

How Should I Prepare My Resume If I'm Getting Ready for a Law Firm Job Search?

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Question: I am revising my resume to get ready for a law firm job search. Can you provide some basic guidance as to how I should prepare my resume?

Answer: The following are some well-established basic rules for preparing resumes in the legal industry.

First, [keep it short and sweet](#). You want your resume to be just one page - two at the absolute most. Shorter is generally better. It is said that you will only have 30 seconds to persuade someone with your resume that you are a serious candidate for the job. [Your resume must look great both at a glance](#) and on close inspection. This means you need plenty of "white space." In an effort to keep resumes short, many candidates use small type to squeeze in as many "accomplishments" as possible. The result is too often an unreadable mess. [You must have a resume that "grabs the eye,"](#) not repels it.

Second, keep it simple with only the most necessary, relevant and impressive information. Remember, your goal is to get the job. So focus on those things that are most relevant and most important with respect to that goal. Of course, you have to put down your academic and employment history. Beyond that, the information added is largely discretionary. Use your discretion to add the most relevant and valuable information available, such as your skill set that matches the job's requirements.

[See 6 Things Attorneys and Law Students Need to Remove from Their Resumes ASAP If They Want to Get Jobs with the Most Prestigious Law Firms](#) for more information.

Inserting your college GPA may make sense if it is truly excellent (over 3.5), but not if it is more ordinary. Additional information that is less relevant should only be added if it is simple to understand and clearly impressive and helpful. For example, winning a Nobel Peace Prize would be worth mentioning. But writing at length about your undergraduate thesis on the eating habits of tadpoles or even just mentioning that you were president of your college drinking club may even hurt you by distracting or boring the reader.

Third, organize your information in an effective fashion. For younger candidates, academic history usually comes first before work history. [For more senior candidates, work history should be placed first when experience starts to become more important](#), usually around 10 years. You may wish to make exceptions to this order if you went to Harvard or worked for a top-flight firm. The key is to get the most relevant and most powerful information at the top where it will be seen first.

Fourth, [once you have more experience, you can consider adding a short "addendum" to the resume that summarizes key deals, cases, patents, etc.](#) It is a separate document with additional information that is better kept outside the 1-2 page limit of the resume. Of course, you should only do this if the additional information is relevant and valuable to your goal of getting the job.

Fifth, you must proofread it very carefully. Even minor mistakes and typos can be fatal.

Sixth, do NOT do any of the following: Include an "objective," a salary requirement (unless asked), any personal information or the phrase "references available on request." Your only "objective" is to get the job. Writing something else can only hurt you. No one cares about your family or hobbies. Revealing such information may also hurt you. And lastly, the "references" phrase is both obvious and outdated.

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