

Introduction to Legal Resume Basics

A resume is a marketing tool to effectively communicate your qualifications and “fit” for the job the potential employer wants filled. It is critical to first understand what qualifications the employer is looking for in the successful candidate. Consider how your background, skills, qualifications, and interests make you a good fit for the job. Then present your relevant qualifications to hiring criteria in a clear, easy to follow format. Each resume should be tailored for the job to which you are applying.

An effective resume will do the following:

- Convince employers to interview you based on your qualifications,
- Create a professional image of the applicant and establish credibility,
- Provide a sample of your written communication skills.

Resumes are evaluated for substantive content, visual appeal, and attention to detail *i.e.*, NO TYPOS.

Legal Resume Formatting Basics

- Rule: one page.
 - Exception: some types of professional experience may warrant two pages.
- Typeface
 - Use a standard font. Arial and Times New Roman are most common. Helvetica, Cambria, Calibri are also acceptable for a legal resume.
- Font Size
 - Header
 - Use a larger font for your name. Size may depend on how much space you need to fill for graphic design purposes.
 - Contact information – size 12-14.
 - Section titles – font 12-14. Make use of **bold**, *italics*, and underline. Be consistent in your use of emphasis.
 - Use font size 11 or 12 for the body of your resume.
- Your resume should be visually appealing and balanced looking. Use decent sized margins. Leave enough white space so it doesn’t overwhelm the eye, but do not leave a large empty white space at the bottom.
- ABSOLUTELY NO PHOTOS on a legal resume.
- Print and proofread your resume several times to ensure that there are no typos, and to ensure that your resume is flawless.
- Microsoft Word has several resume format templates. You are welcome to work with the plain text options of those.

A note on Legal Job Descriptions

Government job postings usually include a very detailed job description—hooray! You now have your hiring “rule.” Present your resume to show how your skills fit the skills needed for the successful candidate.

Note that for governmental and other large corporate entities, your resume may be read by software program before an HR professional looks at it. This keyword tracking is essential – make sure to mimic the posting in your resume.

Private firms and non-profit organizations may have more vague descriptions. If the post is vague or only includes a summary of the firm’s or organization’s benefits and practice areas, assume that the job description is the following:

- Research and analyze the law on complex issues.
- Write briefs for submission to a supervising lawyer in the firm.
- Analyze and summarize complicated legal documents, including contracts, and suggest alterations to those documents.
- Review discovery of various electronically stored data and hard copies of information in preparation for litigation.
- Perform due diligence in legal matters concerning contracts, agreements, and mergers and acquisitions.
- Must be a motivated, self-starter ready to work in a fast-paced environment.

Tailor your resume to meet these needs, and then state your interest in the practice areas the firm mentions in their description.

Plaintiff’s firms often describe their practice areas using terms like personal injury, wrongful death, car wrecks, brain injury, trucking law, asbestos, [any sort of specific drug name], wrongful termination, employee rights, bankruptcy, consumer protection. This is a non-exhaustive list.

Civil defense litigation or corporate firms use terms like complex commercial liability, environmental law, business law, litigation, complex tort and product liability, deliberate intent, commercial, bankruptcy and creditors’ rights, appellate, medical malpractice defense, regulatory, transportation, insurance coverage and defense. This is a non-exhaustive list.

Send Career Services staff a quick email if you need help deciphering law firm marketing lingo on a specific firm’s practice areas.

FIRST NAME MIDDLE INITIAL LAST NAME(S)

address¹ professional email address² telephone number

Education in reverse chronological order

- Most employers are going to be looking for a GPA. Common advice is to list a GPA if it is 3.0 or higher. If your overall GPA is not great, consider focusing on a particular class in which you did well. List your class rank if you are in top 30%.
- Legal employers are also very interested in Law Review and Moot Court.
- Concentrations/majors, major scholarships, awards, student organization leadership activities, study abroad, and competitions as bullet points under each school. Brief note to explain awards (What's a CALI? How did you earn that scholarship?).
- Choose a few highlights.
- Do not go overboard with undergrad details.

Relevant Work History in reverse chronological order

- Focus on legal experience if you have it.
- It's okay to list some non-legal experience on your first resume.
- Job duties like "drafting," "analyzing," "interpreting," and "researching" go well here. Anything that translates to types of duties that a young attorney will perform!
- Present tense for current job descriptions, past tense for descriptions of past jobs.
- If we don't see you again, note that after your first full-time legal job, your Work History section will go before your Education section.

Other Work History in reverse chronological order. Could also be a single line to list some work that might not directly relate to legal practice.

Skills – Magistrate Court Mediation training course? WestLaw/Lexis/FastCase research cert? Excel or other computer-based skills?

Professional and Community Engagement

- Consider carefully whether you want descriptions to indicate political, religious, or personal identity based organizational affiliations.³

¹ Be strategic with your address, if applicable. Employers will want to know if you have some existing connection to the geographic region of their office. Going to your hometown? Use your "permanent address."

² This should be some combination of your first name and last name. Do not use your MIX account. Do not use anything with a "screen name."

³ Come talk to me if you have questions. I'm happy to share my experience and considerations for making an informed decision here.

Maria E. King

52 Michigan Ave. Apt. 1, Morgantown, WV 26505
(304) 555-5555 | mariaeking1909@comcast.net

Education

West Virginia University College of Law	2019-Present	Morgantown, WV
Juris Doctor anticipated May, 2022 Merit Scholar Lexis and Westlaw Research Certified Women's Leadership Council, Appalachian Prison Book Project		
West Virginia University	2015-2019	Morgantown, WV
Bachelor of Arts in Criminology, Minor in Law & Legal Studies GPA: 3.938, <i>summa cum laude</i> Rhododendron Scholar, Promise Scholar, Honor's College Presidential Scholar President's List & Dean's List Treasurer – Pre Law Student Society Morrow National Debate finalist, 2017		

Experience

Outback Steakhouse	January 2019 – July 2019	Morgantown, WV
Hostess/Takeaway/Server <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensured customers were seated promptly and pleasantly• Boxed takeaway orders and delivered food to customers in their vehicles• Employee of the Month		
The Lofts	October 2017 – December 2018	Morgantown, WV
Community Assistant <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Worked with prospective residents throughout the lease-signing process• Monitored clubhouse and surrounding facilities• Gave tours to prospective residents• Handled marketing campaign for the apartment complex		
King, King, Smith, & Jones	May 2015 – July 2017	Moundsville, WV
Intern <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assisted paralegals with writing and proofreading legal documents including deeds and wills• Wrote letters of correspondence to clients and opposing counsel• Filed closed cases according to firm record retention policies		

MARIA E. KING

3 Michigan St., Morgantown, WV 26508 • (304) 555-5555 • mariaeking1909@gmail.com

EDUCATION

West Virginia University College of Law

EXPECTED 2020

Juris Doctor

- Rank: 8/118 – GPA: 3.68
- CALI Award for Excellence in Legal Reasoning, Research, and Writing – Fall 2017
- Extracurricular Activities:
 - *Editor*: Family Law Quarterly
 - *Vice President*: WVAJ Chapter at WVU College of Law
 - *Member*: Women’s Leadership Council, Health Law Student Organization

West Virginia University

2011-2015

B.A. in Gender Studies

- Graduated *Magna Cum Laude*
- Mildred B. Erickson Fellow, Promise Scholar
- Summer 2014 Study Abroad in Brazil

International Association of Privacy Professionals (IAPP)

2018-Present

CIPP/US Certified, November 2018

- Data Breach Bootcamp, October 2018
- Understanding the GDPR, January 2019
- Advanced Applications of the GDPR, March 2019

EXPERIENCE

West Virginia University Hospitals

FALL 2018

Legal Extern

- Attended pre-trial conferences, depositions, and court proceedings
- Drafted deposition summaries and various motions for assistant litigation counsel
- Researched professional liability, premise liability, employment, and privacy compliance matters

West Virginia Office of the Attorney General

SUMMER 2018

Elections Division Intern

- Conducted legal research on state campaign finance laws, cybersecurity, and election systems
- Processed election complaints and drafted responses to complainants and respondents
- Coordinated project partnerships with the West Virginia State Bar and Municipal League

English Second Language Online Education Corp.

2016-2018

ESL Tutor

- Provided one-on-one, fully immersive lessons to Chinese students ages 6-10
- Scored unit assessments and delivered personalized feedback to students and parents
- Maintained a 97% “Excellent” rating across 750 parent reviews

AmeriCorps Volunteer – NYC Literacy Program

2015-2016

Post-Secondary Education Instructor

- Taught Computer Literacy / Job Readiness in three NYC Burroughs
- Planned an English-intensive curriculum for ESL students focused on professional development
- Redesigned program website and managed social media campaigns

Jamie King

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Education

J.D. CANDIDATE | ANTICIPATED GRADUATION MAY 2020 | WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF LAW

- GPA: 3.65 – Rank: 9 of 98
- West Virginia Law Review Vol. 1, Associate Editor
- Supreme Court Clinic student attorney
- Dean’s Fellow – Contracts
- CALI Award – Fall 2017 Contracts

B.S. | MAY 2017 | WEST LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

- Major: Criminal Justice – Magna Cum Laude – GPA: 3.77
- Coursework focused on the federal criminal justice system
- Achieved Dean’s List recognition every semester

Experience

LAW CLERK | MAJOR & MINOR LAW, PITTSBURGH, PA | SUMMER 2018 & 2019

- Conducted extensive research on cases ranging from premises liability to employment law
- Drafted responsive pleadings for federal and state court proceedings
- Drafted briefs and motions presented and argued before the Court
- Wrote in-depth research memoranda to support ongoing litigation
- Exposed to all aspects of a large-scale document review project including planning, review, production, and interaction with eDiscovery service provider
- Reviewed and analyzed deposition testimony and drafted detailed summaries

ASSETS PROTECTION TEAM LEADER | TARGET CORPORATION, MORGANTOWN, WV | JANUARY 2013 – JULY 2016

- Responsible for all safety and security needs of a large retail establishment with sales of \$18M per year
- Maintained strict confidentiality regarding company information, internal investigations, and suspected shoplifters
- Responsible for making fiscally prudent decisions in highly stressful situations
- Reduced annual inventory losses by over \$40,000
- Collaborated with store, district, and group leadership to ensure the completion of company objectives
- Prior to promotion, served as a sales floor team member and store trainer

Clubs and Organizations

- WVU College of Law Community Service Council Member – 2017 to Present
- Alpha Phi Sigma National Criminal Justice Honor Society Member – 2014 to Present
- Jupiter Rising Astronomy Club Public Event Volunteer – 2010 to Present
- National Night Out Planning Committee Member – 2016
- West Liberty University Club Bocce Ball Team Member – 2015 to 2017

MARIA E. KING

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Permanent Contact: 100 Main St, Charlotte NC 28201 | (724) 999-9999 | mariaeking1909@gmail.com

EDUCATION

West Virginia University College of Law, Morgantown WV Juris Doctor candidate 2018

- Merit Scholar
- Student Bar Association Vice President, Class of 2018
- Member: Energy Law Association, Women's Leadership Counsel

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, B.S., Environmental Science, Chapel Hill, NC Fall 2014

- *Cum Laude* graduate
- Tar Heel Award, 2013-2014
- Tutor: Environmental Studies, GIS, Geography, and Geology, 2012-2014

WORK EXPERIENCE

Land Use and Sustainable Development Law Clinic, Student Attorney August 2017-May 2018

- Drafted and prepared legal memoranda, title opinions, deeds, and easements
- Assisted local governments with land use and comprehensive planning

WVU Medicine, Legal Extern, Morgantown WV January 2017-May 2017

- Conducted legal research and prepared memoranda
- Produced periodic West Virginia Legislative Summaries

Valerie Ruiz, Attorney at Law, Law Clerk, Morgantown WV Summer 2016

- Prepared estate documents, real estate purchase agreements, title searches, deeds, and conveyances
- Assisted in document signings and client meetings

Hon. Elizabeth Johnson, Intern, Mecklenburg County Courthouse Summer 2015

- Assisted in legal research and opinion drafting
- Supplemented Court Clerk duties

Mecklenburg Department of Public Works, GIS Intern, Charlotte NC Summer 2014

- Updated a GIS database with information on 2,000 sewers
- Developed specifications for installation of storm sewers
- Participated in the Local Government Academy and municipal meetings

NORTH CAROLINA BAR ASSOCIATION ACTIVITIES

- Student Member, 2014-Present
- Bar Examination candidate, July 2018
- "Legislative Update: NC Real Property Law" webinar, July 2017, participant
- "Easement Drafting 101" Mecklenburg County Courthouse, June 2017, participant

Introduction to Legal Cover Letters

What is a cover letter? What purpose does it serve?

Most employers expect that a resume will be accompanied by a personalized cover letter.⁴ A cover letter is a part of your introduction to potential employers. It provides you with the opportunity to draw the reader's attention to your relevant skills and experiences. A cover letter is NOT a personal statement. It is your chance to state your interest in the position and demonstrate how your qualifications make you the best person for the job.

If the purpose of a resume is to receive an interview, the purpose of the cover letter is to market your resume and convince the prospective employer to take an interest in you. Although a cover letter is not a formal writing sample, your cover letter may be the employer's first exposure to your written work and analysis (Yes, analysis! You are reading the hiring "rule" and offering analysis/insight as to how you meet the factors.). As a writing sample, it is imperative that your cover letter is well written and professional. Take care to express your thoughts clearly and concisely.

Writing Tips

Before writing any cover letter, you must research the employer. You should then use the information you gathered to relate your background more directly to the specific needs of the firm or organization. Doing research allows you to personalize your cover letter and convince the employer that you have some knowledge of their organization, that you are truly interested in them, and that you have made an informed decision to apply for a position there. Aim for a tone of genuine enthusiasm and sincere interest.

When writing your letter, keep the requirements of the job in mind and address them specifically. It's not what the organization can do for you; it's what you can do for the organization. Your letter should be brief, easy to read, and should highlight your best and most relevant qualifications.

⁴ If you are emailing a resume directly to an attorney or a hiring manager and not sending it through an application platform, treat the body of the email as the "cover letter." Use the format described here, but in the email itself.

Cover Letter Template

Date

[2 spaces]

Name of individual to whom you are writing

Title (if applicable)

Organization

Address

City, State, ZIP

[2 spaces]

Dear Ms./Mr./Hon. _____ :

[2 spaces]

INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH This paragraph answers two implicit questions: Who are you? Why did you send me your resume? Name the position or type of work for which you are applying and mention how you heard of the specific opening or organization. If you are applying to a job in a “remote” geographic location, address the question: “why do you want to work here?”

MIDDLE PARAGRAPH Use this paragraph to get specific about your skills and how you can add value to the organization. Point to those work/educational/volunteer or service activities that provide you with the appropriate background for the position. Highlight an item from your resume or include something that you were unable to add to your resume. Do not simply reiterate your resume. Note: this segment of the letter may extend over one paragraph, but remember brevity is critical in the cover letter. You do not need to be exhaustive.

FINAL PARAGRAPH This paragraph concludes the cover letter. Reiterate your enthusiasm for the position and your eagerness for a personal meeting. You may wish to indicate that you will follow up with them. If you choose to follow up, you generally should wait a week to ten days. Thank the reader for their time and consideration.

[2 spaces]

Sincerely yours,

[1 space]

Your name typed

J.D. Candidate [expected graduation year]

COVER LETTER SAMPLE #1
Font: Times New Roman 12

January 19, 2022

Ms. Ann Smith
Jones Washington & Smith, LLC
100 Main Street
Charleston, WV 25301

Dear Ms. Smith:

I am a first-year law student at West Virginia University College of Law, and I would like to be considered for a summer position with Jones Washington & Smith. I recently met and spoke with James King, one of your associates, who encouraged me to apply. After hearing about your firm's commitment to excellent client service and the variety of experiences offered to summer associates, I am very excited to provide you with my application materials.

I believe I will be an asset to your Charleston office. I earned an "A" in legal research and an "A-" in my legal writing course. I also served as a research assistant for Professor XYZ. I look forward to the opportunity to further develop my writing as an advocate on behalf of the firm's clients.

My resume further highlights my educational and work experience. Upon review, I hope you will allow me the opportunity to interview with you for a summer position during on-campus interviews next month. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

[name]

COVER LETTER SAMPLE #2

Font: Arial 11

January 17, 2021

Mr. Ellis Fisher
Director of Recruitment
Public Defender Corporation
100 Capitol Blvd.
Morgantown, WV 26507

Dear Mr. Fisher:

I am a first-year law student at West Virginia University College of Law, and I am interested in a summer internship with the Public Defender's office in Beckley. I learned of the internship through our Director of Public Service, Jennifer Powell. What appealed most to me about working with your office is the important work you and your colleagues do for underserved West Virginians, particularly those in my hometown of Beckley. I am writing today because it would be an honor to assist you in that work.

I believe I will be a valuable contributor to the Beckley team because of my undergraduate coursework, organizational skills, and my background in a fast-paced customer service position. First, through my undergraduate studies in social work at West Virginia University, I completed a variety of field work projects that heightened my communication skills as I handled intake interviews with a diverse group of clients. I learned the value of being a good listener. Next, as the Class of 2022 vice president, I have been tasked with scheduling meetings, developing meeting agendas, and advertising events, in addition to keeping up with the demands of our rigorous academic program. This has been a challenge, and I have found unique methods for staying organized and meeting deadlines. And finally, my work as a bartender throughout my undergraduate studies taught me many valuable lessons in a fast-paced customer service department. Handling these job duties helped me to develop client focused problem-solving skills.

I have enclosed my resume, which further details my education and work experience. I look forward to hearing from you and hope to meet with you soon. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

[name]