



## The Top Three Mistakes Attorneys Make on Their Resumes

By Mary Waldron

We all make mistakes, but as you know, resume mistakes are rarely forgivable. Read on to find out what the top three resume mistakes are—straight from the experienced resume writers at legal resume-writing service Attorney Resume.

### 1. Vague Explanations of Experience and Accomplishments

Attorneys are trained to be very detail oriented, so here is an area where you can put that to good use. Many times, attorneys will give explanations of professional duties or accomplishments from internships or jobs that are very vague, lacking details as to what they specifically did. For example, “handled cases” and “interacted with clients” leave things pretty wide open—obviously lawyers handle cases and interact with clients. If such descriptions were acceptable, wouldn’t every lawyer use them?

Be creative when listing your accomplishments. Remember, you want to stand out. Briefly elaborate on what types of cases you handled and what you did specifically. It’s usually best to cite a great case or project in which you were instrumental, if applicable. But don’t forget that this should be done in no more than one to two sentences or phrases. The long answers belong in your cover letter.

Word choice can also play a large role in remedying vagueness. Instead of feeling pressured to fully explain an accomplishment on a resume (which shouldn’t be done very extensively because, again, that is the cover letter’s job), look for the word choices that will best describe what you did. Simply saying “Contributed to team performance initiative project” is not a great representation of how you fit into the puzzle. Instead of saying “contributed,” which is basically the same as saying “helped,” you could say something specific like “Collaborated on team performance initiative project with chief executive officer; determined standard quality levels, values, and tools. Established organization-wide benchmark operating procedures; increased efficiency of business practices.” These statements are loaded with specific information about the task.

### 2. No Linkage Between Past Work History and Present Job Search

This mistake is more common than you might think. Many people, including attorneys, forget that resumes should be strategic operations that only shed light on career aspects that are relevant to the job at hand. Resumes should not randomly rattle off every single past job and experience. They should be well thought out and mapped. Why else would an attorney hire someone to write his or her resume? People pay money to get their job experiences tweaked and tailored to cater to desired jobs.

But if you’re not going to spend hundreds of dollars to have someone compose your resume for you, listen up. Every bit of information on your resume must somehow relate to the job you want to get. Period. This means you should not list jobs and experiences that have nothing to do with the position for which you are applying. (Of course, if you have nothing else, you must list what you have—but people rarely apply for jobs for which they have no experience.)

Don’t stress out about this; get smart and creative. Most jobs develop oodles of transferable skills that can be highlighted to match any desired position. For example, if you are currently a real estate attorney and you want to refocus your legal career on intellectual property, it would not be wise to hit on all the aspects of your current job that are real estate specific. Instead, look at your job experiences and accomplishments that can be applied to a legal career in IP. Team building, consulting on major projects, and negotiating deals are all skills that can be tailored to either focus.

### 3. Cluttered with Irrelevant Information

Going back to the second mistake, your resume should never involve a single piece of information that does not apply to the job at hand. When employers read resumes, they look for exactly what they want to see, so when something irrelevant comes up, they see it as a roadblock on their path to the “good stuff.” Don't put up roadblocks.

The most common roadblocks are hobbies and interests. No, your potential boss does not need to know that you're an avid traveler who has been to 52 countries—unless you're applying for a position that requires extensive traveling. It's always bizarre to see things like “Member of the Pasadena Soccer League” on resumes. How is that unique or special, let alone relevant to a legal career?

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