

By Charles A. Volkert, Executive Director of [Robert Half Legal®](#), a legal staffing service specializing in the placement of attorneys, paralegals, legal administrators and other legal professionals with law firms and corporate legal departments.

## Creating a Stellar Resume

A good resume can be hard to find; just ask any hiring manager thumbing through stacks of them. To stand apart from the crowd, legal professionals must submit a document that makes an immediate impression. In fact, a well-crafted resume is your most effective tool for landing an interview and, ultimately, a new job. Following are some key “do’s” and “don’ts” of resume writing.

First, some do’s:

- Do use action verbs as much as possible. For instance, instead of writing a passive sentence such as, “My company has provided me with five years of administrative experience,” write using an active voice: “Possess over five years’ experience as firm administrator for an AmLaw 100 company.” Also avoid vague terms such as “familiar with” or “experience with” — these phrases set off alarm bells for hiring managers, who may question your actual depth of knowledge.
- Do use bulleted sentences that are short and to the point. Avoid lofty and redundant language. The goal is to communicate your abilities clearly and concisely.
- Do format your resume chronologically. According to research by our company, executives prefer work histories listed in reverse chronological order rather than grouped by skills or job function. There are times when it’s necessary to arrange your resume by skills or job function — both are good options for those who have large gaps in their work history or are trying to break into a new career area — but in general it’s best to use the traditional approach.
- Do remember to tailor your resume for each opportunity by highlighting key achievements and qualifications that relate specifically to the position. Often this may be as simple as reordering bullet points to emphasize certain skills and expertise.
- Do include terms from the job description in your resume. If you’re applying for a legal management position, and the advertisement for the job asks for candidates with “high energy” and “experience with clients,” integrate those phrases into your resume (as long as they’re true, of course!). Many companies electronically screen resumes for key words, so you can boost your chances of landing an interview by adopting any applicable phrases.

Now, some don’ts:

- Don’t include a long, unrelated laundry list of job duties on your resume, such as “familiar with XYZ design software” and “employee activity committee coordinator.” Instead, only include those skills that are relevant to the opening.
- Don’t include irrelevant facts about your personal life: The fact that you enjoy cycling on the weekends isn’t relevant unless you’re applying to a bicycle manufacturing company. Only pertinent information — such as volunteer work or connections with professional associations — should be listed.

- Don't include an unprofessional e-mail address in your resume, such as "crazyforcanines@xyz.com" or "mathminded@xyz.com." Set up a new e-mail box, if necessary, that uses your name in the address. Along the same lines, don't include in your resume a link to your personal website; you don't want your potential employer to see pictures of you falling off a surfboard in Hawaii. Providing a link to your personal website is acceptable only if it contains a record of your professional achievements, resume and other career-related information.
- Don't overlook the little things: A resume marred by typos, misspellings or grammatical mistakes sends the message to potential employers that you lack attention to detail, which is especially important for legal professionals. It is always a good idea to use your computer's spell-check function and ask a friend or relative to review your resume for accuracy before submitting the document.
- Don't list references or write "references available on request." Hiring managers assume you will provide this information when asked. However, do give each of your references a copy of your resume so they can more adeptly highlight your achievements when contacted.