

The Yin Of Legal Resume Writing

By Leslie White

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 make the difference between getting an interview and getting the heave-ho. In an earlier article, we discussed the yang, or must-do elements, to create an effective legal resume (See: “[The Yang Of Legal Resume Writing](#)”). Here we will be focusing on the yin of resume writing, or what not to do, when drafting a legal resume.

Do Not Mislead Or Lie On Your Legal Resume

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. While misleading statements can sometimes be unintentional, they can nevertheless lead to serious consequences.

Today, employers have access to a number of tools to verify resume information through both formal and informal channels. Although employers may be receiving a large number of resumes, they typically conduct some form of due diligence on those they have selected to interview. 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.

Do Not Include Race, Religion, Sex, Age, Or Marital Status

You should never state race, religion, sex, age, marital status, or other personal data that have no relevance to your employment qualifications on your legal resume. Doing so could suggest you are unaware of, or are insensitive to, laws prohibiting discrimination. If your legal resume contains personal information unrelated to your job target, you might also fall victim to discrimination, even if you’re qualified for the position.

There are a couple of exceptions to this rule. Some federal or state jobs may require this information, in which case you should only include the information specifically requested. Another exception to this rule is if you are sending your legal resume abroad. Sometimes including age, marital status, race, and/or religion is acceptable if the resume is being sent outside of the United States. In that case, you should check with local recruiters as to what is proper to include in the legal resume.

Do Not Use Small Unreadable Fonts Or More than Two Pages

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. Instead, 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.

While your legal resume should be easy to read, it should also be quick to review. Therefore, you should try to limit your legal resume to one page. If you have ten or more years of experience, a two-page resume is perfectly acceptable. If you have a great deal of experience, and would like to highlight your transactional or litigation experience, or list publications and presentations, consider using an addendum. Experiment with different fonts to select one that pleases you, fits the page, and is easy to read.

Do Not Include Irrelevant Or Unnecessary 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.

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. By the same token, there is no need to include computer or technical proficiency (such as Lexis or Word Perfect), unless it is of specific interest to a potential employer. If those skills are not specifically listed in the position description as a requirement, do not include them. Finally, do not include professional skills or work experience that are irrelevant to the type of job you seek or you no longer wish to use (e.g., woodworking).

Listing another language may be appropriate if it adds to your qualifications for the job. In certain cases, knowing a second language is a plus and should be included on your legal resume. When including language proficiency, state whether you are "fluent," "proficient," or "conversational." Do not claim language skills unless you can carry out a basic conversation.