

Common Resume Mistakes

1. Using Funky Fonts, Colored Paper or Graphics

Be conservative in your format. Law is still a fairly conservative profession. Employers may look negatively at your attempt to catch their attention.

2. Using a Font Size That's Too Small

You don't want your intended audience to have to squint to read your resume. Use 12 pt., 11.5 or 11 pt. font. In some cases, you can get away with a 10.5 but avoid it if you can.

3. Multiple-Page Resumes

In general, you should keep your resume to one page. Having a lot of experience is a good thing. However, you should always trim your experiences to the ones most relevant to the potential employer. Some special situations require a two-page resume, but this is the exception rather than the rule.

Hints to getting your resume to one page:

- Trim honors and awards not relevant to legal employers – use the title “Selected Honors”
- Get rid of the Interest Section of the resume if your activities section serves the same purpose of giving some insight into who you are
- Do not list duties you had during jobs legal employers might not find relevant
- Do not list jobs legal employers might not find relevant. This is not a job history.
- Merge Volunteer activities into either Experience or Honors/Activities
- Expand your margins to .8 on top and bottom
- Decrease the size of the spaces between items but not the actual font used for the text. For example, you can make a .4 or .6 space which gives the illusion of a full 10-point space

4. Drastically Increasing the Size of Your Name

Your name should be slightly larger than rest of the text in the heading. Do not make your name so much larger than the rest of the text that it screams “I have an ego.” Try a 16-18 point font, not a 24 to 28!

5. Listing Anything Other Than Your Education First

Make Education the first section of your resume followed by Experience. Include your institution, degree, major, minor and date (anticipated date of graduation). Arrange the individual experiences in reverse chronological order, and make sure you include all of the relevant information (employer, position held, dates, etc.).

Use the title “Experience” for the section where you describe your past jobs or volunteer positions. Using the phrase “Employment History” implies the section is a complete list of all past employment, which is unnecessary.

6. Describing Your Past Jobs in Narrative Form

Employers want a quick look at the responsibilities you've had in the past. Use one- or two-line bullet points to describe your jobs. Do not write a narrative.

7. Using Passive Words

Use Action words (Conducted, Developed, Prepared) in describing your job duties and do not use the same action words all the time. Try using drafted, wrote, composed, etc. to add variety

8. Incorrect Use of Tenses

Use past tense for previous jobs (Organized) and present tense for current jobs (Organize).

9. Inconsistent Formatting

If you abbreviate state names, do it for all states. If you abbreviate one month, abbreviate all months. If you italicize or bold some job titles or locations, do it for all of them. Capitalize all section headings if you capitalize one. If you put periods at the end of bullet points, be consistent. It is best not to use them, however, as they are unnecessary. Some might even say use of a period in bullet points is incorrect because the period is only to be used at the end of complete sentences.

10. Extensive Lists of Unrelated Honors and Activities

Limit your list of honors and activities to those that are relevant to the position you are seeking. Highlight scholarships, academic awards and activities in which you held positions. Keep involvement in organizations employers are likely to recognize like Rotary, Greek organizations, Jaycees, Eagle Scout, etc. But, do not include high school activities and awards unless they are truly extraordinary or transcend high school. Eagle Scout is always good to include (once an eagle scout always...) but not homecoming king/queen.

11. Including References Directly on Your Resume

Do not put names of references or “References available on request” on a resume unless you do not have enough material to fill one page. Employers will always assume that you have references available.

12. Not Including the Scale of Your GPA

Always put your GPA on a scale so that it makes sense. If you just say 4.0 and don’t clarify that the scale was 4.0, it’s useless information. Because we are on a 9.0 scale this is even more important.

13. Including an Objective

Do not use an “Objective” section or a “Summary of Qualifications” or “Highlights” section. They are not used on legal resumes. This type of information is appropriate for cover letters but not for legal resumes. If you are marketing yourself to a non-legal industry this may well be appropriate. You should work up at least two separate styles of resumes if this is that case.

14. Spelling Errors or Misused Words

Wrong	Right
Jurist Doctor	Juris Doctor or J.D.
Juris Doctorate	Juris Doctor or J.D.
Memorandums	Memoranda
Memos	Memoranda
Criterion	Criteria
Judgement	Judgment