

RESUME AND COVER LETTER WRITING PACKET FOR LEGAL EDUCATION INSTITUTE STUDENTS

This packet consists of several handouts containing suggestions about and examples of resumes and cover letters. Before scheduling an appointment for a resume critique, please use this information to revise your current resume.

*Widener University Law Center
Legal Education Institute
Career Development Office*

CONTENTS

The Resume: Format & Examples	1
General Format	3
Action Verbs for "Experience" Section	4
Questions and Answers on Resume Writing	5
Sample Resumes	10
Paralegal Resume Samples	11- 14
Legal Nurse Consultant Resume Sample	15
Questions and Answers on Cover Letter Writing	16
Writing Cover Letters/Cover Letter sample	18 - 19
Helpful Websites for Paralegals	20

THE RESUME: FORMAT AND EXAMPLES

When preparing your resume, there are a number of considerations to remember. First, since you are entering a new employment field, it may be necessary to revise your current resume. Potential employers will formulate their first impression of you while reviewing your resume, therefore, you want to make your resume to be a true reflection of your skills, interests, abilities, accomplishments, and even your personality. When employers review resumes, they will usually scan them first. Consequently, your resume should be scannable. Instead of writing in sentences and paragraphs, use phrases; instead of verbosity, be concise. Through the judicious use of spacing, highlighting, and underlining, you can exercise a great deal of control over the initial thirty second scan your resume receives by emphasizing those items enhancing your candidacy.

Included in the following pages are:

- (1) General Format
- (2) A list of action verbs to draw from when writing job descriptions for the "Experience" section of your resume
- (3) Questions and Answers on Resume Writing
- (4) Sample resumes
- (5) Questions and Answers on Cover Letter Writing
- (6) Cover letter format and sample cover letter

Variations on the standard resume form are encouraged, as you may decide to emphasize certain information and underplay other details depending on your targeted employer. Notice that while each sample resume generally conforms to the legal resume format presented as standard, each is unique.

The ways in which one may produce a resume are numerous. The campus has computer equipment for student use; therefore, students seeking employment have the ability to create a professional, laser-printed resume. Additionally, private and commercial resume typing and printing services are available.

For the student who will likely update his/her resume on a regular basis, a computer-generated resume may be the best option. An attractive substantial grade of stationery should be used and it is recommended you use a conservative color (white, off-white, cream) and avoid stationery with imprinted fibertone (i.e., flecked or speckled). Your final documents should be perfectly typed with no errors. Additionally, the legal employer is usually interested in obtaining as much information as quickly as possible. Therefore, a resume that calls attention to key words by using underlining, uppercase letters or bold face type will appeal to employers.

Employers expect clarity, neatness and evidence of strong communication skills. If your resume is poorly designed, difficult to scan, hard to understand or contains a typographical error, you will give the employer an excuse to assume you would also not live up to his/her expectations of you on the job.

NAME
Street Address
City, State Zip
Phone Number(s)

EDUCATION

Widener University Law Center
Legal Education Institute
Wilmington, Delaware
Degree/Certificate expected Date

Major or Program: Paralegal Studies
GPA: If listed, must be displayed to three (3) decimal places
Honors: Can be listed next (e.g., Dean's List; Awards; Scholarships)
Activities: List school activities if any (student organizations; roles in organizations)
Memberships: List professional associations if any

Name of School
City, State
Degree awarded Date

Major:
GPA or Rank:
Honors:
Activities:
Memberships:

EXPERIENCE

Name of Employer
City, State
Dates Worked

Job Title. Job description (Use phrases beginning with action verbs; divide with semicolons; use present tense if still with this employer; otherwise, use past tense)

Name of Employer
City, State
Dates Worked

INTERESTS

This section is optional.

Action Verbs

accepted	debated	held	produced
acquitted	defended	identified	processed
admitted	defined	implemented	prosecuted
advised	demonstrated	informed	protected
advocated	deposed	improved	pursued
afforded	designed	increased	read
aided	determined	initiated	recommended
allocated	deterred	innovated	redirected
amended	developed	inquired	reduced
analyzed	devoted	instituted	represented
applied	directed	interpreted	researched
arbitrated	disseminated	interrogated	resolved
argued	drafted	interviewed	revealed
articulated	edited	introduced	reviewed
assembled	effected	investigated	revised
assessed	elucidated	litigated	ruled
assisted	enforced	maintained	scheduled
backed	engaged	managed	selected
balanced	entered	maximized	served
billed	established	mediated	settled
brought	evaluated	mobilized	sponsored
chaired	exercised	monitored	strengthened
challenged	expanded	negotiated	studied
communicated	explained	observed	subpoenaed
competed	explored	operated	suggested
compiled	exposed	organized	supervised
conducted	facilitated	oriented	supported
constructed	filed	originated	taught
contacted	focused	oversaw	trained
convicted	formulated	participated	tried
corrected	fought	planned	updated
counseled	fulfilled	predicted	won
created	governed	prepared	wrote
cross-examined	handled	presented	

Questions and Answers on Resume Writing

Below are frequently asked questions of the Widener University Law Center Career Development staff. The answers should help you in preparing a rough draft of your resume before scheduling an appointment, so that we may spend our time with you clarifying wording and format, as well as dealing with concerns unique to your situation.

Keep in mind that the answers in this handout are only suggestions. There are a variety of approaches you may wish to take in creating your resume.

GENERAL

Q: *What is the purpose of a resume?*

A: A resume serves to introduce you to potential employers in the most favorable light possible, ultimately culminating in interviews. Further, what you include in your resume will influence what an interviewer asks you about and the tone of the interview in general. You actually exert a significant amount of control over the interview by what you present of yourself in your resume.

Q: *How do I word my graduation date?*

A: Graduation date may be stated as: "Certificate expected May, 20__", "A.S. expected..."; "Associate in Science expected..."; "Bachelor of Science Degree expected May 20__"; "B.S. expected May 20__", "Legal Nurse Consultant Certificate anticipated May 20_", depending on the degree you are to receive.

Q: *When should I include my G.P.A. or class rank?*

A: The meaning of G.P.A. varies from school to school. Therefore, it may be necessary to include some explanatory information together with this figure, i.e. 4.0/5.0 scale. A good cut-off point for including G.P.A. on your resume is typically 3.0/4.0 scale. Another way to handle this is to include your class rank, if you were in the top third of your class.

Q. *How should my resume be organized?*

A. Of course your name, address and phone number and e-mail address should appear at the top of your resume, but after that, organize your resume so that the most important information is presented first. If you seek your first paralegal or legal nurse consultant position, for example, your education is probably the most important thing on the resume and should appear first. If you believe your work experience is more important than your education for the job you seek, then your experience should appear first. The less important information, such as interests, skills, and things of this nature should appear later in your resume.

Q. *How long should my resume be?*

A. Unless you have significant work experience, try to limit your resume to one page.

Q. *Should I include an "Objective" or "Summary" section at the top of my resume?*

A. Objective sections are not recommended. Your cover letter or simply the fact that you have applied for a given position may make the "Objective" section redundant and unnecessary. As you know, in the legal field, unnecessary and redundant language is strongly discouraged. A "Summary" section, which includes a summary of your most significant skills and experience, may be helpful if you have a complex resume with substantial previous experience in one or more fields. If you use a "Summary" section, be sure that it is tailored as closely as possible to the position you seek, though be careful not to make it so specialized that you won't be considered for related positions in the organization.

EDUCATION/EMPLOYMENT

Q: *What should be included in the Education section? Should high school be mentioned?*

A: As with all sections of your resume, emphasize your highest level of achievement. For example, mention serious academic honors and achievements, as well as positions of leadership in organizations. Mentioning something about social/recreational activities will help present you as well-rounded. Regarding high school: this information should be included if you are working toward your first post-secondary degree and have no additional post-secondary education. If you are a student with a post-secondary degree, you should exclude high school information unless a specific reason exists for including it (e.g., you attended a small select prep school or a popular local high school with substantial name recognition).

Q: *What if I have little or no experience in my field?*

A: Your career goals will influence the manner in which you present your experience. Keep in mind that law firms are only one type of legal career option. If you have experience in a field in which you wish to continue, it makes sense to include that experience first. Remember to use action words to describe your skills emphasizing those skills transferable to the legal area. NOTE: It is recommended that you not include personal pronouns on your resume.

Q: *What if I have substantial professional experience which is not law-related?*

A: You will want to find a balance whereby you emphasize the fact that you are a person with extensive professional experience, but without over-emphasizing your particular field. You want to demonstrate that your orientation is now toward a new career, and that the previous experience may be translated into usable skills. For career changers with substantial experience in another field, a functional resume may be desired. An appointment with a career counselor should be made to determine whether this is an appropriate option.

Q: *What if NONE of my skills are related to my career choice?*

A: Probably at least one of your jobs, if not all, facilitated the development of skills and abilities which can be used in your chosen profession. For example, if you have sales experience or have otherwise dealt directly with people, you have probably developed excellent verbal communication skills. Additionally, your participation in community, high school or college activities may provide employers insight into your organizational and leadership skills. Other transferable skills include research and writing, supervisory skills, ability to handle large work loads, ability to work independently, etc.

Q: *What if I have held a variety of jobs not on the same professional level to which I now aspire?*

A: You may include a short paragraph summarizing such experiences, e.g., "Held various hospitality industry positions providing the opportunity to build communication/public relations skills." If you worked in order to help finance your education, you may include this information, e.g., "Worked summers throughout college as (include title, separated by commas) contributing substantially to college tuition". See Sample Resume p. 14.

Q: *What if I have little or no work background?*

A: In this case, emphasize positions of responsibility, activities, honors and grades, as well as community interests and volunteer activities.

PERSONAL/INTERESTS

Q: *Should I include personal data such as birth date, marital status, and health?*

A: The appropriate emphasis in a resume is on professional qualifications. Personal data usually is not included.

Q: *Should I list interests on a resume?*

A: This is an optional section on a resume. The advantage is that by including some mention of interest, you 1) make it known you are a well-rounded person, and 2) create a safe topic of conversation which can serve as an icebreaker for the interviewer.

Q: *How should I handle affiliations which may point out a political, religious, or other orientation different from a potential employer?*

A: In order to strike a balance between being practical and being true to yourself, you must decide: 1) how important to your identity that affiliation is; and 2) whether or not you can work comfortably with an employer with a different viewpoint. For example, if the affiliation is crucial to who you feel you are, but you could work with an employer with a divergent viewpoint, you may want to de-emphasize the affiliation or leave it out. If you could not work with such an employer, it may be more important that your resume makes your affiliation clear to potential employers.

REFERENCES

Q: *What about references?*

A: It is not necessary to include references on the resume itself. Instead create an addendum listing each reference's name, title, work address, and work phone. See Reference List Sample, p. 13. You should confirm this information with your references, who, ideally should be able to speak to your ability. Remember to follow-up with a courtesy copy of your resume.

MISCELLANEOUS

Q: *May I get further assistance with my resume?*

A: Yes...after reading the information in this packet you may still want suggestions about specific concerns. Please make an appointment with the Career Development staff [call 302 477-2163 or e-mail career.development@law.widener.edu] to review your resume draft and discuss your career options.

SAMPLE RESUMES

PARALEGAL RESUME

LINDA P. JOHNSON
1800 NORTH WALNUT STREET
CHERRY HILL, NEW JERSEY 00000
(600) 555-1212
lpj53@aol.com

EDUCATION:

Widener University Law Center
Legal Education Institute
Wilmington, Delaware

Associate of Science Degree expected May, 2011

Major: Paralegal Studies
G.P.A.: 3.245
Honor: Dean's List
Member: South Jersey Paralegal Association
Relevant
Courses: Legal Research I and II; Law Office Management

St. Elizabeth's High School
Wilmington, Delaware

Diploma received May, 2009

Honors: Honor Roll; National Honor Society
Activity: Yearbook Staff

EXPERIENCE:

Top Realty
Houston, Texas

June, 2008 to present

Office Assistant. Researched and selected prospective customers for potential sale of property; served as liaison to customers and agents; handled customer service replies; sold home, health and life insurance; and managed day-to-day office operations.

Financing college education with various part-time positions, including cashier and receptionist.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE SKILLS:

French and Spanish

INTERESTS:

Golf, classical music, tennis

PARALEGAL RESUME
STUDENT WITH UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE

MARY S. CARTWRIGHT
360 Terrace Park Road
Wilmington, Delaware 10000
302-555-5555

EDUCATION:

Widener University Law Center
Legal Education Institute
Wilmington, Delaware

Paralegal Certificate expected May 2011

G.P.A.: 3.250
Research: Delaware Real Estate Law: Liability of Agents for
Negligent Misrepresentation

The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, Pennsylvania

B.S. received May 2009

Major: Communications
Minor: Business/Liberal Arts

EXPERIENCE:

Legal Secretary
John A. Lobby, Attorney at Law
Wilmington, Delaware

August 2008 to Present

Assist with drafting and preparation of wills, trusts and probate and real estate documents and individual and estate tax returns. Handle telephone and written correspondence, bookkeeping and payroll.

Customer Service Representative
Everson Festival Association
Claymont, Delaware

May 2006 to July 2008
(Part-time)

Answered inquiries, accepted ticket orders and resolved complaints of contributors, performers and general public; assisted with general office and accounting duties; and implemented sales projects for manager.

VOLUNTEER WORK:

Adult Literacy Program in the Hispanic Community

2006 to 2008

Arts and Crafts instructor, Herrick House for Children

2004, 2006

MARY S. CARTWRIGHT
360 Terrace Park Road
Wilmington, Delaware 10000
302-555-5555

REFERENCES

Professor Thomas Torts
Widener University Law Center
Legal Education Institute
P.O. Box 7474
Wilmington, Delaware 19803
(302) 477-2100

John D. Smith, Esquire
Smith, Jones & Brown
277 Somewhere Street
Anytown, Anystate 11111
(302) 555-5555

Professor Frances Finance
Widener University Law Center
Legal Education Institute
P.O. Box 7474
Wilmington, Delaware 19803
(302) 477-2100

PARALEGAL RESUME

DEBORAH BROWN
1616 Maple Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 09000
(215) 555-1234
dbrown@star.erols.com

EDUCATION

Widener University Law Center
Legal Education Institute
Wilmington, Delaware

B.S. expected May 2010
A.S. awarded May 2007

Major: Paralegal Studies
G.P.A.: 3.750

EXPERIENCE

Widener University Law Center
Civil Law Clinic

January to May 2008

Intern/Legal Assistant Researched civil law issues. Reviewed pleadings including complaints, answers, motions and discovery materials. Assisted in the preparation of interrogatory questions and answers. Assisted student attorneys in trial preparation and document organization.

Delaware Health Advocates
Wilmington, Delaware

May 2006 to June 2007

Secretary. Provided administrative support to professional staff. Assisted with scheduling of meeting and events. Created and verified all new projects within database system.

Held various jobs such as hostess and waitress to finance undergraduate education.

INTERESTS

Sailing, literature, travel

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Philadelphia Paralegal Association
National Association for Paralegals

LEGAL NURSE CONSULTANT

Charles Adams
123 Main Street
Newark, Delaware 00000
(302) 555-6666

EDUCATION

Widener University Law Center
Legal Education Institute
Wilmington, Delaware

Legal Nurse Consultant expected May

Gloucester County College
Gloucester, Pennsylvania

Associate Degree in Nursing awarded May 2006

WORK EXPERIENCE

Smith, Katz, Garcia & Jackson, P.C.
Wilmington, DE

October 2009 to present

Legal Nurse Consultant Intern. Analyze medical malpractice files to determine case merit. Assist in the identification of standards of care, causation and damage issues. Research and summarize medical literature. Prepare medical chronologies. Work with attorneys to locate and retain expert witnesses. Help attorneys with depositions and trials including developing and preparing exhibits.

Mercy Integrated Services Group
Darby, PA

May 2005 to June 2009

Nurse Case Manager. Consulted with medical providers, claim representatives, employers and injured employees. Determined the appropriateness of treatment, level of care and medications in accordance with case management practice standards. Provided claim representatives with recommendations to address barriers to recovery and expected length of disability.

Core Medical Services
Philadelphia, PA

June 2000 to April 2005

Senior Staff Nurse, Surgical ICU
Staff Nurse, Critical Care

April 2001 - April 2005
June 2000- April 2001

VOLUNTEER WORK

Department of Justice, State of Delaware
Domestic Violence Unit
Wilmington, Delaware

Questions and Answers on Cover Letter Writing

Q. *What information should I include in a cover letter?*

A. A cover letter should highlight your skills and qualifications as they relate to your targeted employer. This differs from the resume which highlights your achievements and accomplishments. Your cover letter should not repeat verbatim the information contained in your resume, but instead, demonstrate how your skills can meet the employer's needs. The employer perceives the cover letter as a writing sample and/or work product; therefore, it should be treated as such by you. Be sure to focus principally on what skills and experience you bring to the table that will be helpful to them, not what a job with them can do for you. **NOTE:** A common pitfall in writing a cover letter is the over-use of personal pronouns to begin sentences and paragraphs. Keeping this in mind, it is suggested you review your cover letter to determine if editing is necessary.

Q. *What is the appropriate length of a cover letter?*

A. The letter should be written in a strong, concise, but brief manner. It is strongly recommended that a cover letter be no more than one page in length.

Q. *Can I use the same cover letter for each employer?*

A. In today's competitive market, every effort should be made to strengthen your candidacy. The mass mailing of form cover letters is ineffective and wasteful and easily recognized by the employer. It conveys a lack of research and, therefore, knowledge about the employer, as well as a lack of commitment for wanting to work for that employer. Conducting research on employers before preparing your cover letter enables you to personalize or target cover letters to individual employers. The Career Development Office has numerous resources to help you find out more about employers so you can customize your letters. The Internet is also an invaluable source of information, as many employers have web pages with a great deal of helpful information.

Q. *How should I address my cover letter?*

A. It is best to address your cover letter to the firm's designated contact person. If this information is not available, it is suggested you phone the employer to determine to whom you should address your cover letter. If you cannot determine who the individual contact person is, use the title of the employer's contact person, e.g., "Paralegal Coordinator," "Office Manager," "Hiring Partner," etc. Avoid the use of "Dear Sir" or "Dear Madam."

Writing Cover Letters

Below is a standard cover letter format for reference when creating cover letters.

Your Address
City, State, Zip

Date of writing

Contact Person, Title (e.g., Esquire)
Firm Name
Address
City, State, Zip

Dear _____:

Begin by telling the employer who you are and why you are writing, though you should generally try to avoid saying “My name is....”. A creative introduction will catch the attention of the employer. Reference should be made to the position you are applying for as well as where you read or heard about the position.

This is where you need to sell yourself. First, begin with a strong paragraph topic sentence indicating that your skills and experience will help you make you a valuable addition to the firm or company. Relate your skills and qualifications, whether direct or transferable, to the needs of the employer by setting forth relevant experience, accomplishments, and training. When relating your skills and qualities, be sure to provide proof and examples as support. You may also state why you are interested in working for this employer, as well as your relevant areas of interest. [You may break this information into two paragraphs.]

The closing should pave the way to an interview. Mention when and where you may be reached for an interview. Be sure to include your telephone number (even if it appears on your resume). Make clear your desire for an interview and your appreciation of their consideration of you as an applicant.

Very truly yours,

Your name typed

Enclosure

The letter below is written in response to an advertisement.

Cythnia James
5567 Bellwood Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19104
215-345-9876
cjames@yahoo.com

September XX, 20XX

Mr. Stewart Cunningham
Human Resources Manager
Street, Good & Pryor
235 Market Street
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Dear Mr. Cunningham:

In response to your paralegal advertisement in the *Daily Paper*, I am submitting my resume for your consideration. I recently obtained my Paralegal Certificate from Widener Law Center's Legal Education Institute and am looking forward to the possibility of utilizing my skills and experience at your prestigious firm. I am especially intrigued by your firm's reputation in medical malpractice matters, an area of particular interest to me.

As my resume indicates, my academic training and work background have prepared me to succeed as a paralegal. I developed strong administrative and organizational skills while working in a medical office for the past five years. In addition, while participating in an internship with a local litigation firm, I strengthened my legal research and drafting skills while preparing responses to discovery. I also gained critical communication skills while performing initial intake interviews with clients. Further, I have excelled in my courses while at Widener, achieving a 3.56 cumulative average. I am confident that my training and work experience will allow me to make an immediate contribution to your firm.

I look forward to the opportunity to meet with you to discuss my qualifications in further detail. I can be reached at 215-345-9876 or via e-mail at cjames@yahoo.com. Thank you for your consideration of my resume.

Very truly yours,

Cynthia James

Enclosure

HELPFUL WEBSITES FOR PARALEGALS

<http://www.careers.findlaw.com> - Review job listings, research employers and salary information and career advice

www.law.com - The leading legal news and information network for attorneys and other legal professionals.

www.legalstaff.com - Listing legal and law related jobs, with free searches, a job agent feature and the opportunity to post your qualifications for employers to review.

www.paralegalgateway.com - Dedicated to continuing the development and education of paralegals worldwide.

www.monster.com

www.paralegaljobs.com

www.lawjobs.com

www.careerbuilder.com

Government positions

www.usajobs.opm.gov

www.governmentjobs.com

Networking

National Paralegals Association

www.nationalparalegal.org

National Federation of Paralegal Associates

www.paralegals.org

American Association for Paralegal Education

www.aafpe.org

Delaware Paralegal Association

www.deparalegals.org

Philadelphia Association of Paralegals

www.philaparalegals.com

Maryland Association of Paralegals

www.mdparalegals.org

National Association for Law Placement Directory
www.nalpdirectory.com

National Association of Legal Assistants
www.nala.org

The Paralegal Association of New Jersey
www.laanj.org

Martindale-Hubbell
www.martindale.com