

**HOW TO CREATE**

**THE PERFECT**

**RESUME**

**CAPTURE** the employer's attention

**HOLD** the employer's attention

**CONVINCE** the employer that he/she needs  
what you have to offer

## **GENERAL FORMATTING ISSUES**

**Resume Length:** One page is preferable for law school students and recent graduates, but there is no hard and fast rule regarding page length. Unless you have significant work experience, you should have no problem limiting your resume to one page. If you cannot limit your resume to one page (because otherwise you would sacrifice important content), then make sure the information on the second page takes up at least 1/2 of the page.

**Font size and styles:** Times New Roman, Garamond, or Book Antiqua are best. 10 point font is the smallest recommended font size. Anything in the 10-12 point range is acceptable.

**Margins:** 1-inch margins all around, but you can slightly decrease the margins to make space (do not recommend decreasing beyond 0.75-inch margins)

**Paper:** High quality, crisp white paper looks best, but ivory is certainly acceptable.

**Organization:** organize into sections and use indents, bold, caps, underlines, and/or italics to draw the eye easily through. Make sure you have the proper balance of text and white space so that your resume does not look too sparse or too busy.

**Do not include any of the following:** an objective line, a personal section, “references available upon request” line, your LSAT score, or a photo of yourself.

# LETTERHEADS/HEADINGS

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To get them to appear in the header section, double click at the top of the word document to open the header section

## MARTIN SEXTON

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1234 Americana Lane, Naples, Florida 34109 • (239) 555-8097 • [msexton@avemarialaw.edu](mailto:msexton@avemarialaw.edu)

*Details: Name in Garamond (16 pt) in all caps bold. Hit Enter. Row of dashes --- followed by "enter" gives you line. Garamond (12 pt) regular. Insert symbols for breaks. Undo hyperlink for email.*

## MARTIN SEXTON

1234 Americana Lane, Naples Florida 34109  
(239)555-8097; [msexton@avemarialaw.edu](mailto:msexton@avemarialaw.edu)

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*Details: Name in Times New Roman (18 pt) in small caps bold. Centered. Next lines in 12 pt font, regular. Enter. Undo hyperlink for email. Row of underscores (shift on dash button) \_\_\_\_ followed by "enter" gives you bold line.*

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## MARTIN SEXTON

Local: 1234 American Lane, Naples, FL • Permanent: 589 Maple Rd., Portland, OR  
(239)555-8097 • [msexton@avemarialaw.edu](mailto:msexton@avemarialaw.edu)

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*Details: Row of equal signs ==== followed by "enter". Name in Book Antiqua (16 pt) bold caps. Following lines in 12 pt., regular. Insert symbol for break. Undo hyperlink for email. Double line.*

**If Your Resume Is Two Pages Long You Need A Heading On The Second Page**

## MARTIN SEXTON

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## **EDUCATION**

**School:** Valparaiso University Law School – Valparaiso, IN

**Degree:** *Juris Doctor* Expected, May 2012 – **OR** – Candidate for J.D., Expected May 2012

\* Whatever you choose, J.D. or Juris Doctor, just make sure that law school and undergrad are consistent, i.e. J.D. with B.A.

**GPA & Class Rank:** If 3.0 or above, include it, e.g., 3.3/4.0  
Generally, include rank if top 1/3 or better (must be official)

Highlight any high grades, such as A's in Legal Research and/or Legal Writing

**Honors:** Dean's List - state how many semesters  
Describe scholarships so the reader knows what they mean

**Law Review and other journals:** If you haven't participated yet, but you have been invited to participate, state it as such "*Valparaiso Law Review* invitee, 2010-2011 school year". If your piece has been chosen for publication, list it in blue book form with a notation such as "publication pending" or "to be published in Spring 2010 edition". If you had an editorial or managerial role, say so, and feel free to elaborate regarding your duties.

**Competitions – Moot Court and others:** Make sure you describe your results, if your results were good, or participation in Moot Court Society. If you were selected but haven't participated yet, say so.

**Student Organizations:** State the name of the organization, your involvement (i.e., member or officer) and elaborate with respect to your involvement.

**Clinical Experience:** Do not include in education section – put in experience section.

**Study Abroad:** If you got credit from Valparaiso, then list the program under Valparaiso. State where you studied, when you studied, and what you studied.

**Undergrad and any other degrees:** this will be in the same format as law school, but if you had a lot of undergrad activities, just choose the ones the employer will find most significant.

## **EXPERIENCE**

This section can include both paid and unpaid opportunities (though you do not have to state that something was unpaid unless there is a reason to point that out), as well as legal and non-legal experiences. If you had a career prior to attending law school, then you should consider breaking down this section in two parts: (1) legal experience, and (2) other experience. List your experiences in reverse chronological order.

### **FORMAT**

**Name of Employer** – City, State

*Title*, dates of employment (dates can be right-justified if you prefer. Spell out or abbreviate the months – do not use number format)

### **For example:**

**Schiff & Waite, P.A.**, Fort Wayne, IN

*Law Clerk*, May 2009 – Present

**Exception to reverse chronological order:** multiple jobs for the same employer go under one heading, with the most recent position listed first. For example: let's say you did on-campus work study during spring semester of first year; then you interned for the prosecutor's office that summer; and the following year you became the research assistant to one of your professors. You would put both the research assistant position and work study position underneath the same Valparaiso University Law School heading, leading with the more recent research position.

### **DESCRIBING YOUR WORK**

**Exercises:** Before you delve into the descriptions, begin with these simple exercises to help you get started.

- 1) Choose at least five qualities/skills of an ideal lawyer and under each quality write down specific experience(s) you've had which prove that the quality applies to you. This will help you identify how the things you've done in the past (legal and non-legal) translate into things you can do for employers in the future.
- 2) Create a two-column sheet for each experience. In the left-hand column write down, in great detail, everything you did and how often you did it. In the right-hand column write down the accomplishments that spring from the duties in the left-hand column. Ask yourself how well you did the things in the left-hand column.

*What are your accomplishments? Ask yourself...*

- Were you commended for your work on a particular project?
- Were you an expert or go-to person for anything in particular?
- Were documents that you drafted used with little or no edits?
- Were you trusted with additional responsibilities – over and above others at your level?
- Did you receive positive performance reviews?
- Did you contribute to marketing efforts?
- Did you have any ideas that resulted in more efficient/streamlined operations?
- Did you develop trusting relationships with clients?
- Did you bring in clients?
- Did you resolve disputes?
- Did you solve problems?
- Did you handle a heavy client/customer load compared to others?
- Did you save your employer money?
- What did you do that made the firm, company, or organization better for hiring you?
- Being *part* of an accomplishment counts too. If you worked with others to do something noteworthy, write it down.

Now, you might be thinking, *but I was just an intern*. Well, as a law school student or new graduate, you can set yourself apart in the following ways:

- Was your position competitive, i.e., a highly coveted internship?
- Be specific – say more than just “assisted with cases”, show how you assisted. Ask yourself what purpose your work served. How did you contribute to the overall success of the case/resolution of the issue?
- If you worked in a specific practice that you want to continue with, use the buzz words
- What did you learn, i.e., gained insight on...gained exposure to...

**Phraseology:** action verbs and results!

- Do not need complete sentences
- Keep descriptions concise by removing “a” “an” “the”
- Use action verbs and skills where appropriate
- Introductory phrases unnecessary: don’t say “Responsibilities included drafting motions to dismiss,” instead just say “Drafted motions to dismiss”
- Use present tense for jobs you currently hold and past tense for former jobs

- **BE SPECIFIC**

- Accomplishments

- “Began as a volunteer; hired and subsequently promoted based on performance.”
- “After brief training period, handle heavy caseload with minimal supervision.”
- If you worked on a team to accomplish something, you must make that clear: “Contributed X to Y project” or “Along with another intern...”

- Quantifiers – numbers and percentages jump out on resumes and are helpful in terms of providing evidence of accomplishments:

- “Managed caseload of 25 clients.”
- “Employed up to thirty hours per week while attending law school full-time.”
- “Increased productivity by 10%.”

- Skills gained on the job and abilities sharpened because of them:

- Instead of: “Reviewed documents,”
- Say: “Assessed and analyzed purchase and sale contracts, balance sheets, profit/loss and income statements.”
- Instead of: “Researched employment law issues,”
- Say: “Researched numerous employment law issues including wrongful termination, wage and hour disputes, and discrimination.”

**Bullets vs. Paragraph style:** Bullets describing your work experience and accomplishments are preferable (especially for a law student resume) to the paragraph style. Your experience will stand out far more when described in bullet format.

## **OTHER SECTIONS (if applicable)**

**Community Service:** This is especially important for public service and public interest employers. Treat it much like the Experience section. If you have not done much volunteer work, creating a separate section is not necessary. You can include service work in your law school activities section. However, legal or law-related pro bono work can be included under “Experience.”

**Personal Interests:** This can be a separate section or you can combine it with Community Service by just calling the section “Interests”. Although this section is by no means a must, hobbies or interests can show rainmaking potential (an obvious one would be golf); personal characteristics like self-discipline, leadership, and teamwork; community service; or show excellence outside of school and work (i.e., marathon runner, Blackbelt in Karate or training for one). Remember that personal interests should show something special about you if you are going to include them on your resume.

**Publications:** You can treat this as a separate section if you have published outside of the education realm. Otherwise, it is just as effective to include publications under the Education section.

**Languages:** Be specific about your proficiency level, e.g., fluent in, proficient in, conversant in, etc.

**Bar Admission:** Include this at the very top of your resume when you begin looking for post-graduate employment. Depending on where you are in the bar admission process, here are the various options for language about your admission status.

Sitting (or Will Sit) for July 2009 Indiana Bar Examination

Sat for July 2012 Illinois Bar Examination; awaiting results

Passed July 2010 Indiana Bar Examination; admission pending

Indiana State Bar, October 2009



## **HANDLING CONTROVERSIAL ITEMS**

Religion

Politics

Gay & Lesbian Issues

Fraternities/Sororities (Party on dude)

Gun Issues (in the form of belonging to the NRA or being an avid hunter)

Abortion

The two extreme ways to deal with these issues:

- 1) Leave it on in all its glory and deal with the consequences.
- 2) Leave it off entirely.

The middle ground options:

- 1) Have different versions of your resume for different employers.
- 2) Include the highly charged item on every resume you send but only if the item provides you with transferable skills. Use this litmus test: Was the value of the experience more important than the potential downside of a controversial topic?
- 3) Water down the item by keeping the transferable skills without mentioning the specific controversy.