



Choosing The Right Resume Style — How To Effectively Show— Case Your Strengths

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A RESUME IS A MARKETING TOOL, not your life's story. Neither is it a ticket to a new job. A resume is merely a way of making you visible as a valuable asset to a law firm, corporation, or any other prospective employer. A resume should be so attractively designed that it immediately arrests the reader's attention. It should also be visually inviting, well organized, use space wisely, and most of all, set you apart as a competent professional.

This book will give you tips on how best to prepare your resume. In truth, there is no **one way** to organize and write a resume. In fact, good resumes are often as individual as the attorneys they represent. However, there are some guidelines that will aid you. Also, I highly recommend that you seek the help of a certified professional resume writer. They will be best suited to help prepare your resume so that it is the best possible representation of you as an individual.

Should you choose to write your resume alone, these coming chapters will help to guide you in this process.

Kinds of Resumes

There are three commonly used and accepted formats for a legal resume:

Chronological

This is the resume style most lawyers use and most interviewers expect. As it is named, the **chronological** resume stresses dates and places of employment, beginning with the most recent and working backwards. It emphasizes firm names and job titles, and it includes a brief synopsis of each position and its primary responsibilities. Used effectively, this resume style is clean, clear, and concise. At its worst, it is bland and boring, like all the other poorly written, cluttered resumes that fill the reviewer's wastebasket.

Corporate

This is sometimes called a composite resume because it blends the best parts of the traditional chronological resume with some elements of the functional format. It is called corporate here because this resume would be used by someone seeking to move into the corporate legal community or looking for new directions outside of law—in business or with a nonprofit agency.

Functional

The **functional** format does include firm names, titles, and dates; but it organizes the lawyer's work



experience differently—by accomplishments or competencies. The **functional** resume is attractive, interesting to read, and a powerful statement of a person's skills and abilities. Creating this kind of resume can also be an excellent preparation for job interviewing and the self-marketing process, but it demands a little more thought and time to prepare. The **functional** resume is such a powerful tool in the job search that an entire chapter of this book will be devoted to its design and preparation.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL RESUME

Oliver W. Holmes' resume on the next page is an example of a Philadelphia-style chronological resume. It has a clean, simple style, yet it is appropriate for a lawyer who needs to update his or her resume in a hurry to answer an ad and doesn't have time to develop a completely new format.

Note

The spacing, fonts, and margins of the resumes illustrated in this chapter are compressed due to space and page-layout requirements. Full-size Holmes resumes are in the Sample Resumes section.

Experience

Education

Bar Memberships

Normally, if you are more than one job out of law school, you would position the **Experience** heading first, before **Education**, on the assumption that employers hire on the basis of their needs: they're most interested in the legal experience and the skills you can bring to their firms.

OLIVER W. HOLMES, ESQ.

Meeting House Road
Chester Springs, PA 19425
(610) 111-1111
oholmes@dissention.net

EXPERIENCE

Bramante, Bernini, Botticelli & Borgia, Philadelphia, PA, 1996–Present

Partner

Manage commercial and business litigation for this 55-attorney firm. Caseload commonly involves banking, transactional, commercial, employment, and disabilities law. Lead counsel on approximately 5-15 matters at any given time; co-counsel on others. Supervise new associate training, billings, and evaluations. Market firm's services to commercial client base.



Shelley, Keats, Byron & Browning, Wilmington, DE, 1989–1996

Litigation Associate

General commercial, corporate, health care, insurance defense, products liability, and professional negligence litigation. Drafted pleadings; conducted discovery; represented clients in arbitrations, trials, hearings, and settlement negotiations. Routinely second-chaired jury trials. Trained and supervised junior associates.

Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA), Pittsburgh, PA, 1989

Legal Department Intern

Channing, Emerson, Brownson & Thoreau, Columbus, OH, 1988

Summer Associate

Pennsylvania Bureau of Workers' Compensation, Pittsburgh, PA, 1987

Legal Division Law Clerk

EDUCATION

University of Pittsburgh School of Law, J.D., 1989

Harvard University, B.A., Liberal Arts (*magna cum laude*), 1986

BAR MEMBERSHIPS

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1996

U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit, 1997

U.S. District Court, E.D. Pennsylvania, 1997

State of Delaware, 1989

An exception to this “experience before education” rule is if you are a recent law school graduate whose legal background is limited to a summer clerkship or part-time legal work

Another exception: Even though you may be several career moves out of law school, if you attended a top law school or an upscale undergraduate college and are applying to a firm whose Martindale-Hubbell listings seem to show a preference for prestigious credentials, then change the order of the headings to:

Education

Experience



Bar Memberships

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Previous work history. Suppose during college you worked summers on the Jersey Shore as a bartender. Normally, you would leave this pre-law work out of your legal resume. But if your pre-law experience could contribute to your legal credentials, then include it. If you were a healthcare professional—a structural engineer, tax consultant, or accountant—then blend your law-related specialty into your legal resume by differentiating it this way:

Experience

Legal

Pre-Legal

Employment dates. Position your employment dates **flush right** on your resume. People read from left to right. Don't distract the reader's attention from your work experience, position title, and places of employment by cluttering the left side of the resume page with dates. This is particularly true for people who have had short periods of employment, stayed too long in one position, or have significant gaps in their work experience. Years of employment are enough. To include months (e.g., "May 1996–August 1999") is visual clutter.

Finally, notice the emphasis on **function** even in Holmes' chronological resume. Because he believes that his experience is more important than his firm name, Holmes bolds his function or title. But if your firm or place of employment is well known or considered prestigious, then bold that. For example:

Philadelphia District Attorney

Summer Intern

THE CORPORATE RESUME

Sometimes a lawyer will consider a move into the corporate community by seeking a position as in-house counsel. Again, by using legal experience and skills as credentials, the lawyer might be looking for a change of venue into a social services agency in the nonprofit sector.

The corporate format is the appropriate resume format for these career moves, as it approximates the format most often used by business and corporate executives. While it preserves the chronological elements of the traditional legal resume, the corporate style also highlights the special skills the job seeker can offer potential employers. This resume format offers a style that is neither as rigid as the chronological nor as supposedly avant-garde as the purely functional format.

Elements



To turn Holmes' chronological into a **corporate** resume, begin by adding some new categories or headings at the top of the page:

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Objective

Profile

Expertise

OBJECTIVE

The **Objective** section may or may not be suitable to the purposes of your resume. Career consultants differ as to whether an **Objective** is really necessary at all. The short answer is it depends. On one hand, an **Objective** does indicate that you have focus. It tells the reader that you know who you are, where you are going, and what you want to do.

On the other hand, an Objective may be redundant. Suppose all your experience and credentials are as a litigator and you're applying to a litigation firm. It makes no sense to write an Objective statement. Your goal is understood. In addition, the corporate resume is functionally less restricted without a formal objective, thereby leaving the door (and the resume) open to multiple submissions, for example, to different kinds of social service agencies.

PROFILE

Sometimes also titled the Qualifications Summary, the **Profile** is a key feature of the chronological resume, and it is placed at the top of the page as an introduction, as a sketch of the candidate and his or her credentials. The section offers a brief rationale for why the resume is worth reading and why the job seeker is worth interviewing.

By custom, this **Profile** is written in a third-party voice (without using "I" and "my"), with tight, carefully crafted words and phrases that are set off from each other by an ellipsis (. . .). It is designed to catch the reader's attention right at the top of the resume by highlighting the author's experience, career history, and credentials. Here is how Holmes summarizes his credentials in his resume's **Profile**:

Provide legal direction and manage comprehensive commercial and business litigation for a 55-attorney Philadelphia civil litigation firm. . . Outside counsel to a diverse corporate client base, including Ardmore Aeronautics, Bonato Design, and Campbell-Dorance Pharmaceutical companies. . . Negotiate and structure purchase agreements, prepare disclosure statements, and serve as general counsel and troubleshooter on a variety of corporate matters. . . Handle a broad range of litigation, including products liability, professional malpractice, and employment discrimination issues. . . Monitor state and federal regulatory legislation



affecting client business interests. . . J.D., University of Pittsburgh School of Law; B.A. (*magna cum laude*) Harvard University. . . Associate Editor, *University of Pittsburgh Law Review*; Assistant Editor, the *Harvard Crimson*.

Other samples of the Profile section are provided in the **Resume Samples** chapter of this book.

A Bonus Feature. If you create a **corporate** resume, you'll find that your **Profile** statement will come in handy later in the job-search process when you are writing your "opening argument" to answer that eternal interview-opener: Tell me something about yourself.

You're going to need a good answer to this question for any number of job-search situations: when being screened over the phone, when describing your background to potential employers over lunch, or when conducting self-marketing meetings. Even if you didn't create a corporate resume, you will find out how to develop an "opening argument" outlining your experience and credentials.

Notice how easily Holmes could transform his **Profile** into an "opening argument" by delivering it as a first-person narrative, "Presently, I provide legal direction and manage comprehensive commercial litigation for Bramante, Bernini, Botticelli & Borgia, a Philadelphia civil litigation firm. In this position, I also serve as outside counsel for a diverse client base . . ." And so on.

EXPERTISE

In this section, Holmes briefly names the valuable legal and professional skills that he can offer a prospective firm. This enumeration can either run down the page as a bulleted list or be formatted as a balanced double list, as illustrated here.

To develop your own Expertise list, think of the technical legal skills you bring to the table in addition to the personal abilities you use in the day-to-day practice of law. In other words, what are you particularly good at? Arguing cases? Legal writing? Or are you recognized as a rainmaker, skilled in firm marketing? Do you function particularly well as a crisis manager, a troubleshooter? Or do your skills lie in project management, team leadership, or client counseling?

After the Expertise section, to continue creating your corporate resume, notice that you merely carry over into this resume the **Experience, Education,** and **Bar Memberships** sections from your chronological format. If you prefer, you can place the category of **Bar Memberships** before **Education.** The choice is yours.

The **next two pages** contain a sample of the completed Holmes **corporate** resume.



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oholmes@dissention.net

OBJECTIVE

A position as corporate general counsel

PROFILE

Provide legal direction and manage comprehensive commercial and business litigation for a 55-attorney Philadelphia civil litigation firm . . . Outside counsel to diverse corporate client base, including Ardmore Aeronautics, Bonato Design, and Campbell-Dorance Pharmaceuticals. . . Negotiate and structure purchase agreements, prepare disclosure statements and serve as general counsel and troubleshooter on a variety of corporate matters. . . Handle broad range of litigation, including products liability, professional malpractice, and employment discrimination issues. . . Monitor state/federal regulatory legislative developments affecting client business interests. . . J.D., University of Pittsburgh School of Law, B.A. (magna cum laude) Harvard University. . . Associate Editor, *University of Pittsburgh Law Review*; Assistant Editor, the *Harvard Crimson*.

EXPERTISE

- Litigation Management
- Regulatory Oversight
- Mergers and Acquisitions
- Business Planning
- Commercial Litigation
- Products Liability

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Bramante, Bernini, Botticelli & Borgia, Philadelphia, PA 1996–Present
Partner

Caseload commonly involves banking, transactional, commercial, employment, and disabilities law. Lead counsel on approximately 5-15 matters at any given time; co-counsel on others.



Supervise new associate training, billings, and evaluations. Market firm's services to commercial client base.

Shelly, Keats, Byron & Browning, Wilmington, DE 1989–1996

Litigation Associate

General commercial, corporate, health care, insurance defense, products liability, and professional negligence litigation. Drafted pleadings; conducted discovery; represented clients in arbitrations, trials, hearings, and settlement negotiations. Routinely second-chaired jury trials. Trained and supervised junior associates.

EDUCATION

University of Pittsburgh School of Law, J.D., 1989

Harvard University, B.A., Liberal Arts (magna cum laude), 1986

BAR MEMBERSHIPS

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1996

U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit, 1997

U.S. District Court, E.D. Pennsylvania, 1997

State of Delaware, 1989

AWARDS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Associate Editor, *University of Pittsburgh Law Review*

Law School Merit Scholarship

Assistant Editor, the *Harvard Crimson*

AFFILIATIONS

American Bar Association, Co-Editor, State Legislative Forum

Pennsylvania Bar Association, Chair, Committee on Commercial Law Reform

Member, Alternative Dispute Resolution Committee

Harvard University, Vice President, Alumni Association



PUBLICATIONS

"Ten Things to Remember Before You Build Your Mainline Home," *Philadelphia*, Sept. 2001: pp. 108-11, 201-03.

"Improving the Construction Litigation Climate for Pennsylvania Contractors," *Pittsburgh Legal Journal*, September 1998, at 64.

Comment, The Use of Pre-Judgment Attachments in Commercial Arbitration Proceedings—A Comparative Analysis of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and New York State Praxis. 51 U. Pitt. L. Review 854 (1989).

Additional Elements

The **Bar Memberships** section (sometimes called **Bar Admissions**) is written in a straightforward style:

Third Circuit, U.S. Court of Appeals, 1999
U.S. District Court, Eastern District of Pennsylvania, 1999
U.S. District Court, District of New Jersey, 1999
State of New Jersey, 1998
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1997

Under the **Education** heading, list your degrees in reverse chronological order. Begin with the educational institution, then the degree and date. The degree can either be abbreviated (e.g., J.D., M.A.) or spelled out. Choice usually depends on available space. Add academic honors and outstanding awards, if any. For example:

Villanova University School of Law, *Juris Doctor (cum laude)*, 1995

Villanova University Law Review Editorial Board
ALI-ABA Research Fellowship

Syracuse University, Bachelor of Arts in Public Administration, 1992

Who's Who Among Students in American Colleges and Universities
Annenberg Fellowships; 1990, 1991

Other categories, if they apply (and space permitting), might include:

Software Applications
Electronic Resources



**Publications
Interests and Activities**

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What you include in your **Activities** can oftentimes help you stand out from the crowd, make you memorable as a candidate. **But** be scrupulously honest in this section. Resist any and all attempts at humor, and avoid clichés like “hiking, travel, and reading.” Do include authentic accomplishment or interest phrases that paint a picture, such as “Yale women’s crew,” “Penn State football,” or “skydiving.”

Above all else, don’t forget the basic rule of all resume writing: **Less is more.** So keep it brief. Use simple declarative sentences, strong verbs, and tightly edited writing. Finally, remember that the best resume of all is the way you describe your accomplishments during the interview.