

Career Services

UALR William H. Bowen School of Law

Resume Writing

Question: What is a resume? Answer: An advertisement of what you have to offer. You are introducing an unknown product to a prospective consumer. You must portray yourself as an asset to the employer – an offer that can't be refused. Have you ever bought something because the commercial was so enticing it aroused your curiosity? That is the effect you are trying to achieve with your resume. Its purpose is to stand out from all the others and get you an interview. It also serves as a reminder of you after the interview.

Avoid the trap of providing so much information on your resume that the employer can decide about you without an interview. **A resume is a summary of your academic and experience credentials, not an autobiography.**

Resumes are necessary when applying for law clerk as well as attorney positions. For this reason, you will want to compile one early in your law school career and update it as you establish additional credentials or acquire additional relevant experience.

There is no one ideal resume format. With many ways to write a resume, resume professionals even differ on what to include and what is aesthetically correct. This information is intended as a guide to help you develop your resume for legal and law-related careers.. You should also consult additional sources such as web sites, books, lawyers, law professors, and employers when putting together your resume.

I. The Resume's Purpose

- To summarize you and your attributes in a manner which the employer can easily and quickly absorb.
- To help you compete in the job market.
- To convey your uniqueness in a way that will make the employer WANT to know more about you.

2. Approaches to Resume Writing

- **Chronological:** Telling about yourself (education, employment history and relevant accomplishments) in the order in which these events occurred in your life.
- **Functional:** Grouping relevant skills together as the focus. For example, list your entrepreneurial abilities or your demonstrated legal-related skills and competencies. This approach aids in eliminating redundant entries reported in similar positions with different employers.
- **Combination:** A combination of the two above in a customized format.

3. Resume Formatting

- The left-margin format features headings down the left margin.
- The centered format features centered headings.
- Standard categories on the legal resume (select those most appropriate for your personal resume): personal information (required), admission to the bar, education, work history/experience, publications, activities, writing sample, and references.
- Use caps, bolding, underlining, spacing, white space and balance to establish eye appeal for your resume.
- Length: one or two pages. Most employers strongly prefer a one-page resume. If you can fit all the **relevant** information on one page, leaving enough white space to make it readable, do so. However, use a two-page resume if the alternative would force you to reduce the print to an unreadable size, to cover the one page with information leaving little white space, or to eliminate information which an employer might consider relevant. Individuals with substantial work experience **MIGHT** need a two-page resume. In most cases, the Assistant Dean can assist you in editing to accomplish a goal of one page.

4. Content – Your First Legal Resume

For your first draft, put yourself in the place of the employer and decide what you would look for. Write down everything you want to say about yourself, emphasizing the positive information and minimizing facts you think are negative. Weed out the least important facts. Remember, some prospective employers may receive hundreds of resumes, especially for summer clerkships and professional positions. They will scan

these quickly to select very few people to interview. You may not have more than 30 seconds of these readers' attention, so you must use it well and arrange your resume so that the high points can be absorbed within those 30 seconds.

Do not include false or misleading information or pad or exaggerate any of the content. If you list yourself as a law clerk for a firm when in fact you are a secretary, you endanger your credibility. When interviewers question you or your former employer about your specific responsibilities, they will learn the truth and you will then lose the possibility of a position.

This advice also refers to academic attributes such as the Dean's List. If you have been on the Dean's List only one semester, be sure to list it in that way on your resume rather than just using the general statement, "Dean's List." The latter will be interpreted as an achievement for each semester in school. Of course, GPA and class rank must be absolutely accurate. State your grade point average to the hundredth decimal point—don't round it off. The Career Services staff will not tolerate false information on a resume.

Basic Outline

The following suggestions are for law students and recent graduates who are seeking law clerking or entry level attorney positions. An experienced attorney who is preparing a resume for a lateral move should list legal experience before academic background. For the experienced attorney, legal experience/work history now becomes the prime credential for a prospective employer.

A. HEADING

- Use your formal name. If you are generally called by your nickname, this can be indicated by signing your cover letter using your nickname.
- Both permanent and school addresses should be listed, if applicable.
- Include area code with telephone number(s). Indicate if it is a message, cell or answering machine number.
- Include email address.
- DON'T include picture, date of birth, marital or health status, height/weight, social security number, or number of children. This information is not relevant on a job application.

B. OBJECTIVE

If you have not yet graduated, an assumed objective is a law clerk position. If you have graduated and passed the bar, the assumed objective is an attorney position. If, however, you have an interest in one very specific area and nothing else, indicate that on your resume. The Objective is vital when applying for nonlegal positions. It is appropriate to simply state the position title.

C. ADMISSION TO BAR

If you have recently passed a state bar exam and have been sworn in to practice, you may want to indicate that fact on your resume. After a relevant heading, indicate "Passed Arkansas Bar Exam, February 2011" or "Awaiting Admission to Arkansas State Bar" or "Licensed, State of Arkansas, February 2011." It is not essential to include this category. Most attorneys will assume that you are licensed or will be shortly and view this category as unnecessary.

D. EDUCATION

List the schools you attended in reverse chronological order with UALR (or University of Arkansas at Little Rock) William H. Bowen School of Law first. For your law school entry, list your expected date of graduation and additional relevant information. Class rank and GPA are obvious selling points if your GPA is 3.0 or higher. Of course, not listing it indicates the probability that your GPA is less than 3.0. If you're borderline (2.9, 2.8), you may want to list it. For undergraduate and other graduate degrees, be sure to include the month and year these degrees were conferred and the specific degree received. Academic performance in undergraduate or other graduate education should follow the same guidelines as for law school.

If your cumulative grade point average is not outstanding, but you have a top paper, or your grades in a few specific courses are strong, list these courses. If your Legal Research or Reasoning, Writing and Advocacy grades have been consistently high, indicate that. If you are applying in a specialized area of law practice, list the relevant courses to show an employer that you have studied in this area.

List academic honors, such as Bowen Scholar, and extra-curricular activities such as Law Review or Moot Court, and indicate your capacity. When listing student organizations and associations, always list the full name, not initials (i.e., Student Bar Association (SBA) and office(s) held). This not only fully identifies the organization, but looks more impressive. Be sure to list honors and activities under the school at which they were achieved. In general, list these items rather than write them in paragraph form.

Always remember to list first the assets that are your greatest selling points, but do not overload. This is true for undergraduate as well as other advanced degrees. Excellence in academics before law school is worth noting, but be selective. You do not want to overshadow your law-related experiences.

*Don't list the high school you attended unless that high school has a national reputation or there is some other **major** significance associated with your high school experience (i.e., you were an exchange student in a country where you now have professional interests).*

EXPERIENCED ATTORNEYS: Remember that this category follows the "Legal Experience" category on your resume.

E. PUBLICATIONS

If you have written a law-related article that has been or is about to be published, list it immediately after the education section. Be sure to use an accurate citation. If the articles are not law-related, list them under a "Publications" heading towards the end of your resume, after "Work Experience."

F. LEGAL EXPERIENCE (Might also be termed Relevant Experiences, Related Experiences, or a similar term.)

Legal positions should also be listed in reverse chronological order. Include all jobs that are relevant to your legal training, including volunteer, externship, and internship positions. Give the name of the firm or company, city, and state. State your job title – Law Clerk, Research Assistant, Judicial Extern, etc. Briefly describe your activities/accomplishments. Use action words (see list at end of section) as much as possible to describe your accomplishments (e.g., supervised, interviewed, analyzed, researched, drafted, organized). This is preferable to saying, "Responsibilities included..." Avoid using the word "duties." List substantive areas of law with which you have dealt, types of legal documents which you've drafted, and responsibilities you were given.

Dates of employment may either be stated at the end of the description or in the left hand column of the resume. Do not state salary or reasons for leaving.

EXPERIENCED ATTORNEYS: Remember that this section should be first on your resume. Your legal experience is of prime importance in future job considerations.

G. ADDITIONAL PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

This category can be used if you have had a previous non-legal career or you are presently employed as a professional in a non-legal field. Listing these types of jobs separately allows the employer to note at a glance your legal versus non-legal experience. These positions should be listed in the same manner as the legal jobs. Dates of employment should be listed in a consistent manner with those under "Legal Experience." Keep in mind that listing dates in the left hand margin highlights them, which may not be an asset if the experience dates back too many years or there are significant gaps in your work history. Again, use action words to describe your accomplishments. However, be as concise as possible. By elaborating in tremendous detail your many responsibilities and accomplishments in another career, you might relay a message of preference for that career over one in law.

H. OTHER WORK EXPERIENCE

This category includes employment, other than legal, that is not at a professional level. Part-time and summer jobs such as waitress, store clerk, camp counselor, etc., can be put in this category but only if you lack other work experience. You should use your judgment as to whether this adds anything to your resume. First-year students in particular may want to use this category because you lack significant job experience in the legal arena. In any event, the jobs can be handled simply by listing the job titles consecutively without reference to employer and without descriptions. A simple sentence such as "Various summer and part-time jobs to finance education, including..." will suffice. This will save space and account for a time period in your life.

I. LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY/SPECIAL SKILLS/INTERESTS

Be sure to add any foreign language proficiency to your resume. Those in high demand, like Spanish, should be placed higher up in the resume after Education. Unusual or interesting hobbies, athletic abilities, and/or organizations in which you actively participate, may be included on your resume. These items can be listed consecutively so that they do not take up more than a couple of lines. Information of this sort may be interesting to smaller firms where common interests and compatibility are especially important. Additionally, some firms feel that outside activities are a good source for potential business. Other interests frequently serve as an opening for discussion at an interview.

J. PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Membership in professional organizations should be listed in this separate category. Always mention legal organizations first.

K. WRITING SAMPLE AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST

This phrase is sufficient at the bottom of a resume. Do not send a writing sample unless instructed to do so. If you are asked to submit a writing sample, select a research memo, brief, or other short legal research paper that is your best work, preferably related to the area of law that the job requires. Quality is more important than length. Most employers won't read beyond 5 to 10 pages. Know your writing sample and be prepared to discuss it. Bring a copy to the interview with you, but only offer it if asked. The writing sample should be free of markings, comments, grades, etc.

L. REFERENCES

- Whether to list references or not is a controversial topic. The addition of references may make a resume too lengthy. Generally, most potential employers do not contact your references until after they talk to you. In the interest of keeping your resume as short and concise as possible, it is preferable to have a separate but optional sheet which lists 3 to 5 references. Be sure to include your identifying information on your Reference page. Remember, never list a reference unless you have asked that individual in advance.
- Law faculty and legal employers are the best references. Undergraduate faculty members are also good references, as well as former employers. **Definitely do not use relatives or friends.** Be sure to include the reference's name, title, affiliation, address, phone number. You should also include the email address, if known.
- For some graduating students and recent graduates, listing 2-3 references on the resume can be beneficial. If your resume lacks outstanding academic credentials and/or substantial legal or work experience, list those references who can best attest to class performance or work experience.
- As you progress in law school, you should begin to work towards three references among law professors, other legal professionals, politicians or business and civic leaders known in the legal community.
- Be sure to send a copy of your resume to each of your references.
- End your resume with "References available upon request," or to accommodate both references and the writing sample, "References and writing sample available upon request." While some experts consider

this a non-essential addition to the resume, others see it as in essence, "the end."

M. CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

If you are employed and are seeking a job change, you probably don't want your current employer to know that you are job hunting. It is appropriate to include a statement, at the very bottom of the resume, requesting that a prospective employer not contact a current employer: "It is requested that current employer not be contacted." Or "Confidentiality with regard to present employer is requested." This message must also be included in the cover letter which is sent with the resume.

5. Papers, Printers, and Copying

The resume is a prospective employer's first impression of you. Since you are now marketing yourself as a professional, your resume should look professional.

A. Paper

- Use white, eggshell or light gray.
- Use good quality resume paper.
- Match your resume paper and your cover letter paper and envelope.
- Don't use photocopy or white printer paper.

B. Printers

- Remember that a document from a dot matrix printer does not photocopy well. Even though it may give you a good quality resume, once that resume is photocopied in-house for distribution within a law firm, it won't copy well.
- The Law School computer labs are both equipped with a laser printer. Career Services in Room 116 also provides limited printing access. However, quick-copy prices are competitive. Professional printing is not costly if you format and type your resume yourself so that it is camera-ready for printing.

C. Copying

Test-market your resume before duplicating it. Ask others to read it (attorneys, if possible), and get feedback on the impression it makes. It is very helpful to have someone who does not know you well read it.

You are also advised to bring or email a first draft of your resume to the Career Services staff in Room 116 for review before uploading it to Symplicity. Of course, you are free to visit the office at any time, but you may want to make an appointment so you are assured of the time you need.

- Be particular about the quality of your copying.
- If you use a commercial printer for photocopying, ask to see two copies before you place an order for 25. Check the quality of the paper used, any marks on the resume from the copier, stray black edges, etc.

6. This is the first of many resumes which you will develop over the years. Establish good habits now. Save your resume to a computer disk. Place a hard copy of your resume in a file folder. Each time you update or revise your resume, save it to thumb drive and update your Symplicity account. Then you are always prepared to produce your resume quickly should the need arise.
7. Law is a conservative profession. If you are unsure of a choice, err on the conservative side. Also, Arkansas has a small legal community. Please resist the temptation to “lift” a sample resume or cover letter and call it your own. You can be sure that at least 10 other people are doing the same thing and that your resume or cover letter will be seen by an employer as a “form.” It’s much better to follow a format and create your own resume and cover letter infusing a part of yourself and your personality into it. Remember also that resumes are important, but that no one is ever hired on the strength of a resume alone.