

Legal Resume Checklist

A Practical Guide for Lawyers & Legal Professionals

Use this checklist to elevate your impact and position yourself competitively for your next legal role. The following items reflect the expectations of legal hiring managers, recruiters, and cross-functional partners.

1. CORE RESUME STANDARDS (Must-Haves)

Your resume should meet these foundational criteria before you refine anything else.

- ☐ One-page length for most; two pages for those with 10+ years of experience
- ☐ Clean, modern layout with consistent spacing and simple section headers
- ☐ Professional email address and up-to-date LinkedIn URL
- ☐ Clean design elements that don't break applicant tracking system (ATS) algorithms
- ☐ Present tense for current roles; past tense for previous roles
- ☐ No legalese whatsoever

2. POSITIONING & NARRATIVE CLARITY

Your resume should make your story obvious within the first 6-8 seconds of reading.

- ☐ Clear, concise professional summary (3-4 lines; no fluff or cliches)
- ☐ Resume is specifically tailored to the job for which you are applying

3. IMPACT-DRIVEN BULLET POINTS

Your bullets must communicate outcomes—not your day to day responsibilities.

- ☐ Each bullet begins with a strong action verb
- ☐ Every task is reframed into an accomplishment
- ☐ Clear articulation of impact (risk reduction, efficiency, clarity, outcomes)
- ☐ Metrics included wherever possible (even directional or approximate metrics)
- ☐ Bullets are concise and scannable (1-2 lines max)

4. FORMATTING & READABILITY

A legal hiring manager should be able to skim and understand your value immediately.

- ☐ Bullets limited to 1-2 lines for readability; no orphan words on second lines
- ☐ Adequate white space between roles and sections
- ☐ Professional fonts (e.g., Calibri, Arial, Helvetica); *no* Times New Roman
- ☐ No distracting graphics, icons, borders, colors, or headshots
- ☐ Resume is readable on mobile and on PDF

5. OPTIONAL SECTIONS (Add Only if They Strengthen Your Narrative)

Include these *only if* they reinforce your positioning for the target role.

- ☐ Certifications (e.g., PMP, CIPP, Lean Six Sigma)
- ☐ Publications or speaking engagements relevant to the legal field
- ☐ Committee leadership or cross-functional projects
- ☐ Pro bono work if it aligns with your story
- ☐ Software list tailored to the specific role you're pursuing
- ☐ Languages (helpful for global or cross-border roles)
- ☐ Awards, internal recognition, or promotions (brief and concise)

6. FINAL REVIEW CHECKLIST

Before you send your resume anywhere, confirm the following:

- ☐ Your resume makes a clear case for your target role
- ☐ A hiring manager can understand your value within 6 seconds
- ☐ Bullets focus on impact, not job descriptions
- ☐ Every section is tailored to the type of job you want next
- ☐ Your LinkedIn profile aligns with your resume (especially dates)
- ☐ There are no filler words ("helped," "responsible for," "duties included")
- ☐ Someone who doesn't know your work could still understand your contributions

7. KNOW WHEN TO HIRE A COACH

You may benefit from coaching if:

- ☐ You're not getting traction from applications
- ☐ You're unsure how to quantify your work or articulate impact
- ☐ You want to transition into a new type of legal role
- ☐ You struggle to tell your story clearly in interviews
- ☐ You want a resume that reflects your capabilities—not just your responsibilities

If you think you would benefit from coaching, [book time](#) for a free, initial 30-minute consultation.

About the Author

Ryan Black is an executive coach with extensive experience in BigLaw and in-house legal departments. He works with lawyers, legal ops professionals, and paralegals to build strong career narratives and represent themselves confidently. His approach is grounded in behavior-change science and proven, practical frameworks that make an impact.