
FIRST IMPRESSIONS LAST

*Preparing Effective Résumés, Cover Letters, and
Reference Lists*

Choosing Appropriate Writing Samples



University of Maine School of Law
Career Services Office
(Revised 2010)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|------------------------------------------------|----|
| <i>Introduction</i> | 3 |
| <i>Marketing</i> | 4 |
| <i>Self-Assessment</i> | 5 |
| <i>Résumé Preparation</i> | 8 |
| <i>Résumé Content</i> | 11 |
| <i>Résumé Samples</i> | 17 |
| <i>Cover Letter Research</i> | 20 |
| <i>Cover Letter Development</i> | 22 |
| <i>Cover Letter Samples</i> | 25 |
| <i>Reference List Compilation</i> | 29 |
| <i>Reference List Samples</i> | 30 |
| <i>Writing Sample Selection</i> | 33 |
| <i>A Word about Written Applications</i> | 34 |
| <i>Continued Communication</i> | 35 |

INTRODUCTION

Although searching for and securing the right job can seem like an overwhelming task, you can make your job search easier through careful and methodical preparation. Honest self-assessment and employer research are the first steps to beginning a job search (and are touched on briefly in the following pages), but once you have determined what positions or types of positions may be right for you, you will need to be able to present yourself effectively to potential employers—first in writing, then in person. It is this “self-marketing” that is the focus of this publication and its companion, *The Art of Interviewing*. Other publications and the Career Services staff are available to assist you with self-assessment and employer research.

Written materials are emphasized here because in most job searches they are the first and only contact that applicants have with potential employers. If you are unsuccessful in making a good first written impression, you will likely be out of the running before any interviews are even scheduled. The simple techniques offered here may help you move forward in the selection process and should also (together with other Career Services Office resources) make the job search more manageable.

The Career Services Staff and the Law School community are eager to assist you with your job search, but remember—you are the one who is uniquely qualified to find the best job for you. **If you fail to take responsibility for your own job search and destiny, you will miss out on an important learning experience and may end up in a position you dislike.**

There's a lot to do so let's get started...

MARKETING

What Are Résumés And Cover Letters?

Your résumé and cover letter (the most common application materials) serve as your introduction to a potential employer. It is the first impression you will create, and naturally, you will want this impression to be favorable.

A résumé is a short summary of relevant information about you as a person, a student, and a future attorney. It is not, however, a simple sketch of your educational background and work experience listed in reverse chronological order, although this is exactly what many people mistakenly believe a résumé to be. A good résumé does include this information, but it does more. It holds the attention of the busy hiring partner, recruiting coordinator, or employment manager and prompts him or her into action—namely, asking you to come in for an interview.

A cover letter draws attention to your particular qualifications for a specific job, shows your interest in and/or ties to a particular employer or geographic area, and helps you ask for an interview. In addition to being persuasive, it is essential that your cover letters be well-organized, concise and grammatically correct. A cover letter is, for all practical purposes, a writing sample—and if yours is ungrammatical, poorly constructed, and badly typed, it can spoil your chances with the employer who receives it.

Why Are Effective Résumés & Cover Letters Difficult To Write?

Many people have difficulty selling anything and a particularly hard time blowing their own horns. Developing written materials which identify your strengths and skills and sending them to others to read can be intimidating. Nevertheless, while they may be hard to write, those application materials are crucial marketing tools. Writing résumés and cover letters can be very similar to creating an ad campaign for a new product. Like product marketing, self-marketing can be done sloppily or with style.

What differentiates the successful from the unsuccessful marketing campaign is the preparation and execution of the campaign with thorough knowledge of the product (yourself, in this case), knowledge of the consumer (the employer), and attractive packaging (your written materials).

What Are Employers Looking For? ~ Know The Consumer

To market your strengths to a potential employer successfully, you must know what the organization expects from its employees. The most common mistake people make when writing their résumés and cover letters is to assume that merely listing their activities and accomplishments will be sufficient to impress the employer. This is not so. Employers are looking for certain qualifications, and it is the applicant's responsibility to emphasize those skills, experiences, and accomplishments that match the employers' vision. When reading the list of attributes most desired by potential employers, ask yourself if you have those attributes and what job/organization/real life experience shows these attributes in you.

Once you have done some soul searching and introspection, and know what skills and talents you will be selling to the employer, you can begin to write your résumé. You know what you have to sell; you have an idea of what they want to buy. The final step is attractive marketing of your product.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Self-Evaluation

Know thyself! Before jumping into the job search, conduct a self-evaluation. At this point in your legal career, you will be making some major decisions, and if you are wise you will resist the temptation to follow the path of least resistance (e.g., an associate position with a law firm in an urban area, or a job in a family or friend's firm) until you have done some serious thinking about your career and life goals. Doing so now may save you from aimlessly agonizing over the job search and from scrambling for jobs which may not suit you at all. It is important to remember that self-evaluation is an on-going process, not a means to an end.

The importance of self-evaluation cannot be overemphasized. A thorough knowledge of self includes an awareness of your personal goals, strengths and weaknesses, values, and lifestyle preferences. Hiring partners at law firms agree that besides the basic requirements of law training, they look for maturity and a sense of focus in candidates. After considering those facts on your résumé that catalog your academic and work experience, employers will want to know you as a person. What is it that makes you uniquely qualified for a position with their firm? Self-evaluation is the basis for effective résumé and cover letter preparation, as well as for successful interviewing, on-the-job satisfaction, and overall career planning. A thorough self-evaluation can help you match your skills, abilities and personality with that of the right firm, agency or even your own practice.

List Professional and Personal Values and Preferences

The first step in this process is to make a list of professional and personal values. Review your past employment and try to recall what motivated you or really turned you off about each job. Here are some questions that may help you evaluate yourself:

- How important is power to you? Money? Prestige? Social position?
- Do you most enjoy working on your own or do you prefer being part of a team?
- How important is service to society to you?
- How important are social issues to you?
- Are you looking for the right job regardless of geographic location or do you have definite geographic constraints?
- Do you have an image of what you want to achieve over the course of your career and life?
- What motivates you? What doesn't motivate you?

Knowing your personal characteristics may help you understand the types of workplace experiences which will make you happy and narrow the field of employers. Here are some sample questions to think about:

- Are you an organized person? How much organization do you require in your work environment?
- Are you extroverted and people-oriented or are you more introverted and shy?
- Do you desire a lot of sole responsibility or are you content to share responsibility?
- Are you goal-oriented or do you go with the flow?
- Are you a leader or a follower?

- Under what types of pressure do you best function?
- Do you prefer a highly structured work environment or one that is loosely structured?
- Do you need a lot of positive feedback?
- Do you need a sense of purpose from your job?

These are only some of the questions that will help you determine your individual career goals. The answers will help you decide what image you want to project to the employer. Keep these thoughts in mind as you prepare your application materials.

Evaluate Strengths and Weaknesses

At this point, you must honestly evaluate your strengths and weaknesses. To put your best foot forward, you must know what you do best so that those attributes can be emphasized, while simultaneously understanding your weaknesses so that they can be minimized. Look for things that you have done that coincide with the experience needed in the job for which you are applying.

Regarding strengths, ask yourself:

- Do I have any writing experience such as writing Moot Court briefs, *Maine Law Review* or *Ocean & Coastal Journal* articles, independent writing projects/theses (law school, graduate or undergraduate), newspaper articles, plays, or short stories?
- Do I have any research experience such as assisting a professor, either in law school or as an undergraduate?
- Do I have any advocacy experience such as Moot Court, Trial Advocacy, Pre-trial Litigation, public speaking classes, past speeches, or public appearances?
- Have I held any jobs involving much contact with people? Did I work well with those people?

Now, think about weaknesses—areas that may need improvement. (If you have any trouble with this category, consider asking your significant other, best friend or parents.) Some questions to ask yourself include:

- If I could change one thing about myself, what would it be?
- What supervisors' comments about my performance were less than positive?
- Are there some types of jobs that I do not do well?

Many students believe that their biggest weakness is their law school grades, and it is true that some employers (large law firms, in particular) place a great deal of importance on grades. But your GPA may not be the only way, or even the best way, for you to demonstrate your intelligence to an employer. There are other ways to illustrate this intangible. Perhaps you can highlight individual grades in courses in which you have done particularly well. Or, you may have done poorly during your first year but improved significantly thereafter; if so, show this improvement on your résumé. It will explain a low cumulative GPA and show that you have gotten better at taking law school exams. You can also show the last semester's average along with your cumulative GPA to show achievements that are more recent.

Another method is to emphasize your good judgment and common sense—perhaps by describing how you solved a major problem for a previous employer. Be creative about showing your mental horsepower. At all costs, keep in mind that 90% of all lawyers out there did not graduate in the top

10% of their law school classes. Intelligence is a very nebulous quality at best, and the savvy résumé writer will recognize that grades are certainly not the only way to communicate its presence.

Think about what each employer is looking for and your qualifications or life experiences. To the extent possible, match up your qualifications and experiences with the attributes sought by the employer. Of course, if you do not have the qualifications, you may not get the job. But you may wish to try to write a letter explaining to the employer why you should get the job anyway. If you can do that, you may be able to write a persuasive cover letter selling transferable skills or harnessing your enthusiasm for the position.

Looking for an Employer?

Next, think about what you need from a job and work environment to be happy and satisfied. Your ability to *do* a job is no guarantee that you will *enjoy* doing it. So, do not be passive in the job search process; always conduct an active investigation and, if possible, research the employer before applying for a job. It is important to know what you want from the employer and what the employer can offer you.

Consider the following, for example:

- Do you want a lot of responsibility soon?
- What size organization do you want to work for? Why?
- Do you need an organization that allows free communication of ideas?
- Do you want to work on things alone or in groups?
- Exactly how long are you willing to work each day and weekend? How many weekends are you willing to work?
- What areas of law do you prefer? Do you need a variety of work or are you content to work in one or two subject areas?
- Are there certain types of clients/interests you would prefer (or prefer not) to represent?

These and other questions will help you decide which jobs to apply for, what issues to explore if you get to the interview stage, and what job offers to accept.

During your years in law school it is important to go through this self-evaluation exercise regularly, as your experience and knowledge grows, and as your work preferences evolve. Most important, always be yourself and do not get caught up in your friends' goals and aspirations. Only you know what will make you happy.

**Remember, you will spend the major part of your day at work.
Make sure you are happy there.**

RÉSUMÉ PREPARATION

Brainstorming or outlining is the first—and a very important—step in developing your résumé. Take sufficient time in each step of preparation. Your résumé should convey your best qualities and experiences, making the strongest possible case for yourself.

List Everything

The first step is to get on paper everything about yourself and your accomplishments. (If you have had a lot of experience, you may want to select an appropriate cut-off year or to focus on certain types of employment).

Begin by listing your work experience, including volunteer work, organization participation and paid positions. Write down everything you did in each job or organization. Describe your educational background, special talents and interests. List every honor, award and major achievement under each entry.

Look at your background as an employer would. Think of aspects of your background that emphasize achievement, motivation, goal orientation, intellectual ability, writing experience, ambition, ability to deal well with others, leadership, cultural breadth, strong work ethic, responsible work habits and control of your own destiny. At this stage do not edit; simply jot things down as they come to mind. Do not forget volunteer experiences, community involvement and unglamorous summer jobs you may have had.

Organize into Groups/Patterns

Once you have this list of accomplishments and activities, go back over them and look for patterns such as the following:

- Things that show organizational, public speaking or writing skills or a sense of responsibility.
- People-oriented patterns.
- Detail-oriented patterns.
- Creative patterns.
- Things you have enjoyed doing or things you have done well. Also, consider the things you have not enjoyed.

If you do not find patterns such as these, do not be discouraged. It could very well be that although you would have loved to have honed your public speaking skills during summers in college, you had to take that job as a waitress because the tips were good and you needed the money. This simply means that you are hard working and responsible. The most important thing to remember is that no matter how seemingly unimportant a job may have been, you learned from it and—presumably—contributed something to the organization. Don't undersell yourself.

Drafting

Although many people have the credentials and qualities employers seek, they often fail to follow through in writing their résumés to ensure that the message is delivered. The problem is that employers receive thousands of résumés each year and do not have the time to sift through an unorganized résumé and glean from the chaos those qualities they seek. **You only have 20-30**

seconds to make your sales pitch to the employer! That is how long the average recruiter takes to evaluate a résumé. At the end of that cursory review, your résumé is either tossed in the reject pile or put in a pile with other résumés to be reviewed more carefully. At first glance, therefore, your résumé must be appealing to the eye, easy to read and must contain the type of information the employer wants to read.

Length

The standard rule on résumé preparation is to use one page. Two page résumés are usually unnecessary unless you have exceptional experience or have worked full-time with experience related to your future endeavors. Two page résumés are more appropriate for graduates who have worked several years or for students who held full-time jobs prior to law school. But if keeping to one page requires you to sacrifice visual clarity or cut short your accomplishments, by all means go to two pages. Résumés for entry level law-related jobs should almost never be three pages long.

Résumé Style

Simplicity is usually the key to organizing a visually effective résumé. Look at your résumé as if you were an employer who has already read 30 résumés today. Your résumé is the one concrete item a potential employer has to evaluate you before an interview.

Do you have:

- Absolutely no typos?
- Adequate margins?
- Plenty of blank space between entries?
- Good organization?
- Variation (capital letters, underlining, italics, and boldface type)?

When organizing the information, keep in mind that your background is unique. The choice of résumé style and format is based upon careful consideration of this background. There are three basic types of résumés: the *chronological résumé*, the *functional résumé* and the *combination résumé*. Each style, described below, has its own particular strengths and weaknesses.

The Chronological Résumé

The chronological résumé is by far the most common résumé style. This type of résumé categorizes your experiences into sections such as Education, Experience, Skills and Interests, and Publications. Under these headings, entries are listed in reverse chronological order; that is, leading with the most recent experience. Each entry contains information on where you were, when you were there, and what you accomplished.

Employers prefer this type of résumé because it lends itself to easy tracking of an applicant's record. The employer can immediately see the succession of jobs the applicant has had and whether there seems to be a logical progression of the applicant's experience towards particular professional goals. **Remember, employers are looking for direction and goal achievement.**

The chronological résumé works well for most people simply because it enables the writer to play up job promotions, awards and to show fast track career development. There are, however, two

major drawbacks of the chronological résumé. First, it does not effectively explain the year taken off between college and law school that was spent selling suntan lotion at the beach. Second, it does not lend itself to emphasizing refined skills that are the product of many varied experiences (such as writing skills honed through participation in a student newspaper, as editor of a literary journal, member of the Moot Court team, and avid author of editorials in a local newspaper).

The Functional Résumé

The functional résumé is designed to highlight competencies, talents and skills with minimal attention to chronology. Categories in a functional résumé include headings that are relevant to the specific field the writer wishes to enter. In law, for example, those headings might be Litigation Skills, Writing Ability, Research Abilities and Public Speaking. Under each heading, the writer summarizes experiences that support the existence of that skill or competency.

For instance, if you have gained valuable writing experience through a variety of activities such as writing editorials for a newspaper, writing book reviews for a publishing company, and writing briefs on a free-lance basis for different law firms, it might be difficult to highlight this considerable experience in a chronological résumé. By having a functional category such as Writing Ability, you would be able to consolidate this information and present it in a forceful way.

Another useful application of the functional résumé is to downplay dates. If you had a succession of jobs within a two-year period, for example, and are concerned that your frequent job-hopping will adversely affect a potential employer's opinion of you, a functional résumé would enable you to concentrate on what you have accomplished rather than when you accomplished it. Similarly, for those students who have been out of school for many years, the functional résumé makes it more difficult for an employer to determine the student's age.

The problem with the functional résumé is that employers simply don't like it very much. People who use the functional résumé tend to copy categories from other résumés they see and try to force their lives to fit another's mold. The result is a vague, puffy résumé that sounds canned instead of sincere. In addition, few people really have enough outstanding talents to fill a functional résumé. The employer is also likely to think that the writer has something to hide because a chronology is conspicuously missing.

Perhaps the most important reason that the functional résumé is less popular than the chronological résumé has to do with the extra time an employer must take to try to figure out what you have been doing most recently. Employers simply like to know for whom you have worked and when you were employed.

The Combination Résumé

The third type of résumé is the combination résumé. As the name implies, the combination résumé borrows techniques from both the chronological résumé and the functional résumé. The bulk of the résumé is usually written in a chronological format, supplemented by one or two functional categories. The combination résumé enables the writer to emphasize particular skills while keeping the majority of the résumé in the preferred format.

Most people will have the best success with a chronological résumé, but if functional categories seem more appropriate for you, try a combination résumé before going to a strictly functional format. The Career Services Director will be happy to talk over your specific needs with you.

RÉSUMÉ CONTENT

Headings

All résumés should begin with contact information. This includes your name, mailing address, telephone number (local and/or home depending on whether you wish to show geographical ties) and e-mail address(es).

The body of the résumé should contain headings and short summaries of information. Typically, headings will include categories such as Education, Experience, Publications, and Skills & Interests. Do not simply adopt the headings from a model résumé and force your background to fit these areas. Look at your background and see how it logically divides. The following are some typical headings and summaries.

Education

List your most recent educational institution first and continue listing in reverse chronological order. List school and location, degree or degree program, date received or expected and major and minor areas of concentration. Include academic honors such as *cum laude*, competitive scholarships, and other awards. Keep it brief, but make sure that honors that are not self-explanatory are explained.

Please note that you will earn a “**Juris Doctor**” from the University of Maine School of Law, not a Juris Doctorate or Doctor of Jurisprudence.

Information about class standing and grades can be included here if they are likely to work in your favor. Generally, students in the top third of the class indicate their law school performance by stating either their exact numerical rank in the class (e.g., 8th/85) or the fraction or percentage of the class in which they fall (e.g., top quartile or top 25%). Your GPA can also be included, but it is generally less useful than class rank, except to employers very familiar with the law school’s current grading regime. If your grades are not in the top third of the class, think about other ways of presenting your intellectual skills. (See *Evaluating Strengths and Weaknesses Section* above.)

If you are concentrating in a particular area of study, such as environmental or tax, you may consider indicating so in this section of the résumé by listing classes taken or programs attended. Remember, however, that stipulating this kind of information may serve to screen you out of other opportunities.

Your undergraduate education should be treated in the same manner as your graduate education. High school information should only be included when it is desirable to show ties to a particular geographic area. Preparatory schools can be shown on the résumé if they are well known. Above all, be consistent in presentation. The format should be the same for both Law School and undergraduate school.

Activities

You may list law school and undergraduate activities under the law school and college entries in the EDUCATION section or you may create a separate ACTIVITIES section and indicate the appropriate school under the activity. This decision is often based upon the amount of space available on a résumé.

Activities in law school and college should be included on the résumé to show things such as leadership, well-roundness, involvement in your community, energy, and a sense of civic duty. Be careful that activities of value are not excluded. These should include non-legal internships, teaching assistantships, clinical programs, journal memberships, and Moot Court activities. In the case of work-related activities, such as legal internships, these should be explained in the EXPERIENCE section. Don't list every single activity or internship just to show that you were really involved, and avoid listing activities or internships twice even if they can fit under more than one heading.

Publications

A published paper in a legal journal should be cited completely either in a separate section of the résumé or under the Law School section. Published works in areas other than law should also be listed, using citation methods appropriate for that field of study.

Experience

This section will be of particular interest to employers. Care should be used in word choice as well as the selection of information to be presented. (See *Action Word List* below.)

Remember that experience may include such items as full or part-time employment, clinical experiences and internships, research assistantships, volunteer activities, civic activities of real substance, and workshops where actual work was involved.

When listing employers use only names and cities, not street addresses. Then list your job title and a description of your duties. But lead with your strengths: if your job title was more impressive than where you worked, list your job title first, followed by the employer's name.

Remember to be consistent throughout the formatting of the EXPERIENCE section. When writing job descriptions, keep in mind that they should be to the point but should also include all relevant information. Do not use first person pronouns or possessive adjectives (I, me, my, myself). Instead, use short phrases, not complete sentences. Break the information up if necessary; create visual equivalents of “sound bytes.”

Use action words to formulate sentences that accurately describe your experiences. Concentrate on your accomplishments at each job. **Point out your strengths and successes. If you don't toot your own horn, no one else will.**

*Examples of Action Words**

| | | |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| actively | ensured | prepared |
| accelerated | established | prevailed |
| accomplished | evaluated | produced |
| achieved | expanded | profited |
| adapted | explored | programmed |
| added | facilitated | promoted |
| administered | filed | proposed |
| advised | financed | protected |
| advocated | forecasted | provided |
| aided | formulated | proficient |
| analyzed | fostered | ran |
| applied | founded | recognized |
| appointed | generated | recommended |
| approved | guided | reduced |
| arbitrated | handled | renovated |
| arranged | helped | reported |
| assessed | identified | represented |
| assisted | implemented | researched |
| authored | improved | resolved |
| authorized | incorporated | revamped |
| boosted | increased | revealed |
| briefed | influenced | reviewed |
| budgeted | initiated | revised |
| calculated | innovated | scheduled |
| changed | instituted | screened |
| combined | instructed | scrutinized |
| compared | investigated | selected |
| conceived | labored | set up |
| conducted | launched | signed |
| constructed | lead | simplified |
| controlled | lectured | solved |
| convinced | maintained | spearheaded |
| coordinated | managed | streamlined |
| created | mastered | strengthened |
| critiqued | maximized | suggested |
| defined | monitored | summarized |
| delegated | motivated | supervised |
| demonstrated | negotiated | supported |
| designed | observed | transferred |
| determined | operated | transformed |
| deterred | organized | translated |
| digested | originated | uncovered |
| directed | participated | updated |
| discovered | perceived | won |
| effected | performed | worked |
| earned | persuaded | wrote |
| edited | pioneered | |
| educated | planned | |

**Use present tense for current activities and past tense for past activities.*

Experience Samples

In the following example, note the difference between the two job descriptions. The first is rather nondescript and does not show to advantage any qualities such as initiative, energy and leadership. It also does not quantify the actual number of employees supervised or the percentage increase in business:

Painter, University Painters, Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Painted houses with other members of fraternity. Summers 2006, 2007.

This same job might be written as follows:

UNIVERSITY PAINTERS, Chapel Hill, North Carolina
Coordinator - Organized and directed a group of 12 fraternity brothers in newly formed residential painting business. Negotiated fees with customers and developed team-painting concept which reduced painting time by half while maintaining high job quality. Second summer profit increased 250% over first summer profit. (Summers 2006-07)

If, in addition to a significant work experience, you have also had a string of relatively unimportant summer positions, these positions can be grouped together in a summary listing without going into much detail. For example:

House Painter, Waitress, Child Care Provider, Research Assistant. (Part time, Summer/School Years 2004, 2006-07).

If you worked at these positions to finance your education, you should indicate that as well.

References

References may be included on a résumé, but a separate sheet that lists your references is generally preferable. This frees up valuable space on your résumé for other information that you may want to emphasize. There is no need to say “references available on request.” (See section on *Reference List Compilation and Development*).

Skills & Interests

This is a catch-all category that is useful in establishing ties to a particular geographic area, special skills, computer knowledge, languages, interesting hobbies and travel, and other information that does not logically fit under another heading but which may either be relevant to the position for which you are applying or may help to distinguish you favorably.

Job Objective

One section that you should consider omitting from your résumé is the Job Objective. This is often the first section of a résumé and appears immediately beneath the name, address, and telephone number. If used, make sure the objective is focused, not vague. Most people do not draft effective objectives, using instead objectives that sound bland (e.g., “To become a first year associate at Dewey Cheatum & Howe.”) or insincere (e.g., “To obtain an exciting summer clerkship with a highly-esteemed law firm that will utilize my legal skills.”), while wasting valuable space. Good objectives are hard to write, but if you insist on including one, keep in mind that they should be targeted, professionally and perhaps geographically as well. They should indicate not only what you expect from the employer but also what you can contribute.

The most obvious drawback to having a job objective is that it can serve to screen you out of consideration by the employer. If poorly written, it will begin your résumé with a negative instead of a positive tone. Generally, your job objective will not be the position for which you are applying. Your career goals as well as your qualifications for the specific position can be more effectively discussed in your cover letter.

Personal/Religious/Political

Information that should not be included in your résumé is date of birth, marital status, number of children and health status. Avoid including information that could possibly work against you.

Inclusion of religious or political information should only be done after careful consideration. Hiring decisions cannot lawfully be based on this type of information but you should be aware of how such information can subtly influence an employer's opinion. If your beliefs in these areas are so strong that you would not work for someone opposed to your views, then you might consider including this type of information. On the positive side, such information may demonstrate your community involvement or show an employer that you have the courage of your convictions. **When in doubt leave it out!**

Miscellaneous Content Tips

- Do not write the word "Résumé" at the top of the page.
- Include contact information at the top of your résumé: name, address, telephone number(s), and e-mail address(es).
- Lead with your strengths. If your job title was more impressive than the place where you worked put your job title first.
- There is no rule that says you can only have one résumé. If you want a general résumé and a public interest-oriented résumé, do both. It is perfectly acceptable—and smart—to tailor your résumé to a particular market.
- Do not abbreviate (except for B.A., B.S., or J.D.). States should usually be written out.
- Be consistent with formatting. If you use B.A. for your undergraduate degree, use J.D. for your law degree. If you write out Bachelor of Arts, write out Juris Doctor. This consistency includes the location of city/state, location of dates, etc., in the formatting of each section.
- Use phrases, not complete sentences.
- Use action verbs in job descriptions.
- Use past tense for jobs previously held and present tense for current activities.
- Avoid emphasizing dates. Keep your left margin as uncluttered as possible so that the eye is easily drawn down the page. Dates usually look neater at the end of a job description. Spell out the names of months instead of using numbers. January-August 2003 is much easier to read than 1/02-8/03. You may say Summer 2003 or Summers & Holidays 1999-2002.
- Write numbers in numerical form to emphasize positives if possible. For example, "Increased sales 25%," "Supervised 25 line workers" or "Class Standing: Top 20%."
- When you write your résumé, keep in mind the qualities employers want.
- Do not write in the first person. Avoid the use of "I".
- Avoid wasting space by stating the obvious. "Health: Excellent" is a prime example.

Evaluate

Once you have drafted a first version of your résumé, it is vital that you read through and evaluate it. This step should be done at least several hours after you have finished your first draft so you will be looking at it carefully and with a fresh state of mind. First, check for spelling and grammatical errors. Then, go over the content.

Consider the following:

- Does the résumé portray the most positive image of you that is possible?
- Are there stronger ways to state what you have already said (check the Action Word list).
- Is it easy to read? Is there sufficient blank space? Are your phrases too long?
- Does it capture your essence?
- Do you like how it looks?
- Would you hire the person submitting this document?

Revise

Make all necessary corrections. Recheck for typos. (A good way to do this is to read your résumé backwards one word at a time.) Typographical errors on a résumé are fatal. They are evidence of a lack of attention to detail and follow-up, and may cause an employer to discard your résumé without reading further. This happens much more often than you might think.

Have your résumé proofread by a friend, classmate, or current employer. It is important to have your résumé reflect what you think is important to you. By having someone review it, you will learn what the résumé says to that person. Have them also check for any typos on their second reading of your résumé. Then, have it reviewed by the Career Services Office for additional feedback.

Producing & Printing

You may have drafted a terrific résumé, but if you do a poor job producing it on paper, the good effect can be lost. Before an employer even reads the first line on your résumé, the appearance of your résumé has already left a subtle first impression. Carefully consider the visual effect you want to create. **Regardless of how you produce your résumé, it is imperative that your written product be error free.**

Your choice in type styles should be conservative rather than flashy or bold. The size of type should also be appropriate. **Do not use a font smaller than 10 pitch.**

With the flexibility and quality of the computer programs available today, a résumé produced on a personal computer can be made to look essentially the same as a more expensive professionally-produced résumé. Another advantage of using a computer is that you can store your résumé and easily update it or make format changes.

Printing should be done, if possible, with a letter quality (laser) printer. The original should be on good quality paper of conservative color (i.e., white, ivory, or very light gray).

RÉSUMÉ SAMPLES

SUSAN J. AVOCAT

15 Nowhere Street
Portland, Maine 04103
(207) 761-XXXX
susan.avocat@maine.edu

3222 Somewhere Avenue
Atlanta, Georgia 24565
(404) 657-XXXX

EDUCATION

University of Maine School of Law, Portland, Maine
Candidate for Juris Doctor; degree expected May 2011

- Class Rank: Top Quarter
- Co-President, Maine Association of Public Interest Law (MAPIL)

University of New Hampshire, Durham, New Hampshire
Bachelor of Arts, *magna cum laude*, Economics & French, May 2003

- Dean's List all semesters
- Junior year abroad, University of Grenoble, France

EXPERIENCE

Fowler & Hogan, Manchester, New Hampshire

Law Clerk, Summer 2010

- Researched and wrote memoranda on a variety of subjects including real estate, estate planning and bankruptcy law.
- Assisted with research and briefs for two cases on appeal to the First Circuit Court of Appeals.

New Hampshire Legal Assistance, Portsmouth, New Hampshire

Legal Intern, Summer 2009

- Conducted interviews with clients (with attorney supervision).
- Researched legal issues involving domestic, landlord-tenant, commercial, and bankruptcy law, including numerous child custody cases..

Fidelity Trust, Boston, Massachusetts

Corporate Services Officer, 2007-08

- Assisted Senior Vice President of Corporate Marketing Services.
- Managed task force to design customer problem and inquiry system.
- Revised and evaluated earnings credit rate on deposits and customer relationship system.

Marketing Representative, 2006-07

- Marketed cash management services to corporate customers.
- Designed and implemented disbursement system tailored to customer needs.

Credit Analyst, 2003-05

- Generated and presented financial analysis of existing and proposed corporate customers to executive committee.
- Trained six other analysts.

SKILLS & INTERESTS

Trained in LexisNexis. Fluent in French. High degree of computer literacy. Hobbies include kayaking, skiing, competition sailing, and wildlife photography.

PETER R. LAWS

16 Fessup Street
Portland, Maine 04103
(207) 775-XXXX
peter.laws@maine.edu

EDUCATION

University of Maine School of Law, Portland, Maine
Juris Doctor Candidate, degree expected May 2013
Class Rank: 14th /95
Dean's List, Fall 2010
Member - Business Law Association, Sports and Entertainment Law Society

Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts
Bachelor of Arts, *cum laude*, Political Science, May 2010
Concentration in Environmental Studies
Varsity Tennis Team (Captain, senior year)

EXPERIENCE

Master Carpenter, Pittsfield, Massachusetts
Constructed saunas, barns, and several cabins for company that built the frame to finish construction. Supervised crew of 6 employees, managed work schedules and inspected finished product. Summers, 2005-06

Tennis Instructor, Williamstown, Massachusetts
Taught clinics under the auspices of the U.S. Lawn Tennis Association. Taught all levels, including coaching juniors for national competitions. Summers, 2003-04

Teaching Assistant, Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts
Conducted class discussions and labs for introductory course in Environmental Studies. Wrote exams and evaluated students' progress. 2004-05

SKILLS AND INTERESTS

Trained in Westlaw and LexisNexis
Proficient in Spanish
New England Tennis Association Championship (ages 16 and under), Semi-finalist 2004

ELLEN CALLAHAN BARTLEBY

46 Fiction Street
Yarmouth, Maine 04096
(207) 846-XXXX
ellen.bartleby@maine.edu

EDUCATION

University of Maine School of Law, Portland, Maine
Juris Doctor Candidate, May 2011
Moot Court Board
Vice President, Student Bar Association

University of Maine, Orono, Maine
Master of Public Administration, December 2003
Pi Alpha Alpha (National Honor Society for Public Affairs and Administration)

Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, North Carolina
Bachelor of Arts in Developmental Studies, May 2001

LEGAL EXPERIENCE

Smith, Jones & Ellsworth, Portland, Maine
Law Clerk, May 2010 - Present.
Research and draft memoranda, petitions, appellate briefs and other documents in areas including family law, tort litigation, Americans with Disabilities Act, and workers' compensation.

Farley, Walden, Morrissey & Rogers, Bangor, Maine
Law Clerk, May - August 2009
Researched and drafted memoranda on subjects including exhaustion of administrative remedies, due process for tenured teachers, negligent misrepresentation, debt collection practices, and assignability of employee's covenant not to compete.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Hancock County Planting Commission, Ellsworth, Maine
Community Planner, 2003 - 08
Coordinated and wrote comprehensive plans for the City of Ellsworth and several smaller towns. Reviewed municipal regulations: zoning, subdivision, and site plan review ordinances. Researched and analyzed recycling and solid waste options for municipalities and the region. Negotiated proposals, contracts, and grant applications.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Executive Committee, Big Brothers, Big Sisters
Volunteer, Maine Pretrial Services
Tutor, Seventh grade student with learning disabilities

COVER LETTER RESEARCH

Purpose

According to Marcia Fox, in her excellent book, Put Your Degree to Work (W.W. Norton & Co., New York, NY, 1979),

"A good cover letter...

- ...is cast in standard business format;
- ...addresses a person rather than a function;
- ...identifies the desired position or type of position quite specifically and may also explain the circumstances that led you to apply;
- ...focuses upon the writer's relevant skills, highlighting the résumé or adding information;
- ...refers briefly to the résumé or any other possible enclosures;
- ...requests an interview;
- ...thanks the employer;
- ...does not exceed one page of approximately four fairly brief paragraphs."

Personalization

The key to writing a good cover letter is to make it as personal as possible. All letters, except in those few cases where a name simply cannot be found, should be addressed to a particular person. Following are some good sources of information on law firms and other legal employers:

- *Martindale-Hubbell* (visit the on-line version at www.martindale.com)
- Law Firm websites (locate using a search engine or *Martindale-Hubbell*)
- Maine Law alumni directory (on-line)
- National Association of Law Placement (NALP)'s *Directory of Legal Employers* (available in hard copy in the Career Services Office and on-line at www.nalp.org)
- Maine Bar Directory and other legal directories (available in the Career Services Office)

If you do not know the name of the hiring partner and you are using *Martindale-Hubbell* or the employer's website to choose a contact person, address the letter to the managing partner or to some other partner who appears likely to be involved actively in recruiting. Alternatively, if the employer's office is local, call the office and ask the name of the proper person to contact. Also, consider addressing your letter to someone in the firm who practices in your specialty area or is an alumnus/a of your college or the law school. In other words, address it to someone who is likely to take an interested look at your résumé. If you simply have no way to find a name, address the letter to the Chairperson, Hiring Committee, and use Dear Sir/Madame as the salutation. There are virtually no situations, except blind ads, in which you will not have access in some way to the name of a person to whom the letter may be sent.

Personalizing your cover letter, however, goes far beyond addressing it to a particular person. An employer wants to know why you have written to that company/firm and how you can contribute to the organization. You must, therefore, do some homework on an employer before writing the cover letter. The Career Services Office has many resources available to help with this task.

Your goal is to find out as much as you can before writing the letter. The information you gather will enable you to demonstrate in your letter that the decision to write to that specific employer was an informed one, rather than simply because the name appeared on some employer list. In addition, you will also be able to pick out certain things in your background to stress, especially those most appropriate for the employer.

One way to personalize a cover letter is to point out some field of law the firm practices that corresponds to an area of law in which you are interested, have experience in, or have done well on in class. Find out how much of the employer's practice is devoted to your area of law as you can use this information to show you did your homework.

Following are some personalizing examples:

I was drawn to your firm because of your practice in civil litigation and corporate law—two areas of law in which I am particularly interested. I recently participated in the law school's Moot Court Competition and, before enrolling in law school, worked as a paralegal in the corporate department of the Boston law firm of Moe, Curly & Larry.

~ or ~

I am interested in a summer clerkship with the firm of Hard, Work & Always because of your specialization in the fields of trademark and patent law. These are two areas of law in which I have a keen interest and demonstrated aptitude.

Make sure that you have listed on your résumé any work experience relevant to your stated interests. If you did well in certain classes, consider mentioning the grades for those classes in your cover letter.

Locating Employers

There are many information sources available to you that will assist you in locating employers. The list shown on the previous page is a good place to start. Consider also consulting the Summer Evaluations Binder (available in the Career Services Office), Legal Newspapers (available in the law school's library and in the Career Services Office), state and federal government listings, bar association publications, graduate job bulletins (the Career Services Office has access to several dozen), and the various on-line sites listed in the Career Services Office's website.

COVER LETTER DEVELOPMENT

Organization

Although no one can tell you exactly what to write in your cover letters, keep in mind that goal is to catch the reader's attention, so that he or she will examine your résumé with genuine interest and (with luck) grant you an interview. Never sound desperate for an interview, even if you are. Remember too that your résumé and cover letter are a package deal. Both must be well done or the desired effect will be lost.

Just as your résumé should present a confident self-image, so should your cover letter. It should explain who you are and show your qualifications for and interest in the position. It should also end assertively.

Three or four brief paragraphs is usually the best length for a cover letter. Any longer and there is a good chance that a busy employer may not read it.

First Paragraph

The goal of the first paragraph of your letter is to pique the reader's interest and introduce yourself. The possible ways to begin your letters are limited only by your imagination and good taste (remember, though, that most lawyers and legal employers tend to be conservative in their approach to correspondence). If you are writing at the suggestion of a mutual friend of the employer, by all means name-drop. For example:

I am writing to you at the suggestion of Denise Wilson regarding an associate position with your firm. I am graduating this May from the University of Maine School of Law and am seeking a position with a firm in the commercial real estate area. From Ms. Wilson's description of your real estate practice, I believe there may be a good fit between my career interests and your firm's practice...

In most situations, you will not be able to start your letter with a personal tie. However, your goal is still to introduce yourself and gain the reader's attention. Often it is best to open simply with a statement:

I am a first year student at the University of Maine School of Law and am writing to express my interest in obtaining a summer internship with the American Civil Liberties Union. I have a strong background and sincere interest in public interest work, and would like to spend the summer gaining a more in-depth exposure to the area of civil rights law.

Alternatively, you might try leading directly with your interests and skills if they are well defined.

My extensive training and clinical experience in litigation and my keen interest in that area may be an asset to your firm. I will be graduating from the University of Maine School of Law this spring and would like to meet with you to discuss the possibility of an associate position with Smith, Jones & Moore.

Second Paragraph

In the second paragraph (and third, if necessary) you must persuade the reader that your background and special skills fit the needs of the organization. You can highlight information that is on your résumé such as relevant work experience and academic training, but don't merely repeat all of the information. You can also discuss things that are not on your résumé such as high grades in a relevant course concentration or other appropriate personal qualifications. Think about what skills you are selling. If

your grade point average is not your strongest selling point, sell your experience, your commitment to hard work, and your particular interest in that employer. The tone should be positive and confident, not cocky.

I have worked for both the Public Defender's and State Attorney's Offices while in school and have spent a considerable amount of time in court. In addition, I have received excellent training at the University of Maine School of Law which has won awards in outstanding law school trial competitions throughout the country...

Personalization of a cover letter can occur in the first or second paragraph, depending on your preferences. See the personalization samples above.

Closing Paragraph

Finally, close your letter on a positive note indicating your availability to interview:

I plan to be in the Boston area the week of October 1st and am most interested in meeting with you personally to discuss my particular qualifications. I can be reached during the daytime at 207/633-3333. Thank you for your consideration.

~ or ~

I enclose a copy of my résumé for your review. If you have any questions or require additional materials please contact me by telephone or email as indicated on the résumé and I will promptly supply them to you. I will be contacting you within the next two weeks regarding a possible interview. Thank you for your time and consideration.

It is often useful to say in the last paragraph that you will be contacting the employer about a possible interview. It helps show initiative and organization if you follow-up properly within the designated time frame. Do not always wait for employers to come to you. It is the go-getters in life who “get” the most!

Production

Your cover letters should be typed on the same paper as your résumé. It is also preferable to have envelopes that match your paper if possible, although it is unlikely that using plain, white envelopes will preclude you from getting interviews. Matching envelopes simply add the final professional touch.

At the end of this section is a format you can use in setting up your cover letters. As with your résumé, you may want to get an objective viewpoint by having someone you trust review your letters. Please feel free to see the Career Services Director if you wish to have a second or third opinion on your letters. Of course, it is essential that your cover letter be clean and error-free. As noted above, employers view the cover letter as a sample of your writing, so make sure you take the time to do a good job.

Mass Mailings

Many law students will send out résumés in mass quantities at some point in their law school careers. Mass mailings are not the most effective way to achieve good results but in some cases they are a useful way to reach a large number of employers quickly. Mass mailings can be successful if you know ahead of time how success is defined in this context. **Generally, you can expect about a 4-5% favorable response in a mass mailing**, which translates into 4-5 interviews per 100 letters. Although initially this figure sounds dismal, remember that you are sending out *unsolicited* résumés, and there may or may not be positions available with the employers.

The 4-5% favorable response rate is only a rough average, of course. Some students may receive many more invitations to interview, while others may receive none at all. Obviously, there are dynamics at work other than luck. The job market into which you are trying to place yourself is important. If you mail only to New York City, Washington, D.C., or Los Angeles (or Portland, Maine, for that matter), you will probably be disappointed with the results, as those markets are saturated. Consider other geographic areas that are less canvassed by law students. Look at smaller cities or areas surrounding bigger cities (e.g., Nashville, Charlotte, Arlington).

Even with mass mailings, it's a good idea to personalize them to the extent reasonably possible. Although a personalized mass mailing sounds like a contradiction in terms, mailings can be personalized much more than is commonly thought or done. One way is to write different letters for different types of employers. For example, you could tailor one letter for a small, general practice law firm, one for civil litigation firms, and one for government agencies. By having several different letters for different types of employers, you can make specific statements about why you want to work for each.

You can also have different letters for different geographic regions. For example, if you are originally from the Southeast but plan to remain in Maine to practice law, you might say something like this:

. . . After living and studying in Maine for the past three years, I have decided to make Portland my permanent home after graduating this spring. I will be taking the Maine Bar Exam in July.

Be somewhat creative with your cover letters. Try to put yourself in the position of the employer who has thirty letters résumés on her desk. Make your letter interesting and keep in mind the qualities the employer seeks. In sum, mass mailings may be part of your job search plan but they should not be the sole method for job searching.

One thing is for sure: if you don't send out any letters, you won't get any interviews.

Follow-up

Whether you write ten letters or one hundred, track the response you receive for each letter written. With a mass mailing you may receive responses ranging from invitations to interview (hurrah!), to letters explaining that there are currently no positions available and suggesting reapplication at a later date, to outright rejections. In many cases there will be no reply at all.

Unless you receive a definite rejection, consider a follow-up. If an employer suggests that you contact him or her at a later date, make a note to do so. In the situation where you do not hear from an employer at all, rather than assuming you have been rejected, call and ask about your status. Remember, law firms deal with an incredible amount of paper each day, and it is very easy for a letter to get the "back-burner" while more pressing matters are handled. In short, do not reject yourself. Do not give up! Mass mailings always generate large doses of rejection. Rejection is not failure. **There is no failure except in no longer trying.**

In addition, save the rejection letters. They may contain information that will be useful to you in later phases of your job search. For example, if an employer indicates there is no opening, you may be able to contact the author of the letter for more information about the legal market in that particular city or to learn more about that lawyer's practice area. Sometimes, writers will offer to assist you; often, you will get help if you ask for it. Consider discussing your results with the Career Services Director. (See the section on *Continued Communication* below for other ideas).

COVER LETTER SAMPLES

[date]

John Smith
2365 Hopeful Road
Portland, Maine 04102

O.W. Holmes, Jr.
O'Neill & O'Flannery
25 Park Avenue
New York, New York 13333

Dear Mr. Holmes:

I am a second year student at the University of Maine School of Law and am writing to inquire about summer employment opportunities with your firm. As a native New Yorker, I intend to return to New York to practice law—preferably labor law—upon completion of my studies. I understand that O'Neill & O'Flannery has a thriving labor practice, and I believe that I would greatly enjoy a summer associate position with you. A copy of my résumé is enclosed.

As you will note from the résumé, I have both academic and practical experience in labor matters. My undergraduate degree is in economics with a concentration in labor relations, and I spent this past summer working as a volunteer intern at the United Federation of Teachers, where I learned a first-hand about some of the issues confronting large unions. Here in law school I am currently taking a survey course in labor law and plan to enroll in a labor law seminar during the spring semester. Along the way I have developed excellent writing and researching skills, and hope to further improve my advocacy skills through participation in Moot Court.

I expect to be in New York the week of November 8th and would welcome the opportunity to speak with you at that time. I will be contacting your office within the next two weeks to determine a convenient time to meet. In the meantime, I can be reached by telephone at (207) 780-XXXX or by email at john.smith@maine.edu. I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

John Smith

Jane Jones
341 Congress Avenue
Portland, Maine 04102
(207) 555-1212

[date]

John Lawyer, III
Prescott, Abbott & Cane
One Maine Street
Suite 490
Portland, Maine 04103

Dear Mr. Lawyer:

I am writing to apply for a summer clerkship with Prescott, Abbott & Cane. I graduated from Vanderbilt University in 1997 and am currently in my second year at the University of Maine School of Law. My family roots are in southern Maine and I hope to pursue a legal career here following graduation.

Your firm interests me because of its substantial practice in commercial and corporate law—an area in which I would like to focus. Between college and law school I worked as an account manager for Proctor & Gamble. While there I learned a great deal about the business world, particularly with respect to the development, manufacture, and marketing of consumer products. My undergraduate degree in English helped me acquire excellent writing skills, and these have been sharpened further in my first year Legal Writing class. This past summer I took classes at the law school and worked as a part-time legal intern at the Maine State Chamber of Commerce. I believe this combination of experience and skills has equipped me well for your summer clerkship program.

I have enclosed my résumé for your review. If you have any questions or require any additional materials please contact me at (207) XXX-XXXX. I will be calling you in the next two weeks regarding a possible interview. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jane Jones
/enclosure

Earnest Student

1246 St. Jack Street, Apt. #8
Portland, ME 04102

[date]

Charlotte M. Counselor
Counselor & Billem, P.A.
777 Ocean Avenue
South Portland, ME 04106

Dear Ms. Counselor:

I am a first year student at the University of Maine School of Law and am writing to express my interest in working for your firm as a summer associate or intern. I understand from Professor Tom Reward that Counselor & Billem has a “boutique” practice in [area of law]. This is an area of law that interests me a great deal and I would very much like the opportunity to learn more about it—and about the practice of law generally—while contributing to your firm’s work this summer. Enclosed is a copy of my résumé which highlights my education and work experience.

I believe that I can offer you a strong combination of skills and personal qualities. I am an excellent writer and researcher and did especially well in my first semester Legal Writing and Contracts courses here at law school. I am also self-motivated and hard working, possess a talent for organization and detail, and thrive in challenging situations. During my pre-law school career as a resource coordinator with [company], I improved my already well-developed interpersonal skills and learned, in a very practical way, how to serve a diverse group of clients effectively.

I would greatly appreciate an opportunity to meet with you personally to discuss the opportunities available with your firm. I will contact your office within the next two weeks to investigate the possibility of such an interview.

Thank you for your consideration.

Very Truly Yours,

Earnest Student

[letterhead]

[date]

Ms. Susan D. Atty
Director of Legal Recruitment
City of Boston Law Department
City Hall, Room 111
Boston, MA 02201

Dear Ms. Atty:

I am a third year law student at the University of Maine School of Law and am writing to you, at the suggestion of Judge John Alden, to apply for the recently-advertised opening with your Special Litigation Unit. A copy of my résumé is enclosed for your review.

I understand that the Law Department offers entry-level lawyers the opportunity to work on cases from their inception and to follow them through litigation, something that I find especially appealing. I spent this past summer as an intern at the U.S. Attorney's Office in Portland, Maine, and the previous summer working for Judge Alden of the Massachusetts District Court, so I have had the good fortune to observe the litigation process closely from different perspectives. Litigation and trial practice are how I want to spend my career. I have developed strong research, writing, and analytical skills through my academic and work experiences, and have honed those skills still further while serving as an editor of Maine's *Ocean & Coastal Law Journal*. With this combination of skills and experience I believe that I am well prepared to contribute effectively to the work of the Law Department.

I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to meet with you regarding the position and my qualifications. I will contact your office within the next few days regarding a possible interview. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Priscilla Mullins

REFERENCE LIST COMPILATION

References

List at least three (but no more than five) references. Remember that you are listing professional references; therefore, you should include persons who have personal knowledge of your abilities as a worker or a student—that is, people who have been in a position to observe the quality of your performance “on the job” (e.g., law school professors and employment supervisors). Needless to say, if you know prominent members of the bar or the community in which you plan to work who are willing to speak on your behalf, you should include them among your references. "Character References" (such as those from your camp counselor, rabbi, or elementary school teacher) are usually not necessary and will only be solicited by an employer who desires such referrals.

Always get permission to use a person’s name as a reference. When asking them for their permission, consider giving your references a copy of your résumé and a written summary of your goals, ideas, and geographical preferences so they are up-to-date on your accomplishments and ambitions. It is also helpful to keep your references informed about the positions for which you are applying and the status of your applications. That way, your references will be able to speak intelligently to employers who call, and they may be able to supplement the employer’s questions with facts and information not contained in your application materials. Finally, it will give your references the opportunity to speak with those same employers if they happen to meet them in an informal setting.

Reference List Development

List each person's name, position, employer, work address and telephone number. It is good idea to use the same header that you used on your résumé as a heading or entitle the document “REFERENCES FOR (YOUR NAME)”. Use the space on your reference to make a visually appealing list of references. Do not clump all of the references in a small section at the top of an 8.5" x 11" piece of paper. This document will be viewed as a part of your application package and should present the same professional image as your résumé and cover letter.

REFERENCE LIST SAMPLES

REFERENCES FOR SUSAN J. AVOCAT

15 Nowhere Street
Portland, Maine 04103
(207) 761-XXXX

3222 Somewhere Avenue
Atlanta, Georgia 24565
(404) 657-XXXX

Lionel Woods, Esq.
Managing Partner
Niklaus & Woods, LLP
1200 Putting Green
Manchester, New Hampshire 03104
(603) XXX-XXXX

Nancy Traveler
Professor of Law
University of Maine School of Law
246 Deering Avenue
Portland, Maine 04102
(207) 780-XXXX

Martha Smith, Esq.
Senior Attorney
New Hampshire Legal Assistance
2400 North Winding Hollow Avenue
Portsmouth, New Hampshire 03801
(603) XXX-XXXX

Alvin Gore
Vice President
Fidelity Trust
65 Congress Street, Suite 5
Boston, Massachusetts 01970
(617) XXX-XXXX

**REFERENCES FOR
PETER R. LAWS**

16 Fessup Street
Portland, Maine 04103
(207) XXX-XXXX

Melvyn Czar
Professor of Law
University of Maine School of Law
246 Deering Avenue
Portland, Maine 04102
(207) 780-XXXX

Ervin Earth
Professor of Environmental Studies
Amherst College
Olin Science Building
34 Main Street
Amherst, Massachusetts 03857
(617) 465-XXXX

Roger Martindale
Former Owner, Pittsfield Construction
2345 Oakland Avenue
Pittsfield, Massachusetts 03281
(617) 235-XXXX

**REFERENCES FOR
ELLEN CALLAHAN BARTLEBY**

46 Fiction Street
Yarmouth, Maine 04096
(207) 846-XXXX

Whitley Jones, Esq.
Managing Partner
Smith, Jones, & Ellsworth
345 Congressional Street
Portland, Maine 04101
(207) 783-XXXX

Jon Scrivener
Supervising Attorney
Farley, Walden, Morrissey & Rogers
383 Nevermore Street
Bangor, Maine 04401
(207) XXX-XXXX

Thomas Warden
Professor of Law
University of Maine School of Law
246 Deering Avenue
Portland, Maine 04102
(207) 780-XXXX

WRITING SAMPLE SELECTION

Many legal employers ask for a writing sample in addition to a cover letter and résumé. Ideally, the writing sample should be somewhat brief, generally 5-10 pages. If possible it should contain examples of detailed legal analysis, and perhaps also persuasive writing. Students typically use a memorandum or brief written in the first year of law school or a memorandum written during a summer clerkship. If your best piece of writing is too long, you can either use just a part of it and attach a note indicating that the writing sample is an excerpt from a longer piece of writing (which you should describe in a sentence or two), or provide the entire piece and attach a note indicating that you have enclosed the work in its entirety for context, but refer the reader to pages X-Y as the writing sample.

When preparing your writing sample, remember:

- It must be error free. It is sometimes useful to have a classmate, writing instructor, professor or the Career Services Director review it for content and accuracy.
- It should not be professionally bound. Chances are, it will be photocopied for the employer's hiring committee and only the recruiting director's secretary will get the benefit of your added effort and expense.
- If you produced the document while working for a firm or other organization during the summer, you must obtain their permission before reproducing it. Delete all references to clients or opposing parties.
- Prepare at least two writing samples. If you plan to apply for clerkships later, you may need more than one.
- Be prepared to discuss the content of your writing sample during an interview. There is no better way for an interviewer to test your ability than to discuss case law and theory with you.

Writing Sample Review

In thinking about which writing sample to use, consider the position for which you are applying and the type of work that you will be doing if you get the job. For example, if you are applying for a law clerk position, a detailed legal writing assignment or law review article (unedited) will show how well you analyze issues and write over an extended period of time. On the other hand, if you are applying for a job with the District Attorney's office, you may want to choose something that reflects your ability to write a well constructed brief in a shorter time frame.

Having said all of this, it is still of the utmost importance that you present a solid piece of writing which reflects your abilities. **If you must sacrifice direct relevance for quality, do so.**

A WORD ABOUT WRITTEN APPLICATIONS

Distribution: Targeting Employers

Once you have finished both your cover letter and résumé it is time to send them out to employers. Targeting potential employers properly will yield better results and is more likely to land you in a job that you will enjoy. Before sending out your résumé, it is important to do some self-evaluation if you did not do so prior to writing your résumé. This should help you decide whether you really want to work in a particular setting.

Another important task in targeting is to decide which locations to explore. Many people want to live and work in big cities and as a result these markets are flooded with potential employees. You may want to consider surrounding areas of big cities or smaller cities. Hometowns are usually good markets because you have an obvious personal connection. *Remember, the more flexible you are about the areas you target, the more likely you are to get positive responses to your mailings.*

The next aspect of targeting is to consider the type of practice that interests you. Not surprisingly, it is usually to your advantage to target employers that practice in those areas of law in which you have prior experience or in which you have done well. This type of targeting is also useful when the number of firms in a city overwhelms you, and you need a starting place.

Transcripts

Many legal employers will ask to see a copy of your transcript at some point in the application process. This may work in your favor—or it may not, depending on your academic performance. If your grades are less than stellar, be prepared to focus on the positives. For example, if your grades have improved considerably following your first year, the transcript will show a lower GPA with steady upward progress. In addition, if you have had other experiences that show your abilities, be sure to mention those in your cover letter and highlight them in your résumé.

Transcripts can be obtained from the Registrar's Office. You may then photocopy additional copies as needed. Most employers do not require an official transcript, at least not for your initial application; and in those cases, a photocopy is acceptable.

Note: Please plan ahead so that you are not running to the Registrar's office 5 minutes before your application is due. Last-second transcript requests are stressful for you and unfair to the Registrar.

CONTINUED COMMUNICATION

The importance of continued communication cannot be stressed strongly enough. Those students who maintain prompt, courteous and continued communication get better responses and are more likely to receive offers. Employers naturally prefer go-getters over employees who wait passively, hoping that a job will come to them.

You should keep track of all correspondence sent to employers (what was sent to whom, and when). In addition, keep track of all correspondence received from each employer. Make a list of each organization with its address, telephone number and individual contact. Include columns for Information Sent/Date; Information Received/Date; Follow-up Phone Calls/Date; Results. This will keep you better organized. It is important to send follow-up letters and make phone calls shortly after the employer has received your résumé and cover letter.

Follow-up Phone Calls

Once you have sent your résumé and cover letter, it is often a good idea to follow-up with a telephone call about one week to ten days later. This is especially true if you mentioned such a call in your cover letter. The phone call should be made to the contact person. Tell her/him that you sent your résumé and a cover letter on the date the letter was sent. Indicate that you are calling to set up an interview or to schedule a meeting with the contact person to discuss your résumé and qualifications as well as the opportunities available at their organization. Always try to sound positive and optimistic. Do not sound defeated. If you are making many calls in one day, take breaks to ensure that your "best" is coming across to the employer. Be flexible about times and dates—remember that lawyers are very busy. If you are able to schedule an interview, get all the relevant information: date, time, location, and name of interviewer. In either case, politely thank the contact for his or her time. If you are unable to schedule an interview, consider following-up with a letter of interest.

Thank You Letters

After that all-important job interview, consider sending a thank you letter. In the letter you should thank the addressee for taking the time to discuss the available position or employment opportunities with the organization. You should say what impressed you about the organization. You may also explain (briefly) why you think you would be an asset to the organization or why you are especially interested in this particular organization. If you met with several people (as is often the case with off-campus "call back" interviews), make a note of their names. That way you can either send them each a personal letter or ask the person to whom you send a single letter (generally the Hiring Partner or Manager) to convey your thanks to the other members of the interview team—whom you name.

Thank you letters should be sent out within a few days after the interview to show promptness and courtesy.

Sample Thank You Letter

[date]

Daniel Saguario, Deputy Defender
Office of the State Appellate Defender
Fourth Judicial Circuit
300 East Monroe, Suite 102
Prickly Pear, Arizona 85701

Dear Mr. Saguario:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity last week to interview with the Appellate Defender's Office for the position of Appellate Attorney. I enjoyed speaking with you and would like to reaffirm my interest in working in the Fourth Judicial Circuit.

I was especially attracted by the opportunity to gain immediate experience in the criminal appeals area and by your office's team approach to training new attorneys. As we discussed, I intend to relocate to Arizona and will be taking the Arizona Bar Exam in July of this year.

I have ordered the transcript you requested and it should arrive in your office within the next 10 days. Again, I enjoyed speaking with you about both the attorney position and recreational opportunities in the Southwest. I look forward to hearing from you in the near future and may be contacted at (207) 780-4796 or *arlene.cactus@maine.edu*.

Sincerely,

Arlene Cactus

Letters of Continued Interest

Letters of continued interest are used when you have interviewed with an employer and received an "early" offer, but you have not yet made a decision and want to express your continued interest. This is very important because it is never a good thing to leave an employer hanging. Such letters should generally be sent out promptly after an offer is made. The letter should thank the employer for the offer, tell him or her why you were impressed with the organization, and express your interest. You should also give the employer an approximate date when you intend to reach a decision and indicate that you will contact them upon reaching that decision. Be sure that you do contact them within the time frame established in your letter. These letters should be sent to the Hiring Coordinator.

Sample Letter of Continued Interest

[date]

Richard J. Daley
Hiring Partner/Coordinator
Sidley & Kirkland, LLP
Suite 2200
40 North Wacker Drive
Chicago, IL 60606

Dear Mr. Daley:

Thank you for your offer of a Summer Clerkship position with Sidley & Kirkland. I was extremely impressed with your firm during my visit on [date], and I appreciate your expression of confidence in me.

I am very interested in your offer and eager to finalize my summer plans. I expect to continue interviewing in the next few weeks and will make my decision as soon as possible. I will contact you upon reaching my decision and will most certainly be in touch with you before [date].

Again, I appreciate the courtesies extended to me during my visit to Chicago. I enjoyed both the interview and the social time I had with the new associates. Sidley & Kirkland is receiving my most serious consideration.

Sincerely,

A.B. Hoffman

Acceptance Letters

Once you have decided to accept an offer, you may call the organization and accept, but you should always write a formal acceptance letter as well. Over the telephone or during a meeting with the Hiring Coordinator, you should establish several things: starting date, salary, the number of weeks (if a summer clerkship), and the need for bar membership (if applicable). The confirmation letter should be addressed to the Hiring Coordinator. It should state your acceptance of the position and the date you are to begin. You can also confirm your salary in this letter as well. This letter should be sent a few days after the oral confirmation of the specified terms of employment.

Sample Acceptance Letter

[date]

Sherman Trusting
Administrative Officer
Federal Trade Commission
Room 300J, 550 67th Street
Topeka, Kansas 54908

Dear Mr. Trusting:

I am happy to accept your offer as a staff attorney in the Topeka, Kansas office of the Federal Trade Commission. As we discussed, I will begin work on September 1, 1999 at the GS-11 level. During the summer, I will be studying for the Kansas Bar Exam at my parents' home in Shawnee Mission, Kansas, and can be reached by telephone (913) 375-1128 or by email at *manuel.poly@maine.edu*.

I am eager to begin work in the Consumer Protection Division and look forward to seeing you in September.

Sincerely,

Manuel Poly

Declining an Offer Letter

Whenever declining an offer make sure you do so on a positive note. You never know what the future may hold. Someday you may be applying to this employer again or working in the same community. Indicate that you enjoyed meeting with them and appreciate their offer. It is also important to decline offers that you are not seriously considering as soon as possible to allow another applicant, possibly a fellow classmate, the opportunity to receive an offer from the employer. Please do not sit on offers too long. If you are in doubt, please see the NALP Standards and Guidelines (available through the Career Services Office) regarding the time frames for accepting outstanding offers.

Sample Letter Declining Job Offer

[date]

Anne Ethical
Common Cause
1250 Connecticut Ave., NW #600
Washington D.C. 20036

Dear Ms. Ethical:

I enjoyed speaking with you last week and very much appreciate your offer of a staff attorney position with Common Cause. As I emphasized during the closing interview, I was impressed with your organization's mission and with all of the attorneys I had the opportunity to meet.

After careful consideration, however, I have decided to accept an in-house legal position in Houston, Texas with Exxon Corporation. I am therefore unable to accept your offer.

Again, I appreciate your confidence in me and hope our professional paths will cross in the future.

Sincerely,

Douglas Deeper