

Killer Legal Resumes

Resumes are an individual expression of who you are. They are also your one chance to make a **great** first impression. The idea is to set yourself apart from the rest of the crowd, while still maintaining the traditional professionalism required in the field of law.

Remember, the resume is **not** a complete autobiography! It is a prospectus for the future. Its main task is to convince prospective employers to contact you for an interview. A good resume should:

- Be eye-appealing
- Highlight your significant accomplishments
- Be logically displayed for a 30-second (or less) review

Identify Your Skills

It is sometimes difficult to fully and effectively inventory and evaluate your own skills profile. Ask yourself: "What special abilities have I developed which allowed me to perform successfully in my previous activities/jobs?" Do not be concerned that you have little or no previous experience in legal jobs. Job skills are transferable. For example, the communications skills learned in a retail position will be useful in your future legal career when counseling clients. Categorize your skills as follows – all three categories are important and highly valued by employers!

- **Technical/Professional Skills** – skills that are related to performing within a job and acquired by education, training, reading, and/or hands-on experiences (i.e., internships, clerkships, volunteer opportunities). These skills are often listed in advertised job postings: e.g., legal research abilities, writing skills, working knowledge of a certain area of law (e.g., Uniform Commercial Code).
- **Functional Skills** – skills related to people, information, and things that are transferable from one field to another (e.g., organization, communication, management, leadership). These abilities are easy to overlook or downplay, but are highly valued by prospective employers and crucial to successful workplace performance.
- **Personal/Adaptive Skills** -- skills often referred to as personality and/or character traits (e.g., patience, decisiveness, team player, self-starter, quick learner, detail-oriented, work well under pressure).

Inventorying your Experiences/Resume Content

- **Heading** (name, address, email, telephone)
- **Education/Honors/School-Related Activities** (reverse chronological order)
 - Education typically begins with college.
 - List degree/year obtained or expected; names and locations of schools.
 - Include your GPA if 3.0 or higher; class rank if in the top one-third
- **Certificates/Licenses/Bar Admission(s)**
- **Professional/Work Experience**
 - Be specific! Include title, months and years of employment, name and location of employer.

- Instead of automatically listing job duties for each job, try to write "**accomplishment statements**" that single out and spotlight your major achievements. Accomplishment statements are far more compelling than a list of job duties and responsibilities.

Think back on your previous positions and highlight any experiences that represent achievements. To pinpoint achievements, some people think in terms of baseball and ask, "What were my triples and homeruns in that job?" Once you identify the triples and homeruns, write out an explanation of what you did. For additional help on how to write accomplishment statements, go to www.careerlab.com/art_homeruns.htm.

It may be helpful to describe each experience using a **P-A-R (Problem-Action-Result)** formula. Describe the **Problem** (or challenge/responsibility) you faced in the position, **Action(s)** you took to reach an objective/goal, and the **Result** or accomplishment.

Contrast the effectiveness of these two statements:

Basic/Generic Description

Performed legal research and drafted a response to a motion for summary judgment

Using P-A-R Formula

Drafted successful opposition to pivotal motion for summary judgment in personal injury case involving more than \$10 million in damages

List job duties where accomplishment statements are not feasible. Obviously, no one hits triples and homeruns in every job. If you don't have any significant achievements in a particular job, it is perfectly acceptable to list your job duties and responsibilities, but it need not be an exhaustive list. Stick to the more significant ones that will be meaningful to the reader. A list of sample phrases for job duties as well as accomplishment statements is included below.

- Use action verbs to start each statement and omit personal pronouns (i.e., "I" or "my"). A list of action verbs is included below.
- Quantify number of people, products, profits involved (e.g., "Supervised 15-20 community volunteers").
- **Volunteer, clinical, and/or internship experience**
 - This may be your *strong point!* Always consider how you can "put your best foot forward", presenting yourself as an experienced, capable candidate.
- **Professional Memberships/Activities/Publications**
- **Special skills** (fluency in a foreign language; advanced computer skills if truly beyond those skills expected)
- **Activities/Interests** (extracurricular activities, hobbies, interesting pursuits)

Format

- One page (unless you have *significant* work experience, e.g. career before law school, high level responsibility, etc.)
- Professional, clean, easy-to-read typeface
 - Standard 12 pt. font
 - Reasonable margins

- Printed on high quality paper (limit color to white, cream, pale gray)
- Use space to highlight information and make it easy to read

Tips and Traps

- Tailor your resume to the specific employer
 - Be sure to include skills and experience sought by the employer
- Proofread (for accuracy, grammar, punctuation, and correct telephone number)
- No personal information! (i.e. marital status, children, etc.)
- Have two other people proofread (perfection is key)
- Before including anything on your resume, ask yourself this: Does this information *significantly* contribute to your presentation? If not, exclude it.
- Exclude photograph
- Make sure that your voice-mail message is appropriate
- Don't list references on your resume. Have a separate list available if requested. It is important to select people as references who are familiar with your work skills. Ask former employers or colleagues. Include their full names, job titles and addresses, along with phone numbers and email addresses.

Sample Job Duty Phrases for Law Clerk and General Legal Experience

- Researched issues pertaining to pending motion to dismiss in complex civil litigation case
- Researched and drafted memoranda on discrete issues of law including ... (piercing the corporate veil, 1933 Act securities regulations, CERCLA, etc.)
- Assisted in discovery including drafting deposition questions, interrogatories and requests for production of documents
- Drafted settlement letters
- Drafted and edited articles of incorporation, by-laws and articles of merger
- Communicated with opposing counsel and clients
- Attended federal pre-trial conferences and court proceedings
- Attended depositions in commercial foreclosure proceedings
- Attended various client meetings regarding x, y, and z
- Drafted corporate resolutions and partnership agreements
- Drafted lease agreements
- Prepared due diligence for complex civil litigation case
- Researched and drafted bench memoranda, orders and opinions on various issues of criminal law, such as ... (preliminary injunctions, order to produce documents, etc.)
- Reviewed motions, researched relevant case law, prepared summaries of legal arguments and assisted in preparation of court rulings
- Prepared and filed documents in (dependency and neglect proceedings, probate case)
- Conducted in-take interviews of prospective clients

Sample Accomplishment Statements for Law Clerk and General Legal Experience

- Drafted complaint in complex contract case involving dispute over multi-million dollar parcel of real estate
- Prepared settlement agreement to resolve \$30,000 construction contract case between general contractor and property owner

- Drafted and edited successful motions to dismiss and motions for summary judgment defending claims for workers' compensation involving potential liability for permanent, total disability payments
- Investigated and developed factual basis for motion for restraining order for victim adopted by assistant district attorney in presenting case and relied on by court in issuing order
- Successfully represented indigent, Spanish-speaking woman from Columbia in all aspects of a two day asylum hearing before a federal immigration judge; client granted asylum as a result
- Wrote and edited a legal manual on domestic violence distributed to law enforcement officers and battered women's shelters throughout the state
- Drafted speeches on x, y, and z delivered in committee and subcommittee meetings by Congressman
- Argued more than a dozen sentencing and bond reduction hearings for misdemeanor defendants resulting in favorable decisions by the court in all cases
- Obtained a sentence reduction for client in criminal case from one year to ninety days in jail
- Researched and drafted successful motion to suppress evidence in criminal case resulting in dismissal of several charges
- Drafted motion for partial summary judgment that was filed in case involving the Endangered Species Act resulting in the inclusion of a species of Colorado trout on the endangered species list
- Developed factual and legal premise to support dismissal of frivolous trespassing suit, saving client potential damages exceeding \$10,000

Action Verbs for Resumes

A list of action verbs to assist you in describing your experiences and accomplishments:

accelerated	categorized	delivered	explored	interpreted
accomplished	chaired	demonstrated	facilitated	interviewed
achieved	clarified	derived	figured	introduced
acquired	cleared coded	designed	financed	invented
activated	collaborated	detected	focused	investigated
adapted	compared	determined	forecasted	judged
adjusted	compiled	developed	formed	led
administered	completed	devised	formulated	listened
advised	composed	directed	fostered	maintained
allocated	computed	distributed	founded	managed
analyzed	conducted	drafted	functioned	marketed
annotated	consolidated	edited	generated	mastered
anticipated	constructed	educated	governed	measured
applied	contacted	effected	grouped	mediated
appraised	continued	elicited	guided	modeled
arranged	contracted	encouraged	helped	modified
articulated	convened	established	identified	molded
assembled	conveyed	evaluated	illustrated	monitored
assessed	coordinated	examined	immunized	motivated
assigned	corresponded	executed	implemented	named
authored	counseled	exhibited	improved	negotiated
balanced	created	expanded	increased	observed
briefed	critiqued	expedited	informed	obtained
budgeted	decided	experienced	initiated	operated
built	defined	experimented	instituted	ordered
catalogued	delegated	explained	instructed	organized

originated
outlined
oversaw
perceived
performed
persuaded
planned
planted
presented
presided
printed
produced
protected

provided
publicized
questioned
raised
recommended
recorded
recruited
reduced
rendered
repaired
reported
represented
reproduced

researched
resolved
responded
restored
retained
retrieved
reviewed
revised
rewrote
routed
scheduled
searched
selected

served
shaped
shared
showed
simplified
solicited
solved
specified
spoke
stimulated
structured
studied
supervised

supported
synthesized
targeted
taught
tested
trained
transferred
tutored
updated
utilized
verified
wrote

Providing Substance to Your Resume

During your three years in law school, build up your resume through the following:

- ❑ Participating in clinics and internship programs
 - Student Law Office
 - Corporate Internship Program
 - Internships for Credit
 - Other Clinical Programs
- ❑ Get involved in student and volunteer activities, including student organizations
- ❑ Research assistant for a professor
 - Great way to improve your research and writing skills
- ❑ Part- and full-time legal positions
 - Work during your summers (full-time) and possibly during the school year (part-time) after your first year if your schedule will allow
- ❑ Concentrate on your grades
- ❑ Apply to writing competitions
- ❑ Participate in moot court competitions, such as Barrister's Cup and Negotiations Competition
- ❑ Join the American Bar Association (ABA), the Colorado and Denver Bar Associations (CBA & DBA) as a student member. Attend section or committee meetings in the areas of law you are interested in practicing.
- ❑ Join an Inn of Court: The American Inns of Court is a national organization whose members include judges, lawyers and a few law students. Inns meet once a month for dinner to hold programs and discuss matters of professionalism, ethics and skills. It is modeled after the English apprenticeship system for barristers. There are 10 Inns in Denver. *Please see the Career Services Office for more specific information and visit www.innsforcourt.org.*
- ❑ Get published
 - Write for a Law Journal
 - Interview an attorney about an interesting case or area of expertise; submit the resulting article to *The Docket* or *Law Week Colorado*
 - Write an article on a current legal issue and submit it to the newsletter of the appropriate bar committee for publication
- ❑ Join a chapter of Toastmasters to improve public speaking abilities

- Attend bar sponsored continuing legal education (CLE) programs to meet local attorneys practicing in areas of interest