

## The Perfect Legal Resume From A to Z

*By Leslie White*

**A: (ASCII)** ASCII Text is basic text that you would use in an email message or online resume database. You should use a Plain Text or ASCII version of your legal resume to copy and paste into online forms or post in online resume databases. ASCII Text resumes are the most widely used format for posting a resume to an online job board or sending it through an email.

**B: (Bar Admission)** Your legal resume should include a separate section that includes your bar admission. Be sure to include the year of admission for each jurisdiction you were admitted to. Including dates of admission will indicate eligibility for waiver into other jurisdictions, which can be helpful information to potential employers.

**C: (Contact)** Your contact information should include a name, phone number, email, and mailing address. Be sure to include at least one phone number, either your home, cell, or both. Never include your work number or work email address on the resume. If you have created a LinkedIn profile, you should consider adding a hotlink of your LinkedIn profile on your resume.

**D: (Do-It-Yourself)** While the “do-it-yourself” approach to creating a legal resume seems to be the most popular approach; it’s not always the most successful. In today’s competitive legal job market, a professional resume is the single most important tool in getting your foot through the door. Therefore, you may want to consider hiring a professional resume writing service that specializes in legal resumes. You will find that working with a professional resume writer is worth the investment.

**E: (Education)** You should list the schools of higher education you attended in reverse chronological order. Begin with the name of the law school and college from which you received your higher education degree. Next, include your degree, the date it was received, and include the city and state of your school for consistent formatting.

**F: (Format)** While there is no one-size fits all in terms of formatting your legal resume, there are a couple of rules of thumb you should keep in mind in terms of formatting and editing your legal resume. Your legal resume should be on neutral tone paper, either white or ivory. You should use a traditional black 12-point font, either Times, Arial, or Verdana. In other words, you need to stick to the basics. See: [“Building Your Lawyer Resume”](#) for more information on how to properly format your legal resume.

**G: (Gaps)** If you are sending your legal resume while you are currently unemployed, are you filling the gaps? Most attorneys simply don't fill the gaps on their legal resume. At best, they provide the end date of their employment and send out their legal resume "as-is." That's a mistake. Whether the gap is created when a candidate is no longer employed by his or her former employer, or because of unaccounted time between jobs, these gaps need to be addressed. See: "[Filling The Gaps On Your Legal Resume](#)" for more information.

**H: (Hobbies)** Unless your hobbies or activities relate to the position you are applying to, leave them out, no matter how interesting they might appear to you. These are better off addressed during an interview rather than on a resume. However, if you are a member of an association that relates to your legal practice or practice focus, include it in the resume. This may include publications, articles, lectures, and speaking engagements.

**I: (Inaccuracies)** That may seem like an obvious no-no, but you might be surprised to find out how many applicants stretch the truth or simply lie on their legal resume. The most common offense usually involves some type of misrepresentation or misleading statement concerning degrees, grades, class standing, academic honors, participation on scholarly publications, work history or relevant work experience. Today, employers have access to a number of tools to verify resume information through both formal and informal channels. Therefore, avoid making factual misrepresentations of any kind on your legal resume. You should always aim to represent your qualifications, skills, experience, and interests fully and accurately.

**J: (Job Postings)** If you want to land the perfect job, take the time to check out legal job listings, and use them to create a powerful legal resume. You will find that by mining this resource to create your legal resume, you will come up with some excellent results. See: "[Using Job Postings To Build Your Lawyer Resume](#)" for more information on this subject.

**K: (Keywords)** To draft an effective legal resume based on keywords from job postings, you have to use identified keywords and phrases to create your "summary," "skill," and "work history" sections. By incorporating keywords and phrases identified in job postings into your legal resume, you will make your resume stand out to employers. There will be an element of instant recognition, as keywords will be picked up immediately, either by live recruiters or resume-scanning databases, reviewing your legal resume.

**L: (Legal Resume)** A legal resume is a constantly evolving document that has to be updated and customized. Be sure to add new skills, accomplishments, or relevant training or publications you've been involved in since you last updated your resume. This is also an opportunity to delete information that is no longer as relevant or useful in advancing your candidacy.

**M: (Make it Perfect)** I cannot emphasize enough the important of proofreading your resume. Nearly 9 out of 10 legal resumes I read every day contain at least one typographical error. When it comes to a legal resume, that's not something you want to take lightly. Spell-checkers can be your best friend and your worst enemy. In other words, they miss a lot of errors. So before you send out your legal resume, print out a copy, and read it carefully word by word. When it comes to typos, you can never be too careful.

**N: (Not Using Templates)** A template can often be a good place to begin the initial information collection process; however I would caution legal professionals from solely relying on them for layout, structure, wording, and content. There are many websites that offer free resume templates, including our own. If you think they are easy to find and use, you are not alone. Imagine a recruiter who is required to sift through hundreds of resumes on a daily basis, looking at similar resumes based on the same template. The last thing you want is for your legal resume to look like everyone else's. So beware of using templates.

**O: (Omitting)** Omitting your graduation date, employment dates, or other relevant information is a big don't for legal resumes. If you are omitting a date, you are now making an employer guess what that date might be. Worst, it clearly shows that you are hiding something, and if it is something as innocuous as a graduation date, an employer can only guess what else you might not have been upfront about in your legal resume. Doubt creates questions, and questions create doubt. This is the last thing you want your legal resume to do.

**P: (Professional Resume Writers)** If you lack the time or are unsure about how to create an effective legal resume, don't worry; there is plenty of help available. Writing a great legal resume isn't necessarily a skill that you need to have, so take some time, and spend the money to have it professionally drafted for you. Hiring a professional resume writer to craft your legal resume may be the best investment you've ever made.

**Q: (Quantifying Your Experience)** Quantifying your experience on your legal resume is one of the most important steps you can take to improve its overall substance. Whenever possible, include numerical figures that demonstrate progress or accomplishments resulting directly from your work. How does quantifying your resume improve it? Supposed you're reading a resume and you see the following statement: "Handled the discovery of a large products liability case and obtained a favorable settlement." Sounds nice, but that statement does not make much of an impact. Consider this statement instead: "Handled the discovery of a products liability case, including the review of over 5,000 documents, and obtained a favorable \$10M plaintiff settlement together with attorney's fees in the amount of \$500K." Now that's a statement with impact! Why? Because it provides enough details that an employer will want to know more about this story and about your accomplishments in general.

**R: (References Upon Request)** Including “References Available Upon Request” on your legal resume is a waste of space and states the obvious. Employers are assuming that you can provide references upon request, so don’t waste precious resume space on something that’s unnecessary.

**S: (Summary)** Your legal resume should start with a clear and concise summary section that highlights your practice areas and skills. This section can be named a number of things such as “Profile,” “Overview” or “Summary.” The most important thing to remember when drafting this section is to keep it brief and to the point.

**T: (Tailor Your Resume)** A one-size-fits-all legal resume is like junk mail. They are not personalized toward an employer’s needs. When you receive junk mail that does not address you by your name or your needs, what do you do? Probably toss it. Employers are no different. If you are planning to apply to more than one position, your legal resume should be drafted specifically for each position you are applying to. If you don’t tailor your legal resume to the position you are applying to, you will most likely obtain few positive responses from your resume.

**U: (Unreadable Fonts)** Formatting your legal resume properly is almost as important as the information it contains. If you present an employer with a dense, hard to read document requiring a magnifying glass, you may find that your legal resume will not be getting the attention it deserves, even if its content is outstanding. Use a font the employer can read easily, such as a 12-point font with variable spacing such as Times New Roman or Arial. While you may have to compromise on font size and style to keep your resume to two pages or less, try not to go below a 10-point font on the major sections of your resume.

**V: (Verbs)** You should use action verbs in your legal resume because they make sentences and statements more concise and persuasive. In order to make a striking first impression, use action verbs as the first word of each bullet point to emphasize a skill. Using action verbs will allow you to highlight the tasks you can do. Choosing the right verb to describe your skills and accomplishment is critical in effectively describing what you have done, and in persuading potential employers to interview you. For a list of legal resume action verbs, see [“Using Active Verbs in Your Legal Resume”](#).

**W: (Work History)** Your professional experience should begin with the full legal name of the company, law firm, or organization you have worked for. This will immediately allow an employer to determine if you have the industry or background that would be a good match for his or her organization. Next, provide your full title, as well as your dates of employment and the city and state where you practiced. Finally, provide a short description of the organization you worked for, a description of your responsibilities, and bullets to highlight your various accomplishments. Most legal employers prefer to hire from their competitors, so identifying the organization that you are currently working for or worked for in the

past is very important to signal at the beginning of the work history section of your legal resume.

**X: (X-traneous Information)** Your resume is a marketing tool designed to land you an interview. It is not a biography. Because the modern resume is a marketing tool, it's best to keep personal interests, hobbies, and other non-essential materials for the interview process as a way to "break the ice." If you are keen on listing organizations, affiliations, volunteer work, or extracurricular activities on your legal resume, only list those that are relevant to your practice as a legal professional, or that are directly related to your targeted job. Again, if it's not related to your practice or the position, do not include it.

**Y: (Yin and Yang)** While it is usually easier for job seekers to focus on what to do "right" on their legal resume, many tend to forget what they may be doing "wrong" with their resume. When we put on blinders about potential faults in our resumes, we can miss critical errors that can make the difference between getting an interview and getting the heave-ho. In "[The Yang Of Legal Resume Writing](#)," we discuss the yang, or must-do elements, to create an effective legal resume. To find out about the yin of resume writing, or what not to do, when drafting a legal resume, see: "[The Yin Of Legal Resume Writing](#)."

**Z: (Zone In)** You may already know the resume basics when it comes to drafting your legal resume: how to use the right keywords, where to put the most important information, how to use bullets with active verbs, etc. But are you also zoning in on the small stuff? A missing period or a different sized hyphen might not make or break your resume, but when you realize that your legal resume is also considered a writing sample by most employers, the small stuff can take on a whole new level of importance. To see a list of details most often overlooked in legal resumes, read the following article: "[Sweating The Small Stuff On Your Lawyer Resume](#)."