which you have a demonstrated commitment.
- **DO NOT INCLUDE:**
 - “Objective” or “Goal” statements. These are unnecessary and not used in legal résumés. That is what a cover letter does.
 - “References Available on Request.” Including this line is a waste of space and is unnecessary, as you will provide references if they are requested.
 - “Résumé.” There is no need to put this label at the top of the page.
 - “Date of Birth, Height, Weight, and Health Status.” This information should not be included, as it constitutes a sensitive area of inquiry that may be used to restrict or deny employment to a protected group of people.
- **REFERENCES (Separate Page):** References should not be provided unless specifically asked for in the job listing (they are often requested at a later stage). Once asked, be consistent, and use the same bonded paper for your cover letter, résumé, and references.
- **FINAL REVIEW:** You must thoroughly review your résumé several times before sending it out. In addition, schedule an appointment with the Office of Career Services to receive feedback from a career counselor. When conducting a final review, keep in mind the following questions:
 - Does it project a given career direction with supporting evidence?
 - Does it look professional? Is it easily scanned?
 - Are there any typos? **CHECK spelling, punctuation, and grammar!**
 - Are there too many items bolded/underlined? Are the important elements highlighted?
 - Are the sentences and paragraphs short, vivid, and descriptive?

- Are the formatting and verb tense consistent?
- Are all personal pronouns eliminated?
- Are there any time gaps that employers will question?