

Center for Co-op & Career Development

GUIDE TO WRITING RESUMES

Resume writing is a skill you will use throughout your professional life as you gain more experience and seek to advance or change positions.

Before writing your resume consider the following:

1. **What type of law do I want to practice?** *Litigation or transactional? Civil or criminal?*
2. **Who is my audience?** *Public Interest or private sector? Large firm or small firm? In-house legal office? Judge?*
3. **What are they looking for in a co-op student or graduate?** *Working directly with clients? An understanding and commitment to their mission? Strong legal research and writing skills? Transactional work experience?*
4. **Why should they hire me over other candidates?** *Relevant experience? Strong academic evaluations? A demonstrated commitment to the issue-area or client population?*

The purpose of this guide is to assist you with drafting an effective resume. We encourage you to also submit your resume for review by a co-op advisor to maximize your chances of receiving an interview. As noted in the Co-op Rules & Professional Expectations, please only request review of your resume by *one advisor at a time*.

The following sections of this guide cover formatting guidelines and other best practices for drafting effective resumes. There are also sample resumes included that you may reference when preparing your own.

FORMATTING YOUR RESUME

Here are some formatting basics to keep in mind:

- **Length** – Resumes should be limited to one page. An exception to this rule is for public interest fellowship applications, which can be more than one page. If you have significant professional experience prior to law school (for example, another career prior to starting law school), speak with an advisor about whether a second page of your resume is appropriate.
- **Page Margins** – Adjust as needed to keep the length at one page but avoid having margins narrower than 0.5 inches.
- **Spacing** – The paragraphs on your resume should be single-spaced, with spaces

between new entries for schools, experiences, and sections. The spacing should be consistent throughout your resume, as it will quickly jump out to the reader if it isn't.

- **Font and Font Size** – The font should match the font used in your cover letter. Use a common business font such as Times New Roman or Arial. Aim for an 11 or 12 font size. The header on your resume should match the header on your cover letter — including the font and font size.
- **Bullet Points or Paragraphs** – Use either bullet points or paragraphs to describe your experiences. The choice comes down to how much space you have and personal preference.
- **Consistency in Formatting** – For example, if you bold and underline the names of the schools you attended in the "Education" section, do the same with the names of employers in the "Experience" section. Also, be consistent within categories and for abbreviations. If you put a position title in italics, do that throughout. If you use J.D. instead of Juris Doctor, then abbreviate your other degrees (e.g., B.A.).
- **Paper** – (for those rare employers that require hard copies, including some judges and law firms) Use high quality 8.5" x 11" white or ivory bond paper. Use the same paper for both your resume and cover letter.
- **Color** – If you print your resume, use black ink. Do not use any color on your resume, in both print and electronic versions of your resume.
- **Appearance** – Carefully proofread your resume several times. Misspellings (especially of employer names), typos, or grammatical errors can take you out of consideration. Consider asking someone else to proofread it for you. Without another reviewer, you may overlook errors in your resume, even after making several revisions.
- **Page Set-up** – The body of a resume should include the following sections (discussed in more detail below): Header/Contact Information; Education; Experience. Additional optional sections may include Volunteer Work, Interests, and Languages.
- **Exclusions** – An objective; a separate qualifications section; references; or personal information (e.g., age, marital status etc.)

WRITING EFFECTIVE RESUMES

Getting Started

Research the employers and put yourself in their shoes. What experiences and skills do you think matter most to them? Next, dissect the job description. Identify the area(s) of law they are

focusing on, and the skills, qualifications, and responsibilities they are hoping a candidate will have.

Thoroughly read the job description and pull select “buzz words” that may also apply to your experiences. Think about your experiences and where you used these skills and/or completed tasks associated with the description’s “buzz words” and try to use those same phrases where accurate and appropriate. By using relevant “buzz words” where applicable (e.g., *marginalized communities, depositions, research, interviewed clients/consumers, court conferences*, etc.), you are effectively highlighting your transferrable skills, even if they were not obtained in a legal environment. It is also important to mirror the language used by an employer when they refer to their client base. For example, if an employer serves the LGBTQ population, but consistently refers to their clients as LGBTQIA – use the specific phrasing of the employer (“LGBTQIA”) when referencing the same group.

Think of ways to be more specific about the type of work you did by adding clarifying details. For example, instead of saying, *“assisted with clerical work including making copies and preparing binders,”* you could re-frame your experience to focus on the specific legal task and say, *“assisted in preparing documents for real estate closings, including making copies and preparing binders for senior attorneys.”*

You may find that once you have drafted a resume for a specific employer, you can use it to apply for several similar positions with similar employers.

Header

Use the same heading as your cover letter. Make sure your heading is positioned at the same location on the page (for example, ½ inch from the top) as your cover letter.

Your header should include:

- Full Name (14 - 16 size font)
- Current mailing address (unless your home address will show a connection to the employer’s location)
- Phone number (with a professional voicemail message stating your full name – no music, no informal greetings)
- Professional email address (when in doubt, use your Northeastern email address). Make sure your email address does not appear as a hyperlink.

This style is ideal because it takes up the least space:

RYAN CHANG

400 Main St. Apt. 45, Boston, MA 02115 • (617) 234-5678 • chang.ry@northeastern.edu

If your home address shows a connection to the employer's location (e.g., you are applying to firms in New York and have a permanent residence there), then consider using the most relevant address.

Education

While you are still in school your Education section should be the first section to appear on your resume. Once you are a practicing attorney, your Education section should appear after the Experience section. Once you pass the Bar, you should include "Bar Admissions" as the first section on your resume. This section should list the jurisdiction(s) and month, year of admission. List all post-secondary school education with the most recent first. Include the location, degree, and expected month and year of graduation.

Be consistent. If abbreviating J.D., abbreviate B.A. If you spell out Juris Doctor, spell out Bachelor of Arts. **Note:** Use J.D. or Juris Doctor, NOT Juris Doctorate.

Use italics and lower case for Latin honors (e.g., *magna cum laude*) and use italics for the names of any journals or other publications you have written for or edited (e.g., *Northeastern University Law Review*).

Generally, you do not need to include your undergraduate GPA on a resume intended for public interest employers. For private sector employers, if you received Latin honors from your undergraduate institution, you may omit your GPA, if you prefer. If you did not receive Latin honors from your undergraduate institution, speak with an advisor about whether to include your undergraduate GPA.

You should also consider adding the following applicable sub-headings:

- **Honors:** Such as scholarships, Law Review, awards, membership to selective groups/societies. If the merit of the group or scholarship is not apparent by the name itself, consider adding a parenthetical briefly describing the basis of the award.
- **Activities:** Such as affinity groups, student organizations, or sports teams.
- **1L Social Justice Project:** Describe using the title or a very brief description of the issue and the client (see examples below).
- **Research and/or Teaching Assistant Positions:** Described with the Professor's First and Last Name, Class, and (Quarter).
- **Study abroad programs:** Described by Program, Location, and Date Range.
- **School-based Employment:** Such as Residential Life, Admissions, or Dining Services. You may also consider this for an entry under "Experience."

Example:

Northeastern University School of Law, Boston, MA

Candidate for Juris Doctor, May 2019

Honors: *Northeastern University Law Review*

Activities: Black Law Students Association, Co-chair; Entertainment and Sports Law Society

Teaching Assistant: Professor Daniel Medwed, Criminal Law (Fall 2018)

1L Social Justice Project: *Title or brief description of issue and client.*

Cornell University, Ithaca, NY

Bachelor of Arts, *cum laude*, in Government, May 2016

Honors: Recipient of full-tuition merit scholarship; Key Society, Member (granted to top 15% of class)

Activities: Judicial Conduct Committee; Intramural Softball; Marching Band, Drum Major

Study Abroad: IES Abroad, Barcelona, Spain (Fall 2015)

Work Experience

While you are still in school, the second section of your resume should be your Experience section. List your experiences chronologically, with the most recent ones first. You may find you need to separate your experiences into distinct categories, that way you are able to list the most relevant ones first, even if they are not the most recent. Do not use more than two categories to describe your experience. The categories are often:

- **Legal Experience:** Appropriate for paralegal, co-op experience, or your social justice project completed in your first year.
- **Law-Related Experience:** Appropriate for non-legal jobs in legal settings, e.g., assistant or marketing coordinator in a law firm.
- **Professional Experience:** Appropriate for general non-legal work experience, e.g., as a teacher or consultant.
- **Additional Experience** (if listed with another category): For non-legal or non-professional work, e.g., bartender, lifeguard, camp counselor, or retail associate.
- **Military Experience:** Include service, honors, active/non-active status.

Set out the employer's name and location, and then your job title and dates of employment. Dates of employment should be in month/year format. The dates of employment should be on the same line as the employer's name and right justified on the page.

Example:

Nonprofit Organization, Boston, MA

May 2016 - Present

Legal Intern

[Description]

XYZ Law Firm, Boston, MA

August 2010 – July 2011

Paralegal

[Description]

Under each employer, provide a brief description of the substantive work you performed, using present tense for current positions and past tense for former positions. Start each description with an action verb and omit any personal pronouns such as “I.” It is implied that you are talking about your own experiences and accomplishments. Do not reference the employer/organization/entity, as this is also implied.

Focus on your accomplishments and any transferable skills (e.g., analysis, writing, research, counseling/advising, negotiation, and communication) that you utilized. Do not exaggerate your skills and responsibilities. If you do not have directly relevant experience, focus on your transferable skills.

Use the active voice (e.g., Researched First Amendment issues relating to privacy and confidentiality agreements) and not the passive voice (e.g., Responsible for researching legal issues).

If you have had positions in the legal field, identify your tasks using appropriate legal terms such as “prepared binders and exhibits for depositions,” or “attended scheduling conference in state court.” You should never reveal a client’s identity or the specific nature of a case or deal that would constitute privileged attorney-client communications. Instead, you can describe the type of case you worked on (e.g., “criminal appeal” or “antitrust case involving multi-national company”).

Example:

Experience

Anders Evans LLP, Boston, MA

June – August 2010

Law Clerk

Researched and drafted memoranda in a wide range of employment matters, including claims relating to discrimination, breach of contract, employee misclassification, ERISA, and business torts. Drafted MCAD charge of discrimination and reviewed and commented on an employment agreement for an executive at a pharmaceutical company.

It is important to consider what NOT to include in a description in your experience section. It is not necessary to list every single topic you researched in a job. Focus on substantive work

performed, and the skills acquired, rather than using your limited space to list topics.

When describing work performed in an experience outside of the legal field, do not use technical terms or abbreviations that your legal reader may not understand.

For Additional Experience or Volunteer Experience (see below) where the work is less relevant or self-explanatory in the title (e.g., Sales Clerk, Camp Counselor, etc.) you can list the experience in one line to save space:

Example:

Additional Experience

Target, *Sales Associate*, Watertown, MA

January – November 2010

Starbucks, *Barrista*, Somerville, MA

June 2009 – January 2010

Volunteer Experience

Include volunteer experience if you utilized relevant or transferable skills, or if it fits the mission of the employer reviewing your resume. If applying to a public interest employer, include prior volunteer work, even if unrelated, to show a commitment to public interest and public service. Follow the same format described in the “Additional Experience” section above.

Skills, Interests, Languages

If you speak any languages other than English, with a conversational or better proficiency, include these in a separate section. When listing each language, accurately state your degree of proficiency (e.g., native fluency, conversational, etc.). Do not include English, even if you are an international student, as this is assumed.

A “Skills” section would include specific certifications, not basic computer skills, which all law students are presumed to have. Do not include skills that are unrelated to the legal field such as computer programming, like SPSS, or familiarity with specific databases.

When applying to private sector employers (big firms only), include an “Interests” section to highlight interests that are specialized and unique, (e.g., jewelry making, scuba diving, etc.), rather than simply listing out hobbies (e.g., music, reading, etc.). Including an “Interests” section is not advised for public interest employers.

Proofread (and proofread again)

Make sure your resume is free from typos and formatting errors. Double and triple check your resume for mistakes.

SAMPLE 1L AND 2L RESUMES

1L Resume – Private Sector Employer

CASSANDRA ALVAREZ

335 Huntington Ave., Apt. B · Boston, MA 02115 · (123) 456-7890 · alvarez.c@northeastern.edu

EDUCATION

Northeastern University School of Law, Boston, MA

Candidate for Juris Doctor, May 2017

1L Legal Skills Project: Researching state and federal immigration laws for Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service to create a “Know Your Rights” resource guide.

Activities: National Lawyers Guild; Student Bar Association; Westlaw Student Representative

University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA

Bachelor of Arts, *cum laude*, in International Studies, GPA: 3.75, May 2014

Honors: Hayden Honors Scholar (awarded to political science major with highest GPA)

Honors Thesis: *The International Criminal Court and the Cessation of Post-Genocide International Tribunals*

Teaching Assistant: Professor Norah Keyes, Globalization course (Fall Semester 2013)

Selected Activities: Model United Nations; Club Rugby

LEGAL EXPERIENCE

The United States Attorney’s Office District of Massachusetts, Boston, MA May – Aug. 2014
Legal Intern, Civil Division

- Conducted factual investigations in asset forfeiture cases and researched statutes authorizing forfeitures.
- Assisted in preparation of discovery for pre-trial settlement conferences and depositions.

Office of Senator John Kerry, Boston, MA May – Aug. 2012
Intern

- Researched grants, transcribed letters, communicated with constituents, and assisted with other day-to-day tasks as needed in the district office.

ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCE

Hampshire College Jazz Festival, Amherst, MA June – Aug. 2013
Scheduler and Transportation Assistant

- Coordinated transportation and all other scheduling for artists performing at a three-day jazz festival.

Whole Foods Market, Amherst and Boston, MA Seasonal 2010
Cashier

- Entered transactions, resolved customer concerns, and trained new cashiers.

LANGUAGE SKILLS AND INTERESTS

Spanish (fluent); Yoga instructor; Volunteer tour guide at the Arnold Arboretum

2L Resume – Public Interest

ROSE A. JOHNSON

180 Main Street ▪ Boston, MA 01810 ▪ (617) 123-4567 ▪ johnson.r@northeastern.edu

EDUCATION

NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW, Boston, MA

Candidate for Juris Doctor, May 2017

Honors: *Northeastern University Law Review*, Managing Editor

Activities: National Lawyers Guild; Queer Caucus

Teaching Assistant: Torts (Winter 2018-2019)

BOWDOIN COLLEGE, Brunswick, ME

Bachelor of Arts, *magna cum laude*, in Government and Environmental Studies, May 2013

Honors: Sarah and James Bowdoin Scholar; Dean's List, 2011-2013

Activities: Ultimate Frisbee Team, Captain

Employment: Seasonal waitress at The Lobster Trap to support educational costs

EXPERIENCE

U.S. DISTRICT COURT, DISTRICT OF MASSACHUSETTS, Boston, MA

Mar. 2019 – May 2019

Legal Intern for Chief Judge Patti Saris

Conducted extensive legal research and writing, including bench memos, and drafted judicial opinions. Attended all court hearings and a bench trial.

NORTHEASTERN LAW SCHOOL POVERTY LAW CLINIC, Boston, MA

Dec. 2018 – Feb. 2019

Clinical student

Represented indigent client in unemployment insurance appeal hearing. Interviewed client and witnesses, prepared opening statements and cross-examinations, and wrote a persuasive legal memorandum.

COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES, Philadelphia, PA

Sept. – Nov. 2018

Legal Intern, Homeownership and Consumer Rights Units

Interviewed clients for intake in property tax foreclosures, probate, and deed theft cases. Drafted litigation documents for representation of low-income homeowners in mortgage foreclosure. Conducted legal research and wrote memos regarding a variety of foreclosure and consumer protection issues.

HEALTH POLICY SOLUTIONS, Portland, ME

Health Campaign Manager

Apr. 2015 – Aug. 2017

Directed the organization's legislative program, including leading state health legislative campaigns, developing policy positions, lobbying, and conducting media outreach.

Organizer

Jan. 2014 – Apr. 2015

Served as grassroots organizer and coordinated a statewide health advocacy coalition.

Habitat for Humanity, Brunswick, ME

2011 - 2013

Volunteer

Participated in building homes for low-income residents.

LANGUAGE SKILLS

Spanish (conversational)