

The Nuanced Art of Resume Writing for Attorneys

While most lawyers have a resume on hand, most say they need to update it before applying for a new position. The status quo is to only update when considering a change. If you have been at the same company or firm for three years, a lot has happened and been learned. While this may not seem like a big deal, this is why it is:

- **Delays the process.** When a job search is underway time is sensitive. Updating and digging for information delays the process and puts you at a disadvantage.
- Risk of **forgetting key or pivotal skills, deals, projects to add to a resume**, cover letter or deal sheet.
- **Procrastination and dread set in** if a lot of changes need to be made. In short, it sucks more.

Resume writing can be a laborious and, frankly, unpleasant task...but only if you are starting from scratch or need an overhaul. Add a repeated task to your calendar for a quick quarterly update to ensure it gets done. A twenty-minute tweak every three months can mean the difference between you getting or missing an opportunity. *Guaranteed.*

Personal Branding

Resumes are only part of your personal brand, the pieces of which provide a consistent story about who you are. Each layer gives just a little more texture and context. The goal with resumes, as well as cover letters, is to make a one-dimensional piece of paper or screen become or represent a three-dimensional person. These tactics humanize and make you become more real to the reader, hiring manager, or partner, who is envisioning working with you.

Your personal brand should be layered, using a variety of tools to build upon your image. Clearly, there is more to be said about this – search personal branding in the NIMBLE·Esquire blog for more information.

You Have 7 Seconds – Use Them Wisely

Research shows that employers skim a resume for approximately seven seconds – **7 SECONDS!** - before deciding to skip or give a resume further consideration. That means you have one chance to make an impression.

This is how to keep them reading...

Italicize and bold with discretion

This must be subtle and eye drawing, giving the reader the opportunity to see the most important aspects quickly.

- Bold company, organization, or law firm name, and schools
- Italicize your title
- Include city, state, department or practice area, months and years of employment
- Bold and underline headings for experience, education, memberships, publications, certifications and recognitions, languages, and – with caution – interests. Include the headings only applicable to you – if you have nothing to add to these categories do not include them.

Experience Arrangement: Based on Sophistication and Keywords

Pay attention to the keywords from the job description or practice summary and begin by listing those keywords **first**. Experience should be outlined with the experience you have that directly speaks to the job description for the position in which you are applying, with the most *sophisticated items first then tiered down*. Always customize with experience that is still relevant. This may mean having several versions of your resume.

Length and Arrangement

Two pages of concise and informative content is absolutely ok. Do not limit a resume to one page if the omission of information will be detrimental to telling your story. It is ok to add a third page titled Representative Matters or Deal Sheet in lieu of sending those documents separately. They are more likely to be read as part of one document.

There are two schools of thought on the placement of job experience before or after education. Given the 7 second quick look previously mentioned, do you want the reader to see your education or previous employer first? This is up to you, with the recommendation being to put whichever is strongest first.

For example, if you are working at a recognizable or impressive company, law firm, or public sector branch, such as the Attorney General's or US Attorney's Office, or clerking for a federal judge, you may opt to put that on the top of your resume. It gives almost instant credibility, and an assumption will be made about your grades being above par to have gotten that gig.

On the flipside, if you did very well in law school (think Law Review, Moot Court, CALI Award, Dean's List and other awards/ participation) and/ or attended a top tier law school, you may want to lead with that.

What should be included on the resume:

- Name and contact information, including your email and phone number.
- Education: Law school name, city and state, type of degree (JD), date of graduation, gpa and ranking, if applicable, honors (cum laude, moot court, law review), awards (CALI Award of Excellence), activities (bar associations, student clubs), and participation in Law Review, Moot Court, etc.
- Job experience beginning with most recent, with employer name, location (city and state), your title, dates of employment, and either paragraphed or bulleted experience. Ensure consistency of the style you choose throughout the resume.
- Memberships, Publications, Certifications and Recognitions, Languages, Bar Admissions, Interests or Personal Interests (in lieu of hobbies), and Professional Affiliations should all be included, only if applicable.

Resumes, Deal Sheets and Representative Matters

We recommend updating a resume monthly or quarterly, while a deal or representative matters sheet should be tweaked monthly.

Take note, if you are not adding more sophisticated experience to your deal sheet it is time to ask if you have reached the ceiling at your current law firm or company.

Not Much to Add?

Take note, if you are not adding substantive changes in experience to your resume over the course of a couple of updates, it could be a signal you are not developing new skills.

For the best resume examples for attorneys, check out our samples and fillable templates to get you started.

You will be ready when a recruiter calls with your dream job.