

# How to Write a Resume that May Actually Get You a Job

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A bad resume puts you on the fast track to the "no" pile. Picture yourself as the person who reads dozens of long, poorly written resumes every day, and imagine how quickly your eyes glaze over at the sight of yet another jam-packed, multi-page colossus. Here are some tips to make your resume the concise, effective document it needs to be.

### 1. 1. Only List Information that is Relevant Now.

Attorneys are thorough. [While, in legal practice, thoroughness is surely an asset, on a resume, it can be disastrous.](#) You have heard a hundred times that your resume should be on one page, and this is almost always true. If you are a partner with a lot of [portable business](#), you may justify two pages, but I can't imagine another scenario in which one page won't suffice. Here's why.

Your career as an attorney has probably lasted several years at least, during which time you have worked on many interesting and noteworthy things. However, you must always remember that you are writing for an audience, and that audience is likely weary and pressed for time. Therefore, you need to be selective about the items you include on your resume. So, what to leave in, and what to leave out?

The answer is simple. Include what you can do NOW, and what you want to be doing in the job you are applying for. Everything else gets deleted. Please resist the temptation to include everything you have ever done. Including it will hurt you.

If you are now specialized within your practice area, and you are not looking to change specialties, only the experience within your specialty should be emphasized. For example, if you are a fifth-year [M & A attorney](#), you can go ahead and leave off the experience at your last job where you dabbled in hedge fund work. (If, however, you are trying to get back into hedge fund work, you need to leave that work on the resume, and de-emphasize the M & A work you do in your present job). Similarly, if you were at one of those firms that allows its associates to "float" for the first year or two, you can go ahead and delete experience in practice areas that you did not ultimately choose.

Your resume only needs to reflect the experience that is appropriate to your seniority level. If you have remained in the same practice area your entire career, your class-year appropriate experience is probably enough. If you are a corporate attorney who runs her own deals, you don't need to include the due diligence you performed two jobs ago.

Similarly, your job descriptions for each position should be very short, except for your current position. Obviously, you want to include that federal clerkship, and possibly even your summer positions during law school, but descriptions are probably not necessary.

### 1. 2. Draft a Template, and Then Make Specialized Resumes

I work with many attorneys who enjoy several areas of law, and want to submit resumes for a variety of different types of positions. Or, maybe the important thing to a particular attorney is moving cities, and she is less picky about the substance of the work. In this scenario, draft a skeleton resume showing your positions, and the experience you will probably want to emphasize in most job applications. Then, tweak the resume as

necessary for each application. For some reason, many attorneys feel that this is somehow disingenuous, but I don't agree. Obviously, you may not misrepresent the amount of experience you have. However, if you are a general corporate attorney who is applying for a securities-based position, there is nothing wrong with highlighting the fact that you have some solid experience in securities by listing it front and center.

**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.**

### 1. 3. Make the Resume Easy to Read.

Do not, as so many attorneys do, make a resume filled with long blocks of paragraphs that the reader has to concentrate on in order to decipher. This will absolutely sink your application, I guarantee it. Instead, use as few words as possible and bullet point whenever possible. This is easy on the reader's eyes, which go directly to the bullet points. Tell the reader, via bullet points, what you can do, now.

On a final note: I personally detest those "objective" paragraphs some people use at the beginning of resumes. No one reads them, and I suggest you delete it if you have one on your resume.

### 1. 4. Make Every Line Count

Attorneys are taught to be concise writers. However, they routinely fill their resumes with fluff. You are not going to impress anyone with your use of big words, so leave them out. Similarly, do not include long descriptions that say nothing. For example, I recently had a resume with the following line item: "Facilitate successful resolutions to conflicts resulting in savings to client of tens of millions of dollars." Saving many dollars is great, but I cannot tell from this line what this attorney's role actually was. Did she conduct the settlements herself? Or was she part of a team, and she had no decisionmaking power at all? What exactly does "facilitate" mean here? I see descriptions like this one constantly. Tell the reader what you did.

Here's another one: "Practice encompassed broad range of legal services to business units across the enterprise." This line is a waste of space. Delete it.

Another popular but confusing description is when attorneys write that they "represented," say, a multinational client in a multimillion dollar litigation. Again, what did you actually do? Were you the contact person for this huge client? Did you argue the case? Depose witnesses? Or were you sitting in an office reviewing thousands of documents? "Represent" can mean a lot of different things, so be clear about your role.

The moral of the story is this: your resume should be short, with lots of empty spaces for ease of reading, and should state only what you can do right now. All else should be deleted.