

**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.

*Fall 2015
Widener University Delaware Law School
Legal Education Institute
Career Development Office*

CONTENTS

The Resume: Format & Examples.....	1
General Format.....	2
Action Verbs for "Experience" Section.....	3
Questions and Answers on Resume Writing.....	4
Sample Resumes.....	9
Paralegal Resume Samples.....	9
Legal Nurse Consultant Resume Sample.....	13
Questions and Answers on Cover Letter Writing.....	14
Writing Cover Letters.....	16
Helpful Websites for Paralegals.....	18

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 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 easy to read and 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 on 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

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.

Further, the value of presenting an attractive resume should not be underestimated. Each resume should be printed on a substantial grade of stationary in a conservative color (white, off-white, cream) without imprinted fibers (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, italics uppercase letters or bold face type will appeal to employers. Be careful to avoid using too much highlighting as it may ultimately distract the reader.

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.

GENERAL FORMAT

NAME

Street Address
City, State Zip code
Phone Number, Email Address

EDUCATION

Widener University Delaware Law School
Legal Education Institute
Wilmington, Delaware

Degree/Certificate expected Month, Year

GPA: List only if above a 3.0
Honors: Can be listed next (e.g., Awards; Scholarships)
Activities: List school activities (student organizations; roles or positions held in the organization)
Memberships: List professional associations in which you are active

Name of School
City, State

Degree awarded Month, Year

Major:
Minor:
GPA: (or class 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 or periods; use present tense if still with this employer; otherwise, use past tense. List all jobs in reverse chronological order with the most recent job listed first)

Name of Employer
City, State

Dates Worked

INTERESTS

This section is optional.

ACTION VERBS

accepted	convicted	guided	provided
accomplished	coordinated	handled	publicized
achieved	corrected	held	pursued
acquitted	corresponded	highlighted	questioned
adapted	counseled	identified	read
added	created	implemented	recommended
administered	critiqued	improved	reconciled
admitted	cross-examined	increased	recorded
advised	debated	informed	rectified
advocated	defended	initiated	redirected
afforded	defined	innovated	reduced
aided	delivered	inquired	referred
allocated	demonstrated	instituted	reported
amended	deposed	instructed	represented
analyzed	described	interpreted	researched
answered	designed	interrogated	resolved
appeared	determined	interviewed	responded
applied	deterred	introduced	revealed
appointed	developed	investigated	reviewed
approved	devised	launched	revised
arbitrated	devoted	litigated	ruled
argued	directed	maintained	scheduled
arranged	disseminated	managed	selected
articulated	distributed	maximized	served
assembled	documented	mediated	settled
assessed	drafted	mobilized	solved
assisted	edited	modified	specialized
attained	effected	monitored	specified
attended	elucidated	named	sponsored
authored	enforced	negotiated	strategized
balanced	engaged	observed	strengthened
billed	engineered	obtained	studied
briefed	entered	operated	submitted
budgeted	established	orchestrated	subpoenaed
catalogued	evaluated	organized	suggested
chaired	executed	oriented	summarized
challenged	exercised	originated	supervised
changed	expanded	oversaw	supported
classified	explained	participated	surveyed
collected	explored	persuaded	targeted
combined	exposed	pinpointed	taught
communicated	facilitated	planned	tracked
compared	familiarized	predicted	trained
competed	filed	prepared	traveled
compiled	financed	presented	tried
concluded	focused	prevailed	updated
conducted	formulated	produced	verified
constructed	fulfilled	processed	won
consulted	gathered	proofed	worked
contracted	generated	prosecuted	wrote
convinced	governed	protected	used

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON RESUME WRITING

Below are frequently asked questions. 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, 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 overemphasizing 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 workloads, 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 Resumes.

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 should not be 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 important 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. 12. You should confirm this information with your references, who, ideally should be able to speak to your legal 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 (302) 477-2163 or career.development@widener.edu to review your resume draft and discuss your career options.

PARALEGAL RESUME
STUDENT WITH UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE

MARY S. CARTWRIGHT
360 Terrace Park Road
Wilmington, Delaware 10000
302-555-5555
Mary.Cartwright@gmail.com

EDUCATION:

Widener University Delaware Law School Paralegal Certificate expected May 2016
Legal Education Institute
Wilmington, Delaware

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

The Pennsylvania State University B.S. received May 2014
University Park, Pennsylvania

Major: Communications
Minor: Business/Liberal Arts

EXPERIENCE:

John A. Lobby, Attorney at Law August 2014 to Present
Wilmington, Delaware

Legal Secretary. Assist with drafting and preparation of wills, trusts, probate documents, individual and estate tax returns, and real estate documents; and handle telephone and written correspondence, bookkeeping, payroll and general office duties.

Everson Festival Association May 2012 to August 2013
Claymont, Delaware

Customer Service Representative. 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 2010 to 2015

Arts and Crafts instructor, Herrick House for Children 2013, 2014

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

REFERENCES

Professor Thomas Torts
Widener University Delaware Law School
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 Delaware Law School
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 Delaware Law School
Legal Education Institute
Wilmington, Delaware

B.S. expected May 2016
A.S. awarded May 2014

G.P.A.: 3.750
Major: Paralegal Studies
Honor: Dean's List
Research: Completed research in the area of insurance law under the
direction of Professor John Williams
Coursework: Advanced Trial Practice; Evidence

EXPERIENCE

Spark & Hartman
Wilmington, DE

January 2014 to present

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 in trial preparation and document organization.

The Law Office of William Harker
Philadelphia, PA

March 2012 – December 2013

Secretary. Scheduled attorneys' calendar. Organized and retrieved case files. Drafted correspondence to opposing counsel and courts. Typed legal documents.

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

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Philadelphia Paralegal Association
National Association for Paralegals

INTERESTS

Sailing, literature, travel

LEGAL NURSE CONSULTANT

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

EDUCATION

Widener University Delaware Law School
Legal Education Institute
Wilmington, Delaware

Legal Nurse Consultant
expected May 2016

Gloucester County College
Gloucester, NJ

Associate Degree in Nursing
awarded May 2014

WORK EXPERIENCE

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

April 2014 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 2011 to June 2013

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 2009 to April 2011

Senior Staff Nurse, Surgical ICU
Staff Nurse, Critical Care

April 2009- April 2011
June 2007- April 2009

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. Providing 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. In addition, you are encouraged to research the employer's web page to gain invaluable insights and information.

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

A. It is best to address your cover letter to the employer's designated contact person. If this information is unavailable, it is suggested that 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 Code
Phone number
Email Address

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 to 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.

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.

Your Name
Your Address
Phone
Email address

Date

Contact Person, Title
Employer Name
Address
City, State, Zip

Dear _____:

I am currently enrolled in Widener University Delaware Law School Legal Education Institute's paralegal program, pursuing a certificate in Paralegal Studies. I was intrigued by the paralegal opportunity presented in your ad in the *Daily Paper*, and am writing to express my interest in applying for the position.

As my resume indicates, I have worked as a legal secretary for two local insurance defense firms. As a result, I have gained experience in many aspects of litigation, and regularly assist in preparing answers to complaints and responses to various discovery motions. I also have a keen eye for detail and excellent organizational skills, which were developed while managing the court calendars and filings of multiple attorneys. In addition, my paralegal classes at LEI have strengthened my legal research and writing skills and knowledge of local civil procedure.

I would appreciate the opportunity to speak with you further concerning my qualifications and how I can contribute to your firm. I can be reached at xxxx. I look forward to hearing from you and thank you for your consideration of my resume.

Very truly yours,

Your name

Enclosure

HELPFUL WEBSITES FOR PARALEGALS

www.martindale.com – Online listing of law firms. Search engine facilitates the identification of firms by city, state and/or practice area.

<http://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.indeed.com – Time saving site that aggregates job listings from various other job boards.

www.idealists.org – A database of job listings in the nonprofit sector.

<http://www.job-hunt.org/law.shtml> – Job board aggregator specializing in jobs for attorneys, legal assistants, paralegals, legal secretaries, etc.

American Association for Paralegal Education
www.aafpe.org

American Bar Association
www.abanet.org

Association of American Law Schools
www.aals.org

National Association for Law Placement
www.nalp.org

National Federation of Paralegal Associates
www.paralegals.com

National Paralegals Association
www.nationalparalegal.org

Delaware Paralegal Association
www.deparalegals.org

Philadelphia Association of Paralegals
www.philaparalegals.com

Maryland Association of Paralegals
www.mdparalegals.org

The Paralegal Association of New Jersey
www.laanj.org