



# Telling Your Story







# Telling Your Story



A Step-by-Step Guide to Drafting Persuasive  
Legal Resumes and Cover Letters



Jo Ellen Dardick Lewis

Professor of Practice and Director of Legal Practice  
Washington University in St. Louis School of Law

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This book is dedicated to my students — past, present, and future. I appreciate you sharing your stories with me and look forward to hearing about your next chapters.



To my husband, Roger, and our boys, Jake, Hal, and Seth — every day you inspire me. To my parents, Alec and Harriet Dardick, z”l, who always had confidence in me and made me believe that I could do anything.

JDL



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JDL



## Message to Students — Why Did I Write This Book?

You have brains in your head.  
You have feet in your shoes.  
You can steer yourself  
Any direction you choose.  
*Oh, the Places You'll Go!*  
Dr. Seuss<sup>1</sup>

Everyone has a story, and in a professional context, you will tell your own in a resume and cover letter. Your resume and cover letter are two of the most important pieces of persuasive writing that you will ever draft. Putting together a memorable resume which reflects your individuality and strengths takes time, but is well worth the effort. You are your own best advocate, and writing your resume and cover letter is your first opportunity to sell yourself. A strong resume persuades a prospective legal organization — let's call this an “Employer” — that you are someone whom that Employer should consider hiring.

I have worked with law students for over twenty years, helping them draft the persuasive resumes and cover letters that get them interviews and jobs. Most of this work happens in a crisis mode: before a career services resume drop deadline, after meeting a prospective Employer at a networking event, or right before winter break. This book teaches you how to avoid the crisis mode by drafting your resume and cover letter the way you learned legal writing: one step at a time. If you spend fifteen to thirty minutes each week drafting your resume and cover letter, they will be finished by the end of the semester.

As you will learn in law school, all writing has an *audience* and serves a *purpose*. The *audience* for your resume will be someone connected with, or someone who can connect you with, an Employer. That person may or may not know anything about you, the law school you attend, or the high caliber of its students. This means that you are writing your resume for several audiences. Those audiences could be: 1) an attorney with an Employer; 2) a human resources professional; 3) a friend or relative; or 4) a professor or law school career development advisor from whom you are seeking advice. The more information you can provide about yourself and your accomplishments and strengths, the more that audience can assist you in connecting with an appropriate Employer.

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1. Dr. Seuss, *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* (Random House, Inc., 1990), p. 2.

I want to emphasize just how important it is to be open to tailoring your resume, when meeting with any of your audiences, in order to take advantage of their feedback — especially the career development office at your law school. Your career advisor is the eyes and ears of your law school in terms of prospective employment, and has the resources to know where other students have been successful and how to use those students' successes as a model for you.

After determining your *audience*, you want to identify the *purpose* of your resume. The purpose of your resume is to get an Employer so interested in your story that the Employer must speak to you — thus, the interview and, ultimately, the job offer.

So, if right now you are thinking that this is one of those ten or twelve step books, you are close. I don't know if there are exactly ten or twelve steps, but I do know that if you draft your resume one step at a time, the task will not be overwhelming and it will get done. I will warn you that when you make the transition from a general resume to a legal resume, the first draft is the most difficult, as it will require you to look at yourself through the eyes of an Employer. But bear in mind that all law students have skills and accomplishments that are directly applicable to legal employment, and possess the characteristics that make for effective lawyers. Those accomplishments, skills, and characteristics form the basis of your story. Your resume and cover letter are the vehicles for telling that story. And as your personal story evolves, your resume will evolve as well.

Let's get started telling your story!

Professor Jo Ellen Dardick Lewis