

Building a Law Student Resume

By Leslie White

Your law student resume is your personal marketing tool. It may be your only opportunity to convince an employer that your education, qualifications, and skills make you an ideal candidate. To pass initial muster, your resume should be easy to read, organized, error-free, and must demonstrate clearly what you can offer the employer. The following article offers some resume tips on how to build a successful law student resume.

Basic Resume Format

Header

You need to include a header with your name, address, phone numbers, and e-mail address. Make sure to highlight your name in bold and with a larger size font so that it stands out. Make sure that the telephone number you include is accurate and will be answered in a professional manner. Change your answering machine if you need to so that it is answered professionally. If you have roommates, you should consider providing your cell phone number. The most important thing is to provide an accurate number where you can be reached directly.

Education

You should list the schools of higher education you attend(ed) in reverse chronological order. For example:

Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, New York, NY
Juris Doctor to be conferred May 2010
G.P.A.: 3.50

New York University, New York, NY
Bachelor of Arts, *magna cum laude*, May 2007
Major: Political Science
G.P.A.: 3.80

Always include the location of the schools you list, as well as your degree, and the date you earned your degree. For law students currently enrolled, state the degree and the date on which you expect it to be conferred:

"J.D. expected May, 2010"
"Juris Doctor Candidate, May, 2010"
"Juris Doctor to be conferred May 2010"

Be consistent with your degree format. For example, if you use the abbreviation “J.D.,” use “B.A.” or “B.S.” for an undergraduate degree. If you spell out “Juris Doctor,” then spell out “Bachelor of Arts.”

Awards & Other Related Items

Include any awards, recognition, or other distinguishing features in this section such as academic performance, and be sure to include whether you received your degree with special honors. If you received your degree “*magna cum laude*,” “*cum laude*,” or “*summa cum laude*” always italicized the Latin terms on your law student resume. Finally, be sure to include all other honors and awards, extra-curricular activities, areas of concentration, independent study topics, titles of relevant papers or articles written, etc.

Activities

You should include your activities under your education section rather than give it a separate listing, unless your practice experience section is very light, in which case you should consider providing it with its own separate section. Activities are important to include in a law student resume because they can highlight certain skills, such as leadership, initiative, responsibility, teamwork, and dedication that a legal employer would be interested in. As you acquire more experience and become more seasoned as a legal practitioner, law school and college activities will become less relevant and may be deleted.

Grades

As a law student, academic performance remains very important. However, listing your G.P.A., class standing, or class rank percentile on your law student resume is optional. Providing your G.P.A. and/or class rank on your law student resume is only recommended if it is a strong attribute. Otherwise, do not include it. While your academic marks will be considered as part of your overall application, should you omit that information on your law student resume, you will not necessarily be eliminated simply based on your grades or rank alone.

The safest approach about placing your academic performance on your law student resume is to do so if it highlights strong academic performance. As with all elements of your background, assess each situation, and determine what puts you in the best light with respect to your law student resume. If your overall G.P.A. is weak, but you received excellent marks in a course relevant to the position you are applying to, highlight it on your resume. If you choose to list your G.P.A. on your law student resume, it must be listed exactly as it appears on your law school or undergraduate transcript. For example, a G.P.A. of 3.567 may be listed as 3.56 or 3.5, but may not be rounded up to 3.60.

Experience

This is the most important section of your law student resume; where you will present your professional skills as opposed to your academic achievements. Your focus should not be solely on legal skills per se or on legal experience. There are a

variety of skills you may have acquired through volunteer or internship positions that would be readily transferable to a legal position. For example, if you were involved in a local club or organization and you were responsible for the newsletter, you took notes or minutes, and organized events; you should highlight those skills, as they will be transferable in terms of writing, organization, and teamwork.

When you are listing your various accomplishments on your law student resume, be sure to quantify and use specific examples to highlight your skills and accomplishments. When describing your experience, make sure to identify particular practice areas of law with which you are familiar. When describing your experience in a practice area, think about specifics. For instance, rather than writing, “researched bankruptcy law issues,” write, “researched issues including liquidation, consumer debts, and creditor remedies.”

Things You Can Do Without

Your law student resume is a tool to secure a position; it is not a biography. Therefore, there are certain items that are not necessary to include and should be best left off your resume. Personal hobbies and activities, unless they are law-related, have no place on a law student resume. They do not add to your overall candidacy, and should be left off the resume. Many candidates include the following at the bottom of their resumes: “references available upon request.” This is stating the obvious and just takes space on your resume; don’t include it.

Most law students look for a fast way to create their law student resumes; often opting for a resume and copying it. However, this often results in a very weak resume. The key to a successful law student resume is to highlight skills that are specific to you and to the position you are applying to. This will be reflected in the format and the content of your resume, which is why a cut and paste job will leave you with a subpar resume. Most people cannot achieve the same level of strength in creating a resume by looking only at the examples of others. Therefore, while there are lots of great law student resume samples out there, merely copying them won't help you create the kind of law student resume that will get results.