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### Résumé Review: Breadth and Depth

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# Résumé Review: Breadth and Depth

By Patrick Barry

**N**obody is born knowing how to craft an effective résumé. But because the document can play a major role in a young lawyer’s career, I often talk with law students and new attorneys about how they might revise the versions they send out to potential employers. I usually frame my advice by telling them about a concept that can give their resumes a helpful organizing structure: being “T-shaped.”

## T-shaped

The term “T-shaped” originated at the consulting firm McKinsey in the 1980s. The basic idea is that the most sought-after employees combine a breadth of knowledge across a wide range of domains (the horizontal part of the T) with a depth of expertise in a specific area (the vertical part).



The vertical part of the T conveys the extent of someone’s mastery in a relevant field. Think of a patent attorney who has a PhD in biochemistry, or a public defender who used to be a cop. That kind of focused knowledge and experience can be a tremendous professional asset.

But so can diffuse knowledge and experience. That is where the horizontal part of the T comes in. The patent attorney might be an even more attractive job candidate if their résumé also signals a broader background and intellectual curiosity: an interest in poetry, perhaps, or a love of painting, or a college thesis that explored 17th-century Japanese history. So, too, the cop-turned-public defender. Did they ever study abroad or possibly serve in the Peace Corps? A lawyer with a variety of experiences and interests is a valuable lawyer, especially as industries and practice areas continue to blend and expand.



These are admittedly extreme examples, and I am certainly not suggesting that every law firm, government agency, and nonprofit organization is looking for T-shaped applicants. Sometimes the hiring search focuses on depth, particularly in highly specialized departments such as cybersecurity, aerospace, or international tax. Other times the emphasis is on breadth. As David Epstein argues in *Range: Why Generalists Triumph in a Specialized World*, there’s a lot of utility in being someone who can play many different roles.

Still, viewing your résumé through a T-shaped lens can be a good way to evaluate what the document is missing – or what needs to be better highlighted. Here are two sets of questions to help guide that evaluation:

- Does your résumé sufficiently demonstrate breadth? Does it include an impressive assortment of skills, interests, and experiences?
- Does your résumé sufficiently demonstrate depth? Are there words, phrases, and bullet points that communicate mastery in something useful or interesting—a second language, an intellectual discipline, a professional certification in something like accounting, mediation, or real estate?

## Revision and Aspiration

If you have several T-shaped attributes but your résumé omits that information, consider making some targeted edits. For breadth, perhaps you could add a skill, interest, or experience outside your core competencies. Did you pursue a volunteer opportunity in college, complete a side project recently, or pick up an interesting hobby? For depth, maybe you could include details that more strongly convey the expertise you have developed (or are developing) in a particular area. Have you published any articles or blog posts on specific legal issues? Do you belong to any CBA Young Lawyers Section committees, ABA sections, or other professional organizations?

The more concrete and detailed information you can provide, the better. Breadth and depth are good in résumés. Vagueness and abstraction are not.

You might even consider creating an “aspirational résumé” by doing the following:

**Step 1:** Look at your current résumé.

**Step 2:** Sketch out what you would like it to contain one year from now, three years from now, or even five years from now. Do you hope to list certain creden-

tials and accomplishments? Do you want to represent particular clients or types of clients? Is there a new city where you want to work or a specific organization for which you want to work?

**Step 3:** Use the aspirational version of your résumé as an action plan for the next few months. What trainings, workshops, or other opportunities should you seek out to help you start to make your aspirational résumé a reality? What specialized knowledge should you try to build?

**Step 4:** Repeat steps 1 through 3 every six months or so.

### Dynamic Documents

The good thing about résumés is that they are not fixed in stone. The best ones are dynamic documents. They can and should change. A good sign that you are progressing as a lawyer is that every year you have new bullet points to add.

So, the next time you revise your résumé, try to frame information that is already there while also creating informa-

tion that will at some point be good to include. Think of the process as a strategic way to look both backward (at what you have done) and forward (at what you might want to do), all at the same time. ■



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