GEORGIA STATE LAW
UNIVERSITY

Career Aid

A Winning Resume

There are no absolute wrong or right ways in which to format your resume. However, there are some general guidelines to consider. The key is ensuring that your resume effectively and concisely presents you to the reader!

Your resume should be organized into four major sections: 1) Contact Information 2) Education 3) Experience, and 4).

- The Contact Information Section should contain your complete name, address, telephone numbers (home & cell), and email address.

- The Education Section should include your law school and pre-law school education in reverse chronological order, degrees awarded along with the month/year received, major, and GPA/Class Rank *(see discussion below)*. Scholastic honors, awards and extracurricular activities should be listed under the institutions to which they pertain.

- The Experience Section should include employment history, as well as all **law related** part-time or summer positions, whether paid or unpaid, externships, and volunteer experience. This section should be displayed in reverse chronological order and include the position title, the location and dates of each position.

- Although not considered a stand alone section, you may include the heading "Skills and Interests. Here you may provide some additional information that may be relevant such as foreign language proficiency and computer skills, civic organization work, etc.

For students and recent graduates, a resume should generally not exceed one page. Instances of two page resume's should be reserved for those students who have substantial pre-law school work experience or experience that may be relevant to the position they are seeking. Anything longer than two pages almost certainly includes extraneous data that distracts from the essential information.

A resume should be formatted in a manner that is visually pleasing. The resume is primarily a marketing tool, so each section of information must be packaged attractively in a design that harmonizes with every other section of information. If a resume looks cluttered, disorganized and hard to read, it may be discarded without the actual quality of the applicant ever being considered. Use of bold, underline, italics and tabs are all ways to attractively package your information, but remember to be consistent.

An outline format of a resume is preferable to the narrative format. This is likely due to the fact that the outline type is more succinct and therefore more easily read and digested. When using the outline format, do not include numbers, letters or dashes as category divisions.

Avoid a cluttered appearance by leaving a substantial margin on all sides and be sure the margins are balanced. A general rule of thumb is to use one inch margins on all sides. Font size can vary, but 10pt font is smallest that should be used.

GPA/Class Rank – To List or Not To List

Whether to include grades and/or class rank on a resume is a common question confronted by law students. There is no absolute right or wrong answer. Obviously, if you have a fantastic GPA/class rank, you will want highlight that. Likewise, if you have a less than stellar GPA/class rank you will want to emphasis your other strengths. Most people, however, fall somewhere in between, and this is where the confusion comes in.

Job applicants fear that if they don't include grade/class rank information, employers will think they did horribly. Conversely, they fear if they include grade/class rank information, employers will automatically disqualify them. Both concerns are valid.

As a general guideline, if your GPA puts you in the top third of your class, you should likely include it on your resume. However, there are other factors to consider.

If your GPA is average, yet you won a few academic awards, excelled in moot court, and participated on a law journal, employers will likely assume you did well in school. Thus, the absence of a GPA may not cause an employer to assume you didn't do well in the classroom, or did not meet the employer's GPA requirement. As an alternative, you could also include specific courses in which you received high honors or high grades.

Great work experience is also another way to make up for a less than stellar GPA. Maybe you didn't do well in the classroom, but you had tremendous success and experience in a legal clinic or externship, you come highly recommended from a legal employer you worked for as a law clerk, or your prior work experience has some bearing on the position you are seeking. In this instance, you may want to forgo the average GPA in favor of fleshing out the experience section of your resume and highlighting these factors in your cover letter. However, be prepared to discuss your GPA and class rank during the interview. Remember to make the discussion positive by highlighting what you learned from the experience and how it will make you a better attorney.

As noted earlier, there is no absolute right or wrong answer to the question of whether you should include your GPA/Class rank on your resume. We recommend that you consider the factors discussed here for every potential employer, because the answer will hinge on the specific requirements and expectations of each employer.

If you have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Career Services Office.

Guide to Creating Achievement Statements for Resumes

When writing, a resume, many jobseekers tend to simply state what their duties and responsibilities were at their previous jobs, but tend to forget one important factor:

How are they of value to a potential employer?

True, the employer wants to know what you've done, but he or she is even more concerned with whether you can achieve results. Make your resume achievement-oriented in order to spark the employer's interest right away. By writing about your experience in terms of achievements, not job descriptions, you convey three things:

1. You have the necessary experience or skills.
2. You're effective at this work or at using these skills.
3. You take pride in and enjoy your work.

Your accomplishment statements will also instigate interesting discussion about your strengths during the interview. Here are some questions and examples to help you think of relevant achievements for your resume:

What projects are you proud of that support your job objective?
- Spearheaded a successful one-on-one reading program for a fourth grade special education student.

What are some quantifiable results that point out your ability?
- Initiated Georgia State's "Gimme Shelter" program, involving the coordination of 80 people to sleep outdoors in cardboard boxes, which raised over $10,000 for the homeless as well as increasing awareness of this important social issue.

When have you demonstrated S. I. R. (Situation, Input, Result)? In other words, what was the Situation or problem you faced, what was your Input to remedy it, and what was the positive Result?
- Reduced theft 47% by instituting "Shoppers' Spy," a tight yet discreet security program.

When did you positively affect the organization, your boss, your coworkers, your clients?
- Enhanced staff morale through a six-month incentive program that prompted a major increase in sales.
- What awards, commendations, publications, etc. have you achieved that relate to your job objective? Awarded "Top Salesperson" at "Red's Shoe Barn" for three consecutive years.

How is success measured in your field? How do you measure up?
Selected by the NIH to represent the United States at the International AIDS Conference in Brazil.

- Are you good at using the skills required for this job? When have you demonstrated that to be true?
- Used advanced CAD tools to create a totally new look in video game modeling.

What activities, paid and unpaid, have you done that used skills you'll be using at your new job?
- Offered academic success counseling and advisement to 40 students at "Make It Happen," a volunteer program at Anytown High School.

When did someone "sit up and take notice" of how skilled you are?
- Initially hired as part of work-study program in college Admissions office and was offered salaried position within one year based on demonstrated communication and recruitment skills.

Use of Action Verbs

Writing an effective achievement statement on your resume also requires the use of action verbs to describe skills, jobs and accomplishments. An action verb expresses achievements or something a person does in a concise, persuasive manner. Since concise writing is easier for readers to understand, it is more reader-centered. Because reader-centered writing is generally more persuasive, action verbs are more convincing than non-action verbs. Here are some examples:

- "Was the boss of a team of six service employees".

Using action verbs:
- "Supervised a team of six service employees

The job description using a non-action verb is less concise. It contains ten words, and it focuses action on a form of the verb "to be" (was). The job description using an action verb is more concise. It contains seven words, and it focuses action on an action verb (supervised). Because concise writing is easier for readers to understand, the job description using an action verb is more powerful and is more persuasive.

Using action verbs in resumes allows you to highlight the tasks you can do. Word choice is critical in order to describe what you have done and to persuade potential employers to give you an interview. In order to make a striking first impression, use action verbs as the "first" word of each bullet point to emphasize job descriptions in your resume.

Here are some examples:
- Accelerated introduction of a new technology, which increased productivity by 15%
- Organized consumer databases to efficiently track product orders
- Supervised a team of six service employees

Each of the previous examples started off with an action verb. For a list of action verbs and examples of concise and persuasive sentences, job descriptions and/or list of skills and accomplishments, please come by your Career Services Office.