

Using Active Verbs in Your Legal Resume

By Leslie White

Your legal resume is your most important career document. It is designed to sell who you are to a prospective employer, and to set yourself above others competing for the same position. In this marketplace, your legal resume is competing against many others, including legal resumes that are professionally written and edited. One of the tools of the trade in designing a professionally written legal resume is to use active verbs.

The right use of active verbs allows you to create sentences that exude confidence, energy, and results. They are designed to engage the reader in a positive manner. At the end of the day, this is the type of reaction you want your legal resume to elicit. You want the person reading your legal resume who has been tasked with hiring for the position, to feel positive and energized when reading your legal resume, and to contact you to schedule an interview.

Using The “Right” Voice on Your Legal Resume.

English verbs have two voices: active voice and passive voice. In active voice, the writer specifies who is doing the action. For example: "The attorney wrote the brief yesterday." The person acting is the attorney.

In passive voice, the writer does not specify who is doing the action. For example: "The brief was written yesterday." Here, we do not know who wrote the brief. It could have been an attorney or a paralegal, we just don't know. The sentence is also in passive voice if the writer specifies the actor, but does so later in the sentence. For example, "The report was written yesterday by the attorney."

Why use an active voice over a passive voice? Passive voice can make sentences unclear by keeping the identity of the actor secret. It can also make sentences sound awkward and evasive. Finally, it can lead to misinterpretation when it comes to responsibility. For example: "A mistake was made in the initial legal strategy but it was corrected and the client recovered damages." Here it is not clear whether the attorney, the client, or some third party made the mistake and/or correction.

While passive voice is appropriate for some documents, when writing your legal resume, you need to use the active voice. A resume is designed to describe the actions of only one person: you. Therefore, when you are describing your experience, skills, accomplishments, and qualifications, you need to structure your sentences by using active voice. Here are some examples:

- Counseled the senior management team on a variety of business, commercial, strategic, and risk management issues.
- Drafted contracts review and approval procedures to conform to Sarbanes-Oxley compliance measures.
- Served as first chair on products liability cases, and managed all phases of litigation from case intake to trial.
- Evaluated agreements to ensure compliance with laws, regulations, corporate policies, and procedures.
- Litigated thirty commercial trials and arbitrations in cases involving insurance subrogation matters.

Notice that your legal resume does not have to be structured with complete sentences to be effective. In this case, our bulleted examples are not complete sentences and did not use the subject “I.” Instead, we used active sentences that are clear, to the point, and will show a prospective employer that you can deliver in the various areas you are describing on your legal resume.

Selecting The “Right” Active Verbs for Your Legal Resume.

The key to selecting the “right” active verbs for your legal resume is to be both selective and varied in your choices. You do not want to use the same verb twice under any one employer’s position. You also want to make sure that the verb you have selected is descriptive of the experience, skill, accomplishment, or qualification you are trying to explain.

When selecting a verb to begin your sentences, remember to use the present tense for describing the job functions of your current position. Use the past tense for previous job functions with former employers.

Finally, remember to choose verbs that are specific to the action you are trying to convey, as well as to the industry in which you have experience or are seeking a new position. Most of the words in the list below are suitable across industries and can be applied to almost any legal resume to make it more impactful.

The following sample list of verbs can be used as either present tense or past tense:

Management	Communication	Research	Technical	Helping
achieved	addressed	clarified	analyzed	advised
administered	arbitrated	collected	assembled	aided
analyzed	arranged	conceived	built	assessed
assigned	authored	critiqued	calculated	assisted

attained chaired conceived contracted consolidated coordinated decided delegated developed directed encouraged evaluated executed handled implemented improved incorporated increased inspired launched led managed motivated organized outlined oversaw planned prioritized produced recommended reevaluated rejected reported reviewed scheduled strengthened supervised united	communicated corresponded counseled developed defined directed drafted edited enlisted formulated influenced interpreted lectured mediated moderated motivated negotiated persuaded promoted publicized reconciled reunited renegotiated reported researched summarized spoke translated wrote	detected diagnosed disproved evaluated examined extracted identified inspected interpreted interviewed investigated organized researched reported reviewed searched studied summarized surveyed systematized wrote	computed designed devised engineered fabricated inspected maintained operated overhauled programmed remodeled repaired solved trained upgraded	brought clarified coordinated counseled dealt demonstrated diagnosed educated encouraged enlisted expedited facilitated familiarized guided helped inspired maintained modified performed referred rehabilitated represented supported upheld
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The following sample list of verbs is specific to the legal industry:

Legal (A-D)	Legal (E-M)	Legal (P-R)	Legal (S-Z)
accelerated accomplished accounted	earned economized edited	made mainlined managed	scanned scheduled screened

achieved	educated	manipulated	searched
acquired	eliminated	mapped	selected
acted	employed	marketed	sensed
adapted	empowered	mastered	separated
addressed	enabled	measured	served
adjusted	endured	mediated	serviced
administered	enforced	memorized	set up
advised	engineered	mentored	set standards
arbitrated	enlarged	merchandised	set
audited	enlightened	merged	shaped
authored	enlisted	met	shared
authorized	ensured	mobilized	shoved
awarded	entertained	modeled	showed
balanced	equipped	moderated	simplified
bargained	established	modified	sketched
briefed	estimated	monitored	sold
brought	evaluated	motivated	solicited
budgeted	examined	moved	solidified
built	exchanged	navigated	solved
calculated	executed	negotiated	sorted
carried out	exhibited	nursed	sought
catalogued	expanded	nurtured	specialized
chaired	expedited	observed	specified
charted	explained	obtained	spoke
clarified	explored	offered	staffed
classified	expressed	operated	staged
collaborated	extracted	ordered	standardized
collected	facilitated	organized	started
communicated	familiarized	originated	stimulated
compared	fashioned	oversaw	straightened
compelled	filed	participated	strengthened
compiled	financed	perceived	stressed
completed	fixed	perfected	stretched
composed	followed through	performed	studied
computed	forecast	persevered	submitted
conceived	formulated	persuaded	substantiated
concentrated	fostered	planned	succeeded
conceptualized	found	played	suggested
conciliated	founded	predicted	summarized
conducted	funded	prepared	superseded
confronted	gathered	prescribed	supervised
conserved	gave	presented	supplemented
consolidated	generated	preserved	supplied
constructed	governed	presided	supported
consulted	graphed	prevented	surveyed

<p> contacted controlled conversed conveyed cooperated coordinated corrected counseled created critiqued curtailed cut dealt debated decided defined delegated delivered demonstrated designed detailed detected determined developed devised diagnosed directed disciplined discovered dispensed displayed dissected disseminated distributed diverted drafted dramatized drew up drove </p>	<p> grouped guided handled harmonized headed helped hired hypothesized identified illustrated imitated implemented improvised increased indexed influenced informed innovated inspected inspired installed instituted integrated interacted interpreted intervened interviewed introduced invented inventoried investigated judged kept informed launched learned leased lectured led liaised listed listened litigated located logged </p>	<p> prioritized problem solved processed produced programmed projected promoted prompted proof-read proposed protected proved provided for provided publicized published purchased qualified quantified raised ran read realized reasoned received recommended reconciled recorded recruited rectified redesigned reduced referred rehabilitated reinforced related remunerated renewed rented reorganized repaired reported represented reproduced researched </p>	<p> symbolized synchronized synthesized systematized tabulated, talked taught team-built terminated tested told took traced tracked trained transcribed transferred translated transmitted travelled treated trimmed tripled trouble-shot turned uncovered understood undertook unified united unraveled updated upgraded used utilized vacated validated verified visualized waged washed weighed widened withdrew won worked wrote </p>
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