

The Basics of a Legal Resume

The goal of the legal resume is to get an interview. To do this, your resume must present clearly and concisely the reasons why you are a great candidate. In other words, the legal resume is persuasive writing.

A good legal resume accomplishes three major tasks:

- **To present your background and experience to emphasize how well you meet the requirements of the position.**

Which parts of your education, work and life experience are most pertinent to the job requirements? How should you describe them? If you have non-legal work experience, what experience should you include and how do you describe it to emphasize the skills that appeal to legal employers?

- **To do so concisely and in an easy to read, proper legal format.**

Employers typically screen resumes in 30-60 seconds. A legal resume has a specific format that allows reviewers to see the most important information easily within this time frame. Review the “Legal Resume Samples” for examples.

Legal resumes are typically one page, unless you have substantial professional experience, or the position requires a more detailed resume, such as an intellectual property or academic position.

- **To convey a sense of who you are as an individual and as a potential employee.**

You can do this by including information on personal interests, community involvement, or other relevant experiences. Personal interests should be interesting to catch the reader’s attention. This can often be a conversation starter in an interview and can help attorneys remember you as a candidate.

Writing a Good Legal Resume

You can simplify the process of writing the legal resume if you follow this approach:

- **Brainstorm** all the experiences you have had using the “Law School Resume Worksheet,” at the end of this publication. The next step is to list your skills, qualifications, and accomplishments. Update your resume as you continue to gain legal experiences, and on an annual basis after you graduate from law school.
- **Read the qualifications preferred for the position.** When you apply for a position, read the detailed job description to target your resume/cover letter as much as possible to match the employer’s desired qualifications.
- **Consider the overall appearance of your resume.** Is the layout professional and easy to read? Is there enough white space? Is it free of grammar and spelling errors? Are the verb tenses consistent? Do the headers highlight your experience, such as, “Legal Experience” or “Business Experience?” Because templates restrict the resume’s style/formatting and often do not highlight your information in the best way, we recommend that you avoid using resume templates. See the “Legal Resume Samples” (found in the Symplicity Document Library in the Symplicity Document Library) which demonstrate good examples of legal resumes.
- **Be succinct in your writing style.** Use short, dynamic, descriptive phrases rather than long sentences or paragraphs. Keep it to one or two pages, preferably one, unless you have extensive relevant experience.
- **Begin sentences with action verbs.** Examples of action verbs would be: drafted, organized, counseled, researched and evaluated. Stress skills, accomplishments, strengths and qualifications. Do not use the same verbs repeatedly to describe your experience. Check out the “Action Verbs” in the Symplicity Document Library for more suggestions.
- **Draft the resume.** Use these suggestions to help in this process. Remember, anything you put on your resume you may be asked about in an interview, so be sure it is accurate.
- **Have a draft of your resume reviewed.** By submitting your first resume in Symplicity, it will automatically be reviewed by career staff. You may schedule an appointment with a career advisor to review your resume. It may also be helpful to ask a mentor or professional in your job target area to review your resume for technical accuracy. Then, make your final revisions and proofread well.

RESUME CONTENT

The legal resume lists sections on education, legal and other experience, and may include other categories such as personal interests or community involvement. The main goal of your resume is to present the most relevant information about you within a limited space.

HEADER Name, address, phone number, and email (preferably your Mitchell Hamline address).

TIPS:

Make sure the header is easy to read. Your name should be a large font size (14-16 pt). There are many ways to save space on your resume, for example: your phone number and email address can be written on one line in the header. Add a symbol (~ or other symbol) to separate your address, phone and email address. Remove the hyperlink in your email address by using a right click of the mouse.

Make sure that your contact information (address, phone, and email) is current. Employers will use this information to contact you if they want to schedule an interview. Make sure that your voicemail messages and e-mail addresses are professional and that you check these on a regular basis.

HEADER EXAMPLES:

Susan A. Johnson
1122 Grand Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55105
651-699-1234 ~ susan.johnson@mitchellhamline.edu

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1122 Grand Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55105 ♦ 651-699-1234 ♦ susan.johnson@mitchellhamline.edu

EDUCATION

List your college/university, city and state, and graduation year (not years attended). Include activities and honors from both undergraduate school and law school. List your GPA / Class Rank / and Top % of class, especially if you are participating in On-Campus Interviewing (OCI).

EDUCATION ENTRY EXAMPLES:

Mitchell Hamline School of Law, St. Paul, MN

Juris Doctor expected, June 2018

G.P.A.: 2.97 **Class Rank:** 100/300 (Top 33.3%)

Honors: *Mitchell Hamline Law Review*, Staff Member Vol. 40

Mitchell Hamline School of Law, St. Paul, MN

Juris Doctor expected, June 2018

GPA: 3.32 Class Rank: 20/220 (Top 9.1%)

Honors: CALI Award (highest grade in class) for Constitutional Law and Evidence; Dean's List (two semesters)

Activities: International Law Student Organization; Student Bar Association, Section Representative

Mitchell Hamline School of Law, St. Paul, MN

Juris Doctor expected, June 2018

- Dean's Honor Roll, 2 semesters
- International Law Student Organization
- Student Bar Association, Section Representative

Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, MN

Bachelor of Arts, *cum laude*, Physics, G.P.A. 3.35, June 2014

Honors: Physics Department Award of Merit; All-Conference Soccer Team

Activities: Physics Club (President); Varsity Soccer; Student Senate (Chair)

Concordia College, Moorhead, MN

Bachelor of Arts, *magna cum laude*, Business, May 2012

Honors: Dean's List (every semester); Merit-Based Academic Scholarships

Activities: Student Senate Standards Board, Chair; Residence Hall Assistant; Intramural Volleyball

TIPS:

Spell out Degrees: Juris Doctor and Bachelor of Arts; *magna cum laude* and *summa cum laude* are Latin and written in italics with small letters (no capitals).

Law Review: *Mitchell Hamline Law Review* (Staff member, 2016) Law Review should be written in italics (if using subheadings, list Law Review within you law school honors subsection).

Grades and Class Rank: This should match what is on your transcript. Do not round your GPA or class rank to your advantage. A class rank of top 10.4% does not round up to top 10%, and a GPA of 2.9 is not a 3.0.

Law School Activities: Legal employers are interested in seeing leadership roles you have held. List student organizations and any offices held or committee membership roles.

Academic Honors: Include CALI Awards, Burton Awards, Dean's List and other selections. Include moot court/mock trial competitions and any honors you achieved (final competition team, best brief, etc.) List law journal membership, any publications, and offices held. Include scholarships awarded on the basis of merit.

EXPERIENCE

This section highlights your experience (paid or unpaid, including internships and volunteer experience) demonstrating your qualifications for the job.

If you have one or more legal experiences, you may want to title this section "Legal Experience." If you have extensive prior work experience, you may want to select titles that reflect your experience such as: "Business Experience," "Technical Experience," or "Public Service Experience."

Resumes may use either a bulleted or paragraph format. Bulleted points may be easier to read, but may take up more space. Always use strong action verbs to begin each phrase. Use the present tense for current jobs and past tense for previous jobs. Refer to the "Action Verbs" and "Legal Resume Samples" for further examples

TIPS:

Remember that volunteering for MJF, research assistantships with Mitchell Hamline professors, clinics, legal internships and externships are all legal experiences, as is work at a private law firm or other legal settings before and during law school. This work does not have to be paid work.

Describe the kinds of legal issues and experiences you were involved in, the types of legal documents you wrote, the level of responsibility you had and the results accomplished. Do not merely list the job tasks. Make your work experience come alive with well chosen detail and description.

For non-legal jobs, emphasize those aspects of your job that intersected with legal issues, such as: Negotiated contracts on _____ and provided clients with advice to obtain health care under complex federal, state and local regulations. Emphasize your transferable skills, for example, skills valued in the legal arena: Problem solving, oral and written communication, research and analysis in complex situations, client/customer service, and obtaining results.

Whenever appropriate, and significant, use numbers and percentages to quantify accomplishments (for example: Supervised 12 employees; increased sales by 25%; managed budgets of \$1-2 million).

EXAMPLES:

Lindquist & Vennum, P.L.L.P., *Summer Associate*, Minneapolis, MN, Summer 2015

Researched and drafted over 10 memoranda on legal issues, including lost profits, attorneys' fees, credit loan participation, and liability of corporate officers for patent infringement.

Drafted documents for marital dissolution, including interrogatories, requests for admission, affidavits and court briefs. Updated an arbitration clause for use in client contracts.

Wells Fargo N.A., Minneapolis, MN (June 2010 - August 2013)

Senior Loan Account Representative. Managed accounts for 20 clients who maintained more than \$10 million in commercial loan transactions. Analyzed and presented trends information to senior bank management. Researched and assessed the impact of new federal bank regulations on clients and on compliance activities of the bank.

Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services, Mankato, MN, May – July 2014

Volunteer Law Clerk

- Researched tenant rights issues, including the right to cure, HUD Section 8 rules, giving proper notice before eviction and the landlord's duty to repair.
- Advised as many as 20 clients per day regarding legal housing issues.
- Advocated with HUD on behalf of four clients to resolve compliance issues.

INTERESTS OR COMMUNITY SERVICE

This section shows a sense of you as a person, in a way that will be likely to help you connect with a legal employer.

TIPS:

The "Interests" section is optional but can be more interesting by providing some details. For example: "Traveled in East Asia" vs. simply "Travel."

Publications, Language or Licenses/Certifications (CPA, Rule 114 neutral, etc.) could be additional headings that show specific skills. If you are active in professional organizations or have been published, you may also want to include those.

SPECIAL TOPICS

Certain topics are “hot button” topics—those that may create a negative impression on the resume reviewer, based on the reviewer’s own background and beliefs. These topics include politics, social fraternities, religion, sexual preferences, and issues that are currently being debated by society.

There are three ways to handle these issues in a resume: 1) list the activities 2) list activities in a neutral way 3) or, do not include these on your resume. It is your choice whether or not to disclose activities or experiences that reflect your beliefs/values. These can be listed as follows:

Minnesota Law Students for (Democrat/Republican) Candidate (Then list activities.)

State Chairman, Law Student Organization, for presidential candidate (Then, list activities, as you choose.)

SPECIAL RESUMES: OCI, Judicial Clerkship, IP and Public Interest

Certain resumes require a different emphasis.

Judicial Clerkship: Emphasize Moot Court, Judicial externships, *Law Review*, research and writing experiences, including any publications.

On-Campus Interviews (OCI): Include your GPA, Class Rank, and (Top __%), *Law Review*, and all other academic achievements.

Public Interest: Public interest employers are particularly interested in things that show a commitment to public service and connections to the greater community, particularly in the area dealt with by that employer. Include a separate section with volunteer work and community involvement. In the cover letter, you will also want to emphasize how and why your commitment to this kind of public interest opportunity arose.

Intellectual Property (IP): IP employers are often looking for a specific technical background. List details about the technical aspects of your education and experience, including publications and research projects. These resumes can be longer than one page.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

Can I use my nickname on my resume if that's what I prefer to be called? Use your full legal name and write your nickname in parentheses or quotation marks. (For example: Elizabeth “Betsy” Roberts). If your nickname doesn't seem professional, do not use it on your resume.

Should I use an “objectives” statement? Most legal resumes do not include an objectives statement. Mention the position you are applying for (and why) in your cover letter.

Should my resume be only one-page? Legal employers prefer to see a concise resume. Most law student resumes are one page. If you have extensive professional experience or a technical background it may be appropriate to have a two-page resume. If your resume is two pages, make sure that your name is on the second page (Robin Hood, page 2), but omit the complete header.

How important is formatting? Make your resume inviting and easy to read by using white space wisely. Do not overuse bold, italics, or underlined text because it may make your resume appear busy. (For example: Bold the names of educational institutions and employers, but do not bold the city, state, and dates).

Do I need to list my GPA and Class Rank? How do I explain if my grades are not in the top ___ % of my class? Most law firms want to see your GPA and class rank. Emphasize the positive. If your grades show an upward trend, show both cumulative GPA and the trend: Cumulative GPA: 2.9; GPA: 3.4 (second year). If you received a high grade in a class that pertains to the position, you may list it (this could also be highlighted in the cover letter as well.)

Should I include my undergraduate activities and honors? Legal employers are typically most interested in your law school experience. Select the most relevant honors and activities. If you received a substantial scholarship related to your academic performance, you can say “Presidential Scholarship” or “Academic scholarships”

How should I list clinics, competitions, and other experiences? List clinics, internships and competitions after you have been accepted or have started the experience. Do not list clinics or competitions you anticipate taking. If you want to emphasize courses relevant to the position, such as IP courses, you could include this in a sub-category “Course Highlights” in the Education section (in addition to your cover letter).

Where do I list clinics and MJF experience? Clinic participation and volunteering with MJF are important legal experiences – include these under the “Legal Experience” section to provide more visibility.

What about Study Abroad? Study abroad can also set you apart from other students. You can add a “Study Abroad” section as an activity under the college or university you attended.

EXAMPLE:

Study Abroad: London, England (May-June 2015)

Emphasis: Comparative Contracts and Alternative Dispute Resolution.

If the study abroad was sponsored by another university, you may also list the name of that University.

Do I need to list every job on my resume? List the jobs that are pertinent to the position. You do not need to list every single position. There should not, however, be large unexplained time gaps in your resume.

What if I was promoted or had several jobs with one company? You can list the company information once, and then list each separate position with a description. See examples in the “Legal Resume Samples” found in the Symplicity Document Library.

What if my only experience is non-legal? Describe your accomplishments and results. Employment at Starbucks during the rush hours says a lot about your ability to handle pressure and provide good customer service. Describe non-legal experiences focusing on transferable legal skills. We also recommend gaining legal experience through MJF, externships, or clinics to add legal experience to your resume.

Should I list undergraduate internships? Some college internships provide excellent experience and make you stand out to an employer. These should be listed under activities.

As a second career student, how do I describe my experience? Focus on your transferable skills, selecting the most relevant experiences. Be careful that your descriptions do not use jargons or acronyms that are unfamiliar to legal recruiters.

Law School Resume Worksheet

Use this worksheet to assist you in brainstorming all of the possible experiences to list on your resume. All resumes should have contact information, education and experience sections, but content will differ greatly, depending on your unique background. A resume is a targeted marketing piece about you, with the employer as your audience. Think about what you can do for the employer, with an emphasis on your skills and accomplishments, rather than on duties and responsibilities.

School Name: _____

Location of School (City & State) _____

Expected Graduation Date: _____

GPA: _____ **Class Rank:** ____/____ (**Top**____%) (**List GPA and Class Rank if in top 40-50%**)

Scholarships/Awards/Honors (may include a brief explanation):

Extracurricular Activities (student organizations, CLE classes, publications, and presentations) Be sure to list all leadership roles within these organizations:

What Made Me Stand Out? (What you did, started, improved that distinguishes you from anyone else doing the same activity):

Professional Experience (Legal experience, non-legal experience, volunteer activities):

Law School Experiences – Scholarly & Practical Learning (Journals, Law Review, Moot Court Competitions, Clinics, Externships, Clerkships, Internships, Client Counseling, Student Bar Association, etc.):

***For additional assistance, visit the Career & Professional Development Office, rm. 103, or schedule an appointment with a Career Advisor.**