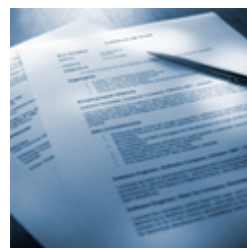


Submitting Resumes to Law Firms

By Emily Sanderson



Law firms want to know where you have worked most recently and where you went to school. If your work history has consisted primarily of firm work, a traditional, chronological resume is the best format to choose.

A stack of resumes that a firm receives over time could be compared to walking into a Baskin-Robbins.

“If you are a partner expecting to get 31 flavors but 27 of them are vanilla, you’re likely to only look at the chocolate fudge and the pralines and cream,” says Dan Binstock, a recruiter with BCG Attorney Search in Washington, DC.

“Firms usually have no problem finding litigators,” Binstock says, indicating that what will make you stand out from the crowd is the specific practice area in which you have worked.

What about the problem of pigeonholing yourself? Keep in mind that ultimately, it is the firm that you are catering to in the resume and cover letter that you submit. Let the firm decide whether you have

the skills they are looking for. Binstock suggests that providing as much detail as possible about your relevant work experience within the confined one- or two-page format of a resume will give potential employers at firms the information they need to evaluate whether you are worthy of a first interview.

For example, Binstock says, if you have worked in litigation, you should state how many depositions you have given and how many briefs you have written. Indicate the percentage of your practice that you dedicate to a particular area of law.

“Law firms want to know where you have worked and where you went to school,” Binstock says. “Those two pieces of information tell potential employers a lot about you.”



Binstock recommends preparing resumes you are submitting to firms in the traditional, chronological format, if possible. The functional format has its purposes, he says, but often resumes for individuals fresh out of law school or just starting out in their careers that use this format automatically raise red flags unless the candidate’s work history clearly indicates that he or she has no gaps in employment or other problems.

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“As far as functional resumes are concerned, I think that they are great for persons who took time off from practicing law and now want to get back into it,” says Joy Nesmith, employment advocate for Legal Authority, a resume crafting and targeted mailing service. “It forces employers to look at their skills first before they look at the timeline of their employment. Also, it’s a good way for older attorneys to highlight their skills and major accomplishments.”

Functional resumes are also generally appropriate for submitting for in-house, government, or special interest positions.

Binstock also recommends being cautious about the use of superfluous or general language. “Show, don’t tell,” he says. Demonstrate your skill levels and areas of expertise rather than expecting potential employers to take your word for it.

If you use a profile or statement of qualifications at the top of your resume, it should be carefully worded and should avoid generalizations, Binstock indicates. A profile at the top of a chronological resume can be used in the place of a functional format to indicate transferable skills if you are pursuing a career shift.