



THE MERGIS GROUP'S GUIDELINES FOR PARALEGAL JOB SEARCHES

Mergis Group is the nation's largest network of legal services, providing temporary and regular employment to legal assistants, paralegals, legal secretaries and attorneys of all experience levels. There are Mergis Group branch offices that specialize in legal placement in San Francisco, Minneapolis, Boston, Washington D.C., Chicago, Cincinnati, Detroit, Kansas City, Columbus OH, and Dayton.

The following information is provided to help you through some of the most stressful parts of job hunting. These guidelines have been developed through 30 years of staffing in the legal industry, and while each individual will want to tailor these suggestions to their own style and personality, you should follow the general focus of the information provided.

Good Luck!

I. INTRODUCTION

A resume is an advertisement. It is a brief summary of your educational and professional background and is presented to an employer in order to describe your qualifications in the most favorable light. As with an ad, a resume should be geared toward the specific market in which you are seeking work – the legal field. Remember a resume only gets you an interview, not the job.

There are many resume styles. The correct one for you depends on your strengths and weaknesses as a prospective employee. However, the one that is recommended for the legal industry is the reverse chronological resume. It lists, in reverse chronological order, specifics about you education and employment history, and should be kept to one page, if possible. Never go over two pages.

II. COMPONENTS OF A RESUME

A. Personal Identification Data

All resumes must include the following (center of left-hand margin at the top of the page):

1. Name
2. Address with zip code
3. Home phone number (be sure to have an answering machine)
4. Cell phone number
5. Email Address

B. Educational Background

Include all your education after high school, in reverse chronological order. (Do not include your high school.) Begin with the most recent degree or certificate. If you are still attending school, list your current enrollment first. For each entry, include the name of the institution, location (if it is not in the name of the school), date of graduation (use year only), degree(s) and/or certificates(s) awarded and major field of study. **BE SURE YOU ACTUALLY RECEIVED EACH DEGREE OR CERTIFICATE YOU HAVE LISTED.** If applicable, add honors and distinctions received. Include appropriate post graduate and continuing education course.

C. Skills, Abilities and Qualifications

If you have not worked as a paralegal, you may want to describe the paralegal skills you have gained throughout your schooling, internships, volunteer experience and other qualifications that make you a good prospect for an employer. List management, supervisory and leadership skills. (DO NOT INCLUDE THIS SECTION IF YOU HAVE TWO OR MORE YEARS OF EXPERIENCE.)

D. Employment History or Experience

List the job title, company name, city, state, and months as well as years of employment for each position you have had in reverse chronological order. For each position, include a brief description of each position, including accomplishments, awards and promotions, supervisory work, and anything else that will be of interest to a legal employer. Do not repeat job duties from one position to another.

E. Other Activities and Interests

Include law-related professional organizations, volunteer activities, relevant hobbies, licenses and credentials, computer expertise and foreign language proficiency. Do not include unrelated activities and hobbies.

F. Closing

“References Available Upon Request” should be the last line on your resume. The references are listed on a separate sheet of paper and are only given to the employer if asked.

III. RESUME APPEARANCE

Be sure your resume is up-to-date, neat and carefully proofread before it is submitted. Use an easy-to-read 10 point typeface. The resume should be printed on 8x 11” paper only; white or cream paper is best.

Margins are important to the design of the resume. Narrow margins make a resume look too cramped while wide margins make it look too sparse. Be careful if you use margin justification, do not leave large blank gaps between words.

Although employers prefer a one-page resume, two pages are acceptable if you have been working as a paralegal for a long time. NEVER go over two pages.

DO NOT INCLUDE ON YOUR RESUME:

- Confidential information (i.e., height, weight, age, health, marital status or number of children).
- Use abbreviations (exceptions: A.B.A., g.p.a., and Inc.)
- Put "Resume" on your resume; it's like putting "Book" on a book.
- Include salaries – past or present.
- Includes a photograph with or/on your resume.
- List the names of your references.
- Includes your reasons for leaving a job.
- Use the word "I" -- anywhere.
- List religious, political or fraternal organizations.
- List the name of your present or past supervisors.
- Include typing skills (unless applying for a word processing position).
- Go over two pages in length.
- Overstate your abilities and/or lie.

INTERVIEW

When interviewing with a firm or corporation, it is not unusual for you to return two or three times to meet with all of the people with whom you will be working. Rarely will you be hired after the first interview, so be prepared.

While no two interviews are ever the same, all interviews are conducted with a single purpose. The interviewer is looking for the answer to the question, "Why should I hire you?"

The interview affords you the opportunity to communicate what skills and abilities you have that are applicable to the specific job and, at the same time, allows the interviewer to assess your qualifications for that job. An initial interview usually covers review of your background, education, work experience, interests, skills and abilities.

I. PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

Be sure to take two copies of your resume to the interview. Also, always take a list of references and work or writing samples which are representative of your experience.

Know what information is on your resume and highlight it in the interview. Be prepared to discuss and describe any relevant prior work experience, including paid and volunteer work. Paralegals recently out of school can describe coursework, unpaid internships, and research papers and projects.

Learn as much as you can about the people and the organization with whom you are interviewing. Check out their website before attending the interview. An interviewer will be impressed by the fact that you took the time to find out this information. Good sources are the Martindale-Hubbel Law Directory, Standard & Poor's Register, networking with others in the legal profession, and reading The Daily Journal and The Recorder.

Try to determine before the interview what the employer is looking for and what is expected from an employee. If you want information about the firm of the job, be prepared to ask for it. Use your judgment to determine how and when to ask your questions. In the second and third interview, you may ask to speak to other paralegals in the department or office, or to meet the attorney with whom you will work.

Keep in mind that an interviewer usually makes assessments quickly. Be prepared to tell the interviewer about yourself. Plan a "thumb-nail" self-sketch which includes education and work-related information.

II. THE INTERVIEW

A. Appearance

Your appearance is of the utmost importance. Dress as if you were applying for the interviewer's position.

You should wear appropriate business attire. Men should always wear a jacket and tie. Be professional, comfortable, and project the image that reflects both your own style and what you believe to be the firm's style. Jewelry, perfume/cologne, and make-up should be kept to a minimum. Hair should be clean and neatly groomed. If possible, take a good quality briefcase or portfolio and note pad (with pen) with you.

B. Procedure

Arrive a few minutes early for your interview and do not take anyone else with you. Be polite to the receptionist/administrative assistant – they may also comment on their initial impression of you and they are your first contact with the potential employer. Most corporate legal departments, and some law firms, will ask you to fill out a job application form. Complete the entire application form as quickly and neatly as possible. This is the only time you should reference your salary at a prior position. Otherwise, your Mergis recruiter will negotiate your salary once an offer has been extended.

Introduce yourself to the interviewer and firmly shake hands. Create a positive and professional attitude. Maintain eye contact with the interviewer. Speak clearly and with interest and enthusiasm. Demonstrate self-confidence about your skills, interests and achievements. Concentrate on giving clear and concise responses to questions you are asked. Eliminate sentence fillers, such as "you know," "like," and "I mean". Do not be afraid to stress your attributes – it cannot hurt to stress those skills or qualities you possess that you feel are particularly well suited to the job for which you are applying, but be sure to not be overbearing or conceited.

The interviewer may ask inappropriate questions or questions you are not required by law to answer. If you are prepared ahead of time for this possibility, you can refuse to answer such questions gracefully. These may deal with your age, sexual preference, marital status, whether you have or are planning to have children, religious beliefs and anything else that has no relevance to your ability to work effectively. Since the interviewer should be aware that these questions are inappropriate, s/he, will generally refrain from pursuing the matter if you indicate that you are unwilling to answer them.

You may have questions about the firm and the job. Do not interrupt while the interviewer is speaking; wait until they have finished telling you about the position to ask your questions. Prepare your questions ahead of time, you might want to ask:

What is a typical day?

How do paralegals receive assignments?

What kind of billable hours are expected?

Are paralegals part of the professional or the support staff?

Does the firm have a structured program?

If the interview becomes awkward, with lulls in the conversation, ask one of your questions then. As the interview winds down, you can ask if the interviewer would like your list of references and writing sample, if s/he has not previously done so.

If the interviewer has not brought up the subject of salary on the second interview, and you are concerned, speak with your Mergis recruiter. DO NOT discuss salary in your client interview; your recruiter will manage the salary negotiation process.

Always thank the interviewer for his or her time. Before leaving, be sure you understand the details of the position and clarify what the firm's timeline is regarding staffing decisions.

III. INTERVIEW FOLLOW-UP

After the interview, email a thank-you letter to your recruiter and ask them to forward it to the interviewer. This reminds the employer about you and serves as a writing sample. It can also be used to furnish references or any other information that may have been requested. This letter should be short and professional in tone. Even if you have been asked to address the person by his or first name, it is wise to use their full professional name in correspondence. Finally, the letter lets the employer know you want the position and encourages the firm to consider you more seriously.

If at the end of the initial interview you were told the firm would be making a decision within two weeks, make a follow-up call if you have not heard from them to your Mergis recruiter. Sometimes the hiring process takes longer than expected, so give the employer at least 2 weeks. When on the phone with your recruiter, inquire if the position is still open or if it has been filled.

Be sure to check for messages on your answering machine/ cell phone. Nothing is more irritating than leaving a message and not having the call returned for two days. Also, while you are job hunting, the message on your machine should be simple, short and professional. Jokes, skits and lots of music send very specific message to the caller who is trying to reach you.

If you are registered with an agency to help find employment, it is the agency's job to follow-up after your interview. Do not call the prospective employer directly if your resume was submitted through an agency. The agency will keep the process moving and troubleshoot for you.

THE BASIC CHRONOLOGICAL RESUME

NAME:

ADDRESS:

TELEPHONE:

EMAIL:

Include current address or one where you can be reached.

Include current phone numbers where message can be left during the day.

EDUCATION:

List the following in chronological order: High School attended and whether you received a diploma (if you attended college, it is not necessary to mention high school), colleges attended, degrees held, or for which you are working (with dates), and major and minor fields of study. If your experience is limited, describe class projects which relate to your career objective/job objective.

EXPERIENCE:

Describe your most important full-time, part-time, summer jobs, internships and volunteer work listing the last job first. Include dates (month and year) and job titles. State specific functions performed using short action phrases. Relevant summer employment during college may be grouped together and included if it related to your particular job area. Do not forget to include here relevant experience (e.g. volunteer or extracurricular) during or after school.

**SPECIAL SKILLS
HONORS OR
ACTIVITIES:**

Include the following: Participation in important and relevant activities; major offices held, and membership in student associations, professional and fraternal organizations. Include special skills and significant certificates or honors.

REFERENCES:

"Available Upon Request." Keep on file letters of several references, personal, job related, education; and have available on hand the names and addresses of your referral sources.

Charles E. Brown
123 Peanut Alley
Schulzville, CA 91919
(415) 123-4567

EDUCATION

University of California Berkeley, Berkeley, CA
Bachelor of Arts, *cum laude*, 1994
Major: Legal Studies; Minor: Economics

LEGAL EXPERIENCE

MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION, Los Angeles, CA

Legal Assistant

June 1995 – Present

Researched impact of reduced state revenue sharing on municipal public safety staffing. Involved in needs assessment, strategy planning, community outreach, interviewing, data collection, analysis and reporting.

LOS ANGELES DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE, Domestic Violence Unit, Los Angeles, CA

Victim Witness Advocate

May 1995 – (120 hours volunteer)

Interviewed victims and witnesses, prepared documents and organized information for court appearances. Assisted attorneys during trials.

SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC DEFENDERS, San Francisco, CA

Legal Intern

June 1994 – April 1995

Researched and drafted motions on various criminal and procedural issues. Interviewed clients at San Francisco correctional institutions. Argued bail motions in several state district courts. Negotiated plea and bail agreements for defendants accused of misdemeanor crimes. Attended criminal trials and depositions.

PRO BONO LEGAL ADVISORS COMMITTEE, San Francisco, CA

Legal Intern

Summer 1993

Advised mentally handicapped clients on aspects of mental health, law, including guardianship, commitment, discharge, and civil rights. Drafted motions, complaints, and discharge petitions for clients. Devoted part of time to advising clients at the Homeless Shelter.

LAW OFFICES OF CHUCK E. CHEESE, Palo Alto, CA

Legal Secretary

Summer 1992

Greeted clients. Prepared documents for legal proceedings involving real estate transactions. Enter all client information into new computer system.

COMPUTER SKILLS

Word Perfect, Microsoft Word, FileMaker, Summation, FoxPro and Discovery ZX; 65wpm

WORD LIST
WORDS TO USE WHEN WRITING A RESUME

ADVERTISEMENT/PROMOTION

accounted for	actively engaged	convinced	generated
improved	influenced	marketed	persuaded
played a key role	promoted	provided	recommended
tailored	was instrumental		

COMMUNICATIONS

approved	authored	consulted	counseled
demonstrated	disseminated	drafted	edited
facilitated	instructed	interviewed	moderated
participated in	presented	presided	reunited
severed as	straightened	taught	wrote

CREATIVITY

abstracted	affected	conceived	constructed
converted	created	designed	developed
devised	effected	enabled	excelled
formed	formulated	founded	innovated
inspired	invented	originated	performed
refined	reshaped	resolved	skilled
solved	structured	transformed	

MANAGEMENT

administered	conducted	contracted	controlled
coordinated	directed	enacted	established
exceeded	executed	governed	headed
implemented	instituted	maintained	managed
obtained	operated	organized	performed
planned	produced	responsible for	retained
revised	set up	supervised	took charge of
undertook	unified		