



LEGAL PERSONNEL
EXPERTS IN LEGAL RECRUITMENT

8 KEY RULES FOR CV WRITING

RULE 1: Structure

As a general rule, your CV should be set out in the following structure, using these or similar sub-headings:

1. **Name and personal information.** A brief overview/summary can be included here. By personal information we mean contact information - do not include your religion, sexual orientation, age, marital status, political stance etc. – this is not relevant for the purposes of applying for a job.
2. **Education.** List all of your qualifications here. Ensure you include the date you were admitted to practice as a lawyer.
3. **Experience.** List each firm that you have worked at, the position(s) that you held and the dates that you worked there. Also provide a brief summary of the work that you did and your duties and responsibilities.
4. **Achievements, Professional Memberships, Other Skills.** These should come at the end of your CV, under experience.
5. **Referees.** List at least 2 referees. Referees must be people whom you have reported to in your current/previous roles, or more senior managers who have supervised your work. They should not be friends or colleagues at the same level as you.

RULE 2: Keep it simple

Separate your experience into different categories such as legal, commercial and voluntary. This makes your CV easier to read.

A CV should entice the reader to want to know more about the applicant. Avoiding a prose-heavy structure will make your CV more pleasing to the eye. Also ensure that your grammar and punctuation are consistent.

Use sub-headings and bullet points – anything that makes your CV easier to read.

If you are at an early stage in your career, aim to keep your CV to a maximum of 2 A4 pages. Senior lawyers will obviously have a lot more experience to outline in their CV, so 4 to 5 pages is fine for those lawyers. If your CV is well beyond this length, consider adding a deal/matter sheet to the end of your CV as an attachment.

RULE 3: Use your legal work experience to show motivation for a career in law

Potential employers want to see motivation for a career in law. Work experience, open days at law firms, shadowing barristers, debating etc., are all great opportunities to show that a legal career is right for you. They also highlight the area within the profession or type of firm that would suit you best.

We recommend that you demonstrate that you have done your research and know what makes a career at a particular firm right for you.

RULE 4: Treat each application as if it is the only one you are doing

We know that applications are time consuming, but it is important to invest a significant amount of time on each application in order to ensure you have sold yourself in the best light possible. Give each application your undivided focus. This document will determine whether you get an interview or not.

RULE 5: Use a professional tone

Remember your reader works in the legal industry - professionalism is essential to the legal sector and you can show just how clearly you understand this through your language and your approach to applications. Aim for a professional tone and avoid using humour in your CV. It inevitably falls flat.

RULE 6: Draw out what you have to offer to a law firm

Concentrate on what you have to offer, not on what your CV/background/education lacks. Success often comes down to confidence. Do not be put off, for example, if the most polished, well connected or intelligent student in your university course has failed to secure a position. S/he may have been rejected for a whole host of reasons. Focus on what you have to offer.

RULE 7: Convince potential employers of your attention to detail

Once you have put your CV and cover letter together, do not be tempted to rush it off. Around 80% of candidates do not get past the paper application stage so you need to make sure you do not fall at the first hurdle due to grammatical or spelling errors – remember that lawyers need excellent written communication skills and attention to detail. Ask either a friend or family member to check your CV and cover letter before sending it off – an extra pair of eyes is invaluable.

RULE 8: Do not include a headshot

It is always best to avoid including a headshot.



7 KEY RULES FOR INTERVIEWS

Before sitting your interview, remember to clean up your social media profile(s). In this day and age, all employers Google their interviewees before meeting them. Ensure that your LinkedIn profile is updated. If you don't have a LinkedIn profile, it is a good idea to create one. Whilst it is not necessary to upload your full CV to LinkedIn, any text on your profile must be well-written and grammatically correct – typos will indicate a lack of attention to detail. Your profile picture must also look professional. Do not use your Facebook or Instagram photos!

Also remember to check your privacy settings on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and any other social media platforms that you use. Google yourself and ensure that all of the results are links that you would be happy for prospective employers to see. Photos of you at a party having a great time are fine for friends to see but probably not the first thing you want your prospective employer to see!

RULE 1: Be prepared

Do your research on the law firm and understand the role in question. Take the time to learn about the firm you hope to join. Research what their business is, who the key people are and what they are about. Make an effort to really understand what the firm's expectations are of you. This means dissecting the job description and researching what the role really involves. Competition is tough and you can edge out other candidates by being more diligent on this front.

RULE 2: Do not be late

No one cares about the bus schedule, the traffic or the alarm that did not go off. By the same token, do not be so early that you start gathering dust in reception. Just be on time, or a few minutes early. Also, never, ever, walk in late with a takeaway coffee in your hand.

RULE 3: Look the part, be the part

Keep it simple. Law is a very conservative profession. Take out those piercings and cover up your tattoos. You want to look, dress and act the part, and law firms like their staff to be professionally presented.

Clothing aside, grooming (or a lack thereof) could cost you the job. Do not have greasy or messy hair or scruffy nails, iron your shirt and ensure that you are wearing your best suit to the interview.

RULE 4: Do not talk money

Raising salary in an interview can often go against you. If it is an entry level position and your first foot in the door of a law firm that is taking a chance on you, be realistic. If you are an experienced lawyer, do not raise money with the interviewer - only discuss money if they raise it with you.

RULE 5: Do not worry about nerves

Being a little nervous is ok. However, make sure you have a firm handshake, smile, ask relevant questions, make eye contact and appear genuinely interested in the position in question.

You need to build rapport with the interviewers. Cultural fit is the most important factor for any team – if you have the required experience but are not someone that the interviewer would like to work with, then you will not get the job.

RULE 6: Know your career narrative inside out

Your CV may have gotten you the interview but the real challenge begins at the interview. About 10% - 20% of the interview will be focussed on confirming the experience set out in your CV and confirming that you know what you are talking about from a 'technical' standpoint. The remaining 80% - 90% will be about discovering whether you are the right cultural fit.

In addition to the typical law firm questions you will likely have to be prepared for some 'interview stories'. These are longer answers that you give in response to behavioural questions. For example: 'Tell me about a time that you had multiple, time sensitive projects due - how did you prioritise and what was the result?'. The interviewer is likely to be looking for your prowess in several specific competencies or skills e.g. time management, negotiation, keeping calm under pressure. Do not ramble or go off on a tangent - simply articulate a concise and compelling story.

It is important to ensure you have 2 or 3 of these scenario based responses under your hat, so think about past situations that you can discuss in interview.

RULE 7: Be polite – manners are remembered

Make sure you thank your interviewers for their time. Be polite to everyone you meet as soon as you enter and exit the building on the ground floor- the cleaner, the receptionist, the random person in the lift, EVERYONE. Employers often ask their receptionists if the person was polite when they arrived and that person in the lift may be a person of influence within the firm.