
Despite continued improvement in the legal job market, competition for many entry-level and lateral positions remains fierce.

Although the resumé is only one part of a typical job application, it is likely the document that potential employers will review first; their impressions of a job candidate's resumé will likely color their evaluation of the rest of that candidate's application materials. The following tips for improving your resumé, collected from senior hiring attorneys and new lawyers alike, can help ensure that your resumé has the desired effect.

Be honest to a fault. Everything on your resumé must be true. There are no exceptions. Lawyers are trained to detect dishonesty and will spot any embellishments, overstatements or inconsistencies, no matter how innocent. Getting cross-examined during a job interview is not pleasant and will not result in the outcome you are hoping for.

Proofread, proofread, proofread. Lawyers pride themselves on attention to detail. Although this attitude can cause occasional awkwardness at social gatherings, it also helps ensure that briefs and other documents lawyers prepare on behalf of clients are as close to perfect as possible. Hiring attorneys will expect the same from your resumé. Fair or not, meeting this expectation will give your resumé the best chance of impressing who it needs to. Besides, typos and grammar or punctuation errors are, at the very least, distracting and will interrupt the employer's evaluation of your credentials.

Treat your resumé like a writing sample. Your resumé is often the first chance employers have to judge your writing. You should craft your resumé as you would any written communication: Be concise, be concrete, use the active voice and choose each word with precision and purpose. For example, "assisted with the drafting and revision of various agreements" is wordy and obtuse; try "drafted financing documents for \$40 million capital investment" instead.

Be mindful of aesthetics. There are myriad articles on resumé formatting for a reason. Choose a readable and professional font, create a logical hierarchy for headings and descriptions and use consistent typeface choices. The visual structure of your resumé should add to your candidacy, not distract from it. Additionally, when you submit a resumé via email, send a PDF instead of a word processing document. PDFs look cleaner and more professional.

Emphasize practical skills and real-world achievements. Employers are looking for lawyers with practical skills who can get a running start; they would not be hiring otherwise. It's up to you to show potential employers how you can help and why they should trust you. If you've obtained good results for clients in law school clinics or with a previous employer, don't be shy about highlighting those accomplishments (while, of course, respecting confidentiality obligations). And experience, even if it doesn't seem earth-shattering to you, is worth noting: Employers need new lawyers who can take on even mundane tasks without needing too much supervision.

Consider customized versions. You may be seeking jobs from different kinds of employers. Law firms, corporations, governmental entities and nonprofits will prioritize different experiences and skills. Your undergraduate finance coursework, while impressive for an in-house position, may not go far with a criminal defense firm. You can use customized versions of your resumé to highlight items that will be of interest to specific employers. A word of caution: Remember which version of your resumé you submitted when you show up for your interview.

Be prepared to talk about anything on your resumé. Anything on your resumé is fair game during an interview. And it's a good thing, too: Interviewers can only talk about legal matters for so long, and discussing novel topics can be a chance to set yourself apart. So if your resumé notes your senior thesis on Norse mythology, review it before an interview; you never know when your interviewer might have a master's degree in Scandinavian history. Likewise, if you advertise fluency in a foreign language, don't be surprised if an interviewer starts asking questions in that language!

Get a fresh pair of eyes. The more you stare at your resumé, the less likely you are to catch errors, awkward phrasing or accidental nonsensical sentences. Get a friend or family member—preferably a non-lawyer—to give your resumé a fresh look. If it makes sense to them, chances are it will make sense to a potential employer.

As an aside, this article presumes that you are accompanying your resumé with a well-crafted cover letter. Unless a job posting specifically instructs you not to send one, sending a resumé without a cover letter tells employers that you are putting little effort on your job search. Your cover letter should identify, with specifics, why you would be a good match for the employer (without simply mimicking language from its website). State (in tasteful terms) why you are seeking a new position and/or location and emphasize the value you can add to the employer's business. In conclusion, your resumé is a prime opportunity to show prospective employers that they should pay attention to your candidacy. The way to make sure employers take your resumé seriously is to take it seriously yourself. Spending just a little extra time on this important document can significantly improve your chances of obtaining an interview. For the interview, you are on your own.

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nation's largest association of young lawyers with over 55,000 members. For more information about CYLA go to <http://cyla.calbar.ca.gov>. This article originally appeared in the winter issue of the 2015 CYLA eNews and is printed here with permission.