

SKILLS AREA RESOURCE SERIES

# RESUME WRITING

**PURPOSE:** Your resume is a tool used to present credentials supporting your candidacy for a specific employment opportunity or range of similar opportunities. A resume must be a clear, directed, and persuasive communication—its aim is to secure an interview.

**SCREENING:** Resumes alone generally do not bring offers of employment. Their primary function, from the employer's perspective, is to provide a means by which to screen your credentials. Your objective is to present your qualifications in such a way as to gain the prospective employer's favor, secure an interview, and make a good first impression!

**RULES:** The cardinal rules for resume writing are: 1) Be focused.  
2) Be selective.

You should deliberately and carefully select each item that appears on your resume to support the career direction and your candidacy. Keep in mind: **ONE PAGE** is ideal. Two-page resumes are acceptable; however, a second page should be used only by those with significant past experience or accomplishments relevant to the position sought. Resumes that are three or more pages in length are unacceptable.

**WRITING STYLE:** The writing style must be simple, active, and use language to present the candidate as a producer, an accomplisher, and someone who is results-oriented.

**Job Descriptions:** When writing job descriptions, avoid phrases such as "responsibilities included"; instead, use active verbs and descriptive terms. (See attached **Key Words** list)

*Example:* You were accountable for legislative research and correspondence in a given position. Your job description would read as follows: “**Researched legislation and drafted constituent correspondence.**” The verbs "researched" and "drafted" connote activity and vitality to an otherwise passive statement.

You can further improve the statement by adding dimension and interest: “**Researched legislation governing the acquisition of national park lands; drafted significant constituent correspondence presenting certain environmental issues.**” Now, your job description not only describes the responsibilities but also lends some interest and uniqueness by identifying the issues involved. It gives the reader a sense of achievement and magnitude of responsibility simply by using the word "significant.”

Also, quantifying language lends interest, substance, and project accomplishment. For example, "maintained client contact" can be reworded as "maintained case load of twenty clients." Likewise, the phrase "supported attorneys in medical malpractice suits" can be rephrased as "provided research support to five attorneys involved in a multi-million dollar medical malpractice suit."

The resume need not be composed of complete sentences. In all cases, avoid the use of personal pronouns -- you are implied as the author of the resume. In order to be readable and easily scanned, paragraphs should be no more than three or four lines. If your message cannot be conveyed with four lines, construct the full paragraph and then break it into several component parts. Each mini-paragraph is separated by a double space for ease of reading.

Bullets: Use bullets as an alternative to paragraph/mini-paragraph format. Bullets break job and skill descriptions into easy-to-read component parts that begin with eye-catching action verbs.

**LAYOUT AND OTHER GUIDELINES:** Your final resume should be pleasing to the eye. Employers generally scan resumes to ascertain qualifications. Easily scanned resumes are effectively organized to carry the eye from major point to major point. The selected resume format should use the following techniques to establish a natural flow of information that simplifies the review process:

Highlighting: Significant points may be highlighted in some way (underlined, ALL CAPITAL LETTERS, *italics* or **bolding**).

Margins: Adequate margins (no less than .8 of an inch) and spacing should be used to gain an uncluttered look that promotes ease of reading.

Consistency: Use a consistent pattern of information placement to allow readers to anticipate where certain information may be found. In scanning a resume, an employer usually reviews information found on the left side of the page. Therefore, the most relevant and significant information (names of employers, job titles) should be on the left side. Less important information (dates and geographic locations of employment) may be placed on the right.

Fonts: Choose a simple, conservative font (Times New Roman, Arial). Avoid combining several fonts on one resume.

Paper: Use good-quality, standard-sized (8½ x 11) bond paper in a neutral tone (white, ivory, light grey). Also, use the same paper for cover letters and reference lists for a coordinated, professional look.

**FORMATS:** Several resume formats exist; however, only two are generally used in the legal employment market: reverse chronological (historical) and functional (qualitative).

- 1) Reverse chronological
  - Preferred resume style
  - Content arranged in reverse chronological order
  - 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 environment

- Should include narrative statements that emphasize skills and accomplishments; should not merely detail history of employment and education
- In developing a chronological resume:
  - ▶ Devote more space to the most recent position
  - ▶ Fully describe positions most supportive of career direction—summarize other work experience
  - ▶ Avoid excessive repetition in detail and substance
  - ▶ Emphasize career growth

#### Content by Section:

*Identification:* Includes name, address(es), phone number(s), and e-mail address. Accurate information is critical; employers cannot be expected to verify an address or obtain an alternate phone number through which to make contact.

*Relevant education/training:* Include schools attended, degrees received, graduation dates (or expected date), majors and other concentrations of study, and academic achievement (class rank in law school and grade point average for undergraduate/graduate program).

You may also include extra/co-curricular activities and academic honors and awards (*summa/magna/cum laude*, membership in national honor societies, nationally-recognized scholarships) under the school where they were earned. Lesser-known honors and awards, if reflective of personal accomplishment, may also be included; however, they require further definition. For example, merely mentioning the receipt of the Jacob Burns Scholarship or Dean's Fellow is not especially meaningful; identifying an award received for superior academic achievement gives it significance.

Keep in mind, a long list of memberships do little to support one's candidacy; however, a few select activities demonstrating substantial leadership roles impress the reader by demonstrating leadership potential, an ability to set priorities and work under pressure, initiative, motivation, reliability, and oral presentation skills.

You should exclude secondary school information, unless you attended a well-known school, and you are hoping to make an alumni/geographic connection with the employer.

*Experience:* Include full-time/part-time/summer/temporary/educational internship or practicum information; it may be volunteer or otherwise (received academic credit or wages). Salary information should not be disclosed on a resume; employers place importance on experience gained, not on whether the position was paid or unpaid.

Go beyond simple detail (name of organization, city and state of employment, dates of employment, and job title). Express the substance of the employment in terms of magnitude of responsibility, success of performance, and specific accomplishments and achievements. Language should be descriptive, vivid, interesting, and active. (See attached **Key Words** list)

Provide detailed job descriptions; do not assume the reader is familiar with activities usually performed by law clerks, legal interns, and judicial clerks. Keep in mind, an effective resume conveys a

uniqueness of credentials that is not achieved by merely listing a set of duties. Describe HOW you performed duties rather than just WHAT duties you performed.

*Personal Interests (optional):* Personal comments can help to create an image of the applicant, and, during an interview, frequently serve as "ice-breakers." Include language ability, community activities, substantial travel, significant sports achievements, public speaking abilities/engagements, unique hobbies, and military experience.

Personal information unnecessary on most resumes includes: date/place of birth, marital status, number/ages of children, height, weight, and health status. This information constitutes a very sensitive area of inquiry that may be used to restrict or deny employment to a protected group of people. Employers are obliged to base personnel selection on job-related qualifications; therefore, an applicant's supporting credentials, as stated on the resume, should be oriented to skills necessary for effective job performance.

*Community Activity/Volunteer Experience (optional):* Such information may give a prospective employer insight into your personal work habits, leadership potential, motivation level, and community ties. Each activity also suggests a particular interest, adding dimension to the candidate. A substantial community role or volunteer position may be appropriately included in the work experience section.

*Professional Associations/Licenses (optional):* This information may further support your capabilities in a certain field. For example, bar admission should be prominently displayed as it is frequently a prerequisite to further consideration for an experienced position.

*Publications (optional):* This information supports writing credentials; however, several listings outside the legal profession might suggest a particular interest or career pursuit. Some balance in perspective should be maintained by carefully selecting for inclusion only those publications that best support a predetermined career direction, or by detailing only a select few of a more general nature. If you have acquired a lengthy list of publications that are non-legal, a statement indicating that "publications are available upon request" may be sufficient.

*References (separate page):* References should not be listed; a more common practice is preparation of a list of references supplied to the employer during an interview. Please note: Careful selection of references is critical to the strength of your employment credentials (See "References" handout).

## 2) Functional

- Emphasizes abilities over work history by organizing information according to skills possessed, results accomplished, contributions made, or functions successfully performed
- Best used by persons changing careers who possess little/no experience supportive of their present goals, have time gaps/inconsistencies in work experience, have been out of the labor market for a considerable length of time, or whose experience does not demonstrate progression and growth
- Presupposes an analysis of your skills, accomplishments, and career interests resulting in selection of functions the candidate feels s/he can perform successfully and will be described in terms of experience (See attached **Functional Categories** list)
- In developing a functional resume:
  - ▶ Select functions describing job-related abilities
  - ▶ List functions in order of importance and relevance to career direction

- ▶ Maintain emphasis toward accomplishment/achievement while illustrating specific abilities
- ▶ Avoid using details such as the employer's name, dates of employment, and job titles within functional descriptions themselves
- ▶ Include a work history section setting forth this information

**FINAL REVIEW:** You must meticulously review your resume, which may go through several revisions, before producing multiple copies. In addition, schedule an appointment with a Career Development Office counselor to receive feedback/critique regarding your resume. In conducting a final review, keep in mind the following questions:

1. Does it project a given career direction with supporting evidence?
2. Is it easily scanned, appealing to the eye and professional looking? Is the layout attractive? Does spacing achieve an uncluttered look?
3. Are the margins wide enough?
4. Are there any typos? **CHECK AND RECHECK spelling, punctuation, and grammar!**
5. Are there too many items underlined/in bold?
6. Is the language direct, concise, results/action-oriented, and free of jargon?
7. Are the sentences and paragraphs short, vivid, and descriptive?
8. Is all repetition/irrelevant information eliminated?
9. Are there any time gaps that employers will question?
10. Are the formatting and verb tense consistent?
11. Are all personal pronouns eliminated?
12. Does the resume represent you at your very best?

### **KEY WORDS**

Activated	Determined	Lectured	Reduced
Accelerated	Developed	Logged	Referred
Adapted	Devised	Maintained	Reinforced
Administered	Diagnosed	Managed	Reorganized
Advised	Directed	Motivated	Represented
Analyzed	Discovered	Negotiated	Researched
Approved	Dispensed	Obtained	Restored
Arbitrated	Distributed	Operated	Revamped
Arranged	Edited	Ordered	Reviewed
Assembled	Eliminated	Organized	Revised
Assisted	Established	Originated	Routed
Audited	Evaluated	Participated	Scheduled
Calculated	Examined	Performed	Selected
Collected	Expedited	Pinpointed	Served
Charted	Expanded	Planned	Simplified
Completed	Formulated	Prepared	Sold
Compounded	Founded	Prescribed	Solved
Conceived	Generated	Presented	Strategized
Conducted	Identified	Processed	Structured
Constructed	Implemented	Produced	Streamlined
Consolidated	Improved	Proficient	Studied
Consulted	Increased	Programmed	Supervised

Controlled	Influenced	Promoted	Supplied
Corresponded	Installed	Proposed	Supported
Counseled	Instituted	Protected	Taught
Created	Instructed	Proved	Tested
Delegated	Interpreted	Provided	Trained
Delivered	Interviewed	Purchased	Translated
Demonstrated	Invented	Received	Wrote
Designed	Launched	Recommended	
Detected	Led	Recorded	

### **FUNCTIONAL CATEGORIES**

Accounting	Interviewing	Recruitment
Administration	Investigation	Research
Advertising	Investment	Retailing
Advocacy	Labor Relations	Sales
Archaeology	Law	Social Work
Architecture	Lobbying	Supervision
Arts	Management	Surveying
Athletics	Market Research	Systems
Budgeting	Materials	Testing
Career Planning	Medicine	Underwriting
Chemistry	Mergers/Acquisitions	Writing
Communications	Navigation	
Community Affairs	Operations	
Construction	Organization	
Counseling	Performing	
Data Processing	Personnel	
Design	Photography	
Drafting	Physical Therapy	
Editing	Planning	
Education	Presentation	
Electronics	Printing	
Employee Relations	Product Development	
Employment/Staffing	Production	
Engineering	Program Development	
Finance	Programming	
Foreign Relations	Promotion	
Fund Raising	Psychological Therapy	
Government Relations	Publicity	
Home Economics	Public Relations	
Human Resource Development	Public Speaking	
Illustration	Purchasing	
Instruction/Teaching	Real Estate	