



Alison Monahan: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox Podcast. Today, we're excited to have ex-recruiter Sadie Jones with us to talk about the most common questions we've been getting about resumes and cover letters.

Your Law School Toolbox host is Alison Monahan, that's me, and typically, I'm here with Lee Burgess. We're here to demystify the law school and early legal career experience, so that you'll be the best law student and lawyer you can be.

Together we're the co-creators of the [Law School Toolbox](#), the [Bar Exam Toolbox](#), and the career-related website, [CareerDicta](#). I also run [The Girl's Guide to Law School](#). If you enjoy the show, please leave a review or rating on your favorite listening app and if you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to us. You can always reach us via the [contact form](#) on LawSchoolToolbox.com, and we would love to hear from you. With that, let's get started.

Sadie Jones: Thanks for having me back.

Alison Monahan: Our pleasure. Let's get started with some basic resume questions that we hear over and over.

Sadie Jones: Sounds great.

Alison Monahan: Number one, I'm a law student. I'm applying for jobs either in the summer or for after school. Should my resume be kept to one page?

Sadie Jones: I feel very strongly about this question that yes, it should be kept to one page, with maybe one notable exception, which is if ... Let's say that you published a lot of articles. Let's say you're a former engineer. You're applying for IP positions. Then, I think you can have a page of your publications. Other than that, you have to figure out a way to cut it down.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think that's absolutely right. I mean, sometimes, you see resumes from people who've gone straight from undergrad to law school, and they're a page and a half, two pages. It's really just kind of like, "Seriously?" Yeah.

Sadie Jones: Yeah. It just looks like filler, and I actually find that more of those people make it longer. Then, I find people with work experience, they know it has to be one page.

Alison Monahan: Right, and I think if somebody, if you've had a prior career or something along those lines, you could consider going over a page, even though I think it's still better, as you pointed out, not to, just because people have a short attention span, and it really also shows are you able to focus and tell your story, which is something we've talked about, or is it just kind of a brain dump of every job you've ever had for your entire life.



- Sadie Jones: Yeah. I think it's just a case where people sort of hold onto things and don't know how to edit, and I think that's a skill that you should show them with your resume, that you can highlight what's important.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. Absolutely. That's definitely something you're going to do as a lawyer, so it's going to make someone probably reluctant to hire you if they're like, "Hmm. Are they going to not be able to edit my brief down to the word limit? Hmm."
- Sadie Jones: Exactly, and I think that especially if you don't have a lot of work experience or there isn't a lot to say and it just feels like you're trying to stretch out a lot of internships and things like that, they're going to notice. But generally, I feel like, blanket rule, it should be one page. Figure out a way to make it work.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. Absolutely, and there are things you can do with ... If you're close to a page, there are things you can do with margins and stuff like that, font size, tighten up your spacing on the lines just a little bit, that are not actually really that obvious that can help you do that, but absolutely.
- Sadie Jones: I'm completely fine with that. I think people ask about that, too. "Oh. Well, should it be normal margins and a bigger font?"
- Alison Monahan: No.
- Sadie Jones: I think you don't want it to be so small that they can't read it, because I have seen things that are pushing that, but I think generally, that's completely fine. Everybody does it. It's okay.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. Exactly. As long as it's easy to read and clear and you've used things like bold or italics consistently, no one really cares if your margins are wider than a normal page, because, obviously, you're trying to fit stuff on there.
- Sadie Jones: Exactly.
- Alison Monahan: The other thing, if you do go over a page, you really need to go over a page. There's ... Sometimes, you see ones that go over a page by a few lines, and that's just ridiculous.
- Sadie Jones: The worst, and I think that's a case where ... Also, make sure that you've converted it to a PDF and actually printed it, not just hit print preview, even. Actually print it, because sometimes weird stuff happens. Maybe even send it to someone else and have them print it, because I think that usually, when it goes on to a page just by a little, onto the next page, there is ... It's sort of a mistake, or I assume it is, so definitely make sure about that.



Alison Monahan: Yeah. Absolutely, and that's a great point. You always want to send this as a PDF document, not as a Word document, for all kinds of different reasons, but among them being that you want to control the formatting, which you can do in a PDF much more than in a Word document, where it may depend on the fonts they have on their computer that may screw up your entire resume. Just make it a PDF. It's a lot easier.

Sadie Jones: Yeah. Absolutely.

Alison Monahan: All right. Now that we're clear that we have to have our resume basically on one page, let's start adding stuff to it. For example, should I have an interests section on my resume?

Sadie Jones: I think different people have different preferences about this. My opinion is yes, you should. Now, if it's such a struggle to get it onto one page, and you feel like you have so much experience, there is not room for an interests section, okay. I don't want it to go over a page because of your interests section, but generally, that's a chance for you to come up with things that you can talk about in an interview with somebody. I find that a lot of interviewers go straight to the interests section, because they want to have a conversation with you, and they want to see what you're about. I think that it doesn't necessarily have to be all the things you're most passionate about. I think it's fine to make it interesting. It's an interests section. I think it's okay to pick some hobbies that you're interested in, you like. You need to be able to talk about it, but I think you're trying to sort of tell a story with it, so, to me, it is important.

Alison Monahan: I agree, and I thought this was super weird. When I went to law school, I had never seen a resume that had interests on it before, but everybody was like, "Well, you need to put this section on there," and I was like, "Well, okay." Maybe it really is the case that lots and lots of people talk to you about it. It was one of the things I would talk to people about all the time just to kind of see ... I don't need your ... Your transcript basically tells me your academic background. I don't really find your opinion on some finer point of law all that interesting, but I might be interested if you've put down that you're interested in cheese or traveling in some place I've never been. We can definitely talk about that, so I think it's an opportunity-

Sadie Jones: Some-

Alison Monahan: Go ahead.

Sadie Jones: Oh. Something I also say with something like that, let's say cheese or traveling or something, get specific. Ask yourself, "Is there specific types of cheese I like?" I think it sounds silly, but people like that kind of stuff, so it's like, "I ... " Not just traveling, "I want to go to every country in Asia, or working on that," ...



- Alison Monahan: Right, or places you-
- Sadie Jones: ... or, "Trying to fly a certain amount of miles a year," or, "I'm really interested in European travel," whatever it is. I think, get specific.
- Alison Monahan: Right, or places you've actually been.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah. Well, and the key here is ... Like, I said, I don't think it has to be your number one thing that you're doing every day, but it does need to be something you can actually talk about, because they are going to look.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, and it's just a softball question, ask someone who put cooking or baking what they like to bake. They looked at me blankly, and I was like, "It's in your interests section of your resume." He's like, "Oh. Well, it's probably more accurate to say I like cooking shows." If they just put cooking shows, watching the cooking shows, I would have been fine with that. It's-
- Sadie Jones: That would have been great.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, and we could have talked about that.
- Sadie Jones: That would have done him good. Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: But instead, I was like, "Why did you lie in your interests section?" because it just doesn't even make sense.
- Sadie Jones: It's a red flag.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. It was just one of those things where you're like, "Really? Just make something up. Come on."
- Sadie Jones: Yeah. Know your resume, but yeah. Get specific. Make it interesting. Make it fun. It's a chance to be a little creative.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think sometimes people say, "Well, I don't really have any hobbies or interests. I'm a law student," so they'll put something like reading. It's like, "Well, that's not terrible, but it could be more interesting. What do you like to read? Do you read historical fiction? Do you read biographies? Put that on there."
- Sadie Jones: Exactly, mysteries, whatever it is, just something so that they have somewhere to go with the questions.



Alison Monahan: It's really just a talking point, and make it something you want to talk about. My friend who put cheese on there was like, "It was awesome. Every single interview I did, all we talked about was cheese, and I can talk about that all day." Yeah.

Sadie Jones: Well, and it's a chance for you to sort of steer the conversation, too. It's like you can shine.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Exactly. All right. If you have the space, we highly recommend you have an interests section. Next question, should I include every job, even if I worked as, say, a nanny, waiter, bartender, retail salesperson, et cetera?

Sadie Jones: Okay. I think this depends. It depends on when you did the job, how important the job was to you, how much time it took up. For example, if you worked as a nanny half-time during law school to support yourself, that's legitimate, or you did it for the two years between college and law school to save up, because you don't want there to be a blank during that time, and you actually did it. I think it shows commitment and that you were doing something to support yourself. Now, I don't think you should put it on if you were a bartender the summer before college or something like that. You know, it didn't really mean anything. It was sort of a throwaway thing. Or, if it was sort of a side job you did for a couple hours a week during law school, I don't know that it's that important. I think you have to figure out where, kind of, it fits in your story.

Alison Monahan: I think that's right. I mean, I think if people are going to be wondering, "Well, what were they filling their time with?" and the answer is you worked two years at this job doing retail, that should probably be on your resume. You can sell that as you were handling money, and maybe you were supervising other people, or whatever it is. I think sometimes people get really paranoid that these jobs aren't prestigious enough, but I think a lot of people like to see that, because it shows that you have some real-world experience. You were taking care of yourself. You were out there in the world dealing with people. That's a lot of what lawyers actually do, so there's no shame in having been a waiter or working at Eddie Bauer, as I did after college. But if it's something minor, I agree, generally for space reasons, you're probably just going to want to drop that.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely, and I think if there's other things to replace it that make sense. The other thing is kind of what you were saying about being ashamed of it. Make sure you have a handle on it before you go into the interview where you're talking to people, because I think something like that comes out. If you worked for a couple years at this to make money, but they kind of get that you're embarrassed about it, I don't think that's a good thing to put out. Focus on the positive, what are the skills that you learned on this job, because you learn something from everything.



- Alison Monahan: Oh, yeah. I was working-
- Sadie Jones: Just make sure that you have that straight.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think I worked for basically minimum wage at Eddie Bauer, but I was like, "This is actually really interesting? I get to run the cash register. I'm helping people find their clothes, pick out their outfits." It was a lot of human interaction, and I think it was-
- Sadie Jones: Working with all sorts of people, probably problem solving.
- Alison Monahan: Oh. Exactly. You definitely learned a lot from these jobs, probably more than a fancy internship that your parents just paid for you to live, and you went and did nothing.
- Sadie Jones: Absolutely.
- Alison Monahan: I think ... Yeah. Exactly. You need to own this, and ... You don't necessarily have to be so proud of it, but you can't ... If you feel like you don't want to talk about it, then you shouldn't put it on there.
- Sadie Jones: Exactly, and I also think. Legitimately, if you were working a lot during law school and did well in law school, that's something to be proud, and that's something to show.
- Alison Monahan: Or in undergrad.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah. Exactly. During school.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. Sometimes, people are working like 20 or 30 hours a week and going to school full-time as an undergrad, and they did really well. Again, that's something to be proud of, and people are going be-
- Sadie Jones: Exactly, and I agree with you. I think, to me, 20 hours would sort of be the line of where I'd say, "Wow. That's a lot."
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, like, this person is legit. I'm looking at their transcript. They did really well. They were also working. This person knows how to organize their time. They know how to commit to something and see it through. These are all soft skills that, basically, lawyers are looking for when they're hiring.
- Sadie Jones: Absolutely.
- Alison Monahan: All right. Next question, should I have my GPA and/or class rank on my resume?



- Sadie Jones: Again, I think the answer is it depends. Generally, I say I wouldn't put a GPA that was below a 3.5 on your resume. It might depend on the school, but that's sort of the cutoff that I would look for on a resume on the employer side. For class rank, I think similar, you know, top 25, maybe 20% of the class, I would start putting that on. I think anything lower, I just wouldn't highlight it. They'll see your grades at some point.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, and you also have to be clear on what your school even allows you to do.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah. True.
- Alison Monahan: Because I know at Columbia, we were not allowed to calculate a GPA and put it on anything, and there were no class ranks. You could put academic honors that you had on your resume, but you literally were not allowed to put other things like this, so you just want to be clear. Does your school even have this information? Do they rank? Do they have official GPAs? You want to be sure you're not making something up that could come back to bite you.
- Sadie Jones: Yes. Definitely, and I think the thing is, the employers, at this point, have a pretty good idea of which schools do that and don't do that and who's allowed to, so they obviously don't expect it from places where that's not an option. But I think, generally, it's the higher tier schools that don't have that. The kind of middle to lower range schools do tend to have all that stuff, and if you did quite well, I think it is a place to highlight it.
- Alison Monahan: Right, and if you didn't do so well, but you did well in a couple of classes, put that on there instead.
- Sadie Jones: Definitely. Definitely.
- Alison Monahan: You're looking for ... You want somebody to get this resume and be like, "Oh. This person seems great. I want to talk to them more," not be like, "Why did they put that they're in the bottom 30%?" You know?
- Sadie Jones: Exactly.
- Alison Monahan: You're not required to add this information.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah. I think your resume is your place to shine, and so if this isn't an area where you shine, I don't think you need to put a magnifying glass on it.
- Alison Monahan: Exactly. Unless people ask
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, but if it is. Great. Do it.



Alison Monahan: Yeah. How about sometimes you see people who will have, like ... They'll only include a GPA for like one year ...

Sadie Jones: I don't like that.

Alison Monahan: ... or sometimes, in college they put, "My major GPA was this." Yeah. I-

Sadie Jones: I don't like that. I think that is really easy to see through. Don't do it. I don't like that.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I agree. Yeah. It's like, "Oh. I did really well second year." It's like, "Well, how did you do first year?" It's just making ... It begs the question.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, and if you did do well first year, also, then that's just weird, so ...

Alison Monahan: But, well, we're going to assume if you had done well, it would already be on there.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, and I think the same with the major GPA. Obviously, most people do better in their major. That's not your real GPA. Don't do it.

Alison Monahan: Certainly. Yeah.

Sadie Jones: We're smarter than that.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. People are not stupid who are looking at these. They can see through these little tricks.

Sadie Jones: Yeah. Exactly.

Alison Monahan: All right, so another question. This is one that comes up all the time, actually, like bizarrely, so often. Should I use bullet points or a paragraph to describe my job responsibilities.

Sadie Jones: Okay. I think this is also an it depends answer for me. Generally, I like bullet points, because I think it makes things clear and breaks out your individual tasks. The time where I would have just, like, a sentence is really if there is just a sentence, maybe two, it was something sort of smaller that you can condense down. Maybe you're trying to save space. But if it's a longer position, I think, and it's four separate points, I think they should be bullet points. It's a lot easier to read. When I see a big paragraph of text underneath a job, I don't even want to look at it.



- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I just remember our career services people insisting we had to use paragraphs ...
- Sadie Jones: I've heard that.
- Alison Monahan: ... and I completely agree with you. I think bullet points are more clear. They're more focused. They're easier to read, and they just, basically, would not let you send out a resume that did not have this, like, six sentence long chunk of text.
- Sadie Jones: I think it's crazy.
- Alison Monahan: I mean, it was just like, "This is ridiculous."
- Sadie Jones: Someone just told me that when they sent me a resume to look at, and I said, "I can't say I think this is good." They just said that their career services said they had to have it that way.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. They insist on it, some of the places.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah. I mean, to me, the point of a resume is always to make it as easy to read as possible, because people don't have time.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. No. I don't understand it. I don't really support it, but I did it, so yeah.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah. Well, if you had to.
- Alison Monahan: Well, I mean, they weren't going to ... I mean, what were they going to do? They couldn't really control it, but yeah. I mean, they did, basically, be like, "You have to do this." If your school is absolutely insisting on it and people are thinking every resume from your school is going to have blocks of text, fine, put blocks of text. If no one cares or they're not really insisting, I think you go with bullet points.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah. That ... I agree.
- Alison Monahan: Which does actually make it harder to fit everything on, but that just means you have to be even more clear.
- Sadie Jones: That's what I was going to say. It actually makes you edit better.
- Alison Monahan: Right. Exactly, and I think sometimes people get so wrapped up in telling you every single thing they did, when really, most people know if you had X type of job, this is probably basically what you did. You know?



- Sadie Jones: Yeah, and I think ... It's pretty obvious when you're sort of trying to stretch it out and imply that you had all this responsibility and that sort of thing.
- Alison Monahan: I mean, if you did something-
- Sadie Jones: No one's really going to read it all.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I mean, if you did something special that's out of the ordinary, definitely, you want to fit that in, but if it's like, "I was a summer associate," it's like, "Okay."
- Sadie Jones: We know what that involves. Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, or "I worked for a judge." We probably know kind of what you did. All right. Well, final question on the resume front, where can people find good examples?
- Sadie Jones: I've seen good examples on websites with ... We're talking about these summer associate kind of things. ... on websites where you can find information about law firms or legal jobs. I know NALP has that. Vault has that, you know, places like that, which I do like, because they're usually tailored to the type of jobs you're going to be applying for, and I do think that these resumes are not the same as if you're applying for a job in the business world or something else.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think, too, going and asking our school for examples is always a good option. I mean, they may or may not be very good, frankly. I've seen some terrible resumes that career services have handed out as examples, but hopefully they do have standard things. I mean, you may have ... There might be different ones, depending on what you're applying for, like, "Oh. This would be kind of a typical public interest resume. This would be kind of a typical big law. This would be kind of a typical whatever." There may be slight variations, but they're not going to be that different.
- Sadie Jones: And you may have different resumes if you're applying to multiple jobs.
- Alison Monahan: I think you should. Yeah.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah. Exactly.
- Alison Monahan: I think we've done [other episodes](#) on [what to put in your resume](#), but definitely think about if you need to have separate resumes.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah.



Alison Monahan: All right.

Sadie Jones: But I think there's a lot of resources online.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Exactly. You just don't want to open up Microsoft Word and resume template and start writing and think it's going to be awesome.

Sadie Jones: Yeah. It's ... That's a mistake.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. The other thing you could do, too, is you could ask people in the classes above you to look at their resume. Somebody who's been successful getting the type of job that you want, they might be happy to share their resume, or your mentor, people in clubs, or whatever it is. I mean, really, you're not competing with them, so why wouldn't they?

Sadie Jones: I think that's a great idea.

Alison Monahan: All right. Well, let's move on to talk about cover letters. First off, do I actually really need a cover letter?

Sadie Jones: You really need a cover letter. I know no one wants to write a cover letter. I don't like writing cover letters either. I don't think anyone really does, but I feel like you need it. They might not read it. It might just go nowhere, but I think it's important to show that you made the effort.

Alison Monahan: I think that's right, and I think, again, you can think of it as an opportunity. This is ... Sometimes, people basically write a cover letter that says, "Please see my resume." That is not a helpful cover letter. You know?

Sadie Jones: That's terrible.

Alison Monahan: That just makes you look lazy. This should be adding something, and what it can really add, I feel like, is it can help sort of pick out and highlight the aspects of your background that are most relevant to this particular position, so say you're applying to a job, and it's in a certain location, and you have a connection to that location, or maybe somebody referred you and said you should apply, so you have this ... you can drop a name, or just whatever it is. You have some piece of your background, like a pro bono project that's particularly relevant to this nonprofit you're applying to. Those are the things that you want to put in the cover letter, because that's going to help this person actually look at your resume. You never know. Some people look first to the resume. Some people look first to the cover letter. You want to give everyone the opportunity to say, "Oh. This person looks awesome. We should continue looking at their materials."



- Sadie Jones: Yeah, and if you're worried that your resume ... you had to cut it down to one page and kind of not explain stuff enough, this is your chance to explain things. I completely agree that it's an opportunity, and I think you should look at it like that and not as, "Oh, it's more work."
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. Exactly. Well, how long should a cover letter be?
- Sadie Jones: I think it should be a couple paragraphs, maybe three, and a few sentences in each paragraph. It doesn't need to be very long. I mean, it could be a full page if you really have a lot to say. Let's say you're uniquely qualified for this position. You have a background that really fits the specialty or something like that. I think maybe you can elaborate more, but I think, generally, you want it to be to the point. You want to talk about your background and then kind of the position and why you're a fit.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. Exactly. It's basically a three paragraph format.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah. Simple.
- Alison Monahan: It's like, "Hi. I'm Alison, and I'm applying for this position that you've advertised. Here's why I think my background is a good fit for you, and here's how to get in touch with me. Thanks. Bye."
- Sadie Jones: Also, the ... Yeah. I think that's perfect, and I think a mistake that people sometimes make on cover letters is kind of overplaying what they can offer to the position.
- Alison Monahan: Yes. I've seen some of these.
- Sadie Jones: I notice that a lot, like, "I'm uniquely perfect for this," and it's like, "You've gone through one year of law school. You don't really know anything." Make it clear that you're excited about it and excited to learn.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think you just have to be realistic. You're not going to come in and single-handedly change the firm because you took one class that related to something. It's like ... This is ... You're trying to get your foot in the door here. You've got to be reasonable.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah. I think some people just kind of get carried away.
- Alison Monahan: Well, I think people feel like they have to sell themselves so hard, and that's not true.
- Sadie Jones: No. I actually don't think that's what they want, so ...



- Alison Monahan: No. I mean, lawyers hate sales things, anyway, so just ...
- Sadie Jones: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: I mean, I think that maybe in a business world, it might be more accepted to really do the hard sell, but lawyers are not like that.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, and especially if this is a summer position, a junior position, keep that in mind.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. They're looking for, like, "Is this person basically qualified to do this work? Okay."
- Sadie Jones: Yeah. Exactly.
- Alison Monahan: "Could I train them to do this work?"
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, and I think that's a great thing to sort of get across, that you're trainable, you're excited to learn from them, that kind of thing.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. Exactly. How personalized does this cover letter need to be for different positions?
- Sadie Jones: I do think that you can have a basic template, especially ... Same with the resume, one for law firms. If you're applying for government positions or that kind of thing, you can have different ones. I think you can have the basic template, but then, I do think you want to make sure that certain things are tailored to that position, most importantly that you write the correct name of the employer and the person you're writing the cover letter to, you've spelled everything correctly. I can't tell you how many cover letters I've gotten with my name spelled incorrectly, firm name spelled incorrectly. The firm name's changed, because there's been a merger, and that's not correct. All sorts of things. They describe the wrong city, things like that.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. You want to proofread your cover letter.
- Sadie Jones: Just the basics definitely need to be correct, but then I think you do want to talk about the position. Some firms, their summer positions are tailored to a practice group or litigation versus transactional, so you want to make sure that's correct, that sort of thing.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think if you have anything special that you can say, that's great, but at some point, this probably does just really become a mail merge type of thing, and then you just need to get the basics correct.



- Sadie Jones: Yeah. Yeah. Just make sure, really, with your ... that you've proofread it.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, and that you've double-checked, like, is this name the current name on the website, that kind of thing, because that stuff changes all the time and now might not be up-to-date. Yeah. It just looks bad if six months ago they added a named partner, and that's not on your template.
- Sadie Jones: All of that is definitely on the website.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. Exactly. All right. How about people who have issues, say, with their grades or something like that? Should they talk about that in a cover letter or in some sort of addendum, or how should that be handled?
- Sadie Jones: You know, I'm kind of mixed on this. I'm curious what you think. I think sometimes it depends on kind of where you are. If you just finished your 1L year and it really affected your grades and that's kind of all they have to go on, you do need to explain it. I don't necessarily know if it matters whether it's an extra piece of paper or in the cover letter. The more documents there are, the more chance there is they're not going to read them all, or they're kind of going to feel like it's overkill. I do think there are things that need to be explained, so you have to find a place to do it. I also think I've seen things that go way overboard and too personal, in too much detail, too many excuses. I don't think that's great.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I agree. I mean, I think if it's something that you know is going to prevent you from being hired, I mean, A, I mean, on the one hand, it's like, "Well, why are you applying for this job, anyway?" but maybe you want to give it a shot, so yeah. I think ... Say, for example, you did have some sort of health crisis your first semester of law school, and your grades indicated that. I think it's fine to say, "Look. I had a health situation come up my first semester, whatever it is. It impacted my ability to sit for my exams. Therefore, my grades were not as great as I would have hoped, and now I'm fine." I mean, you don't even have to go to that depth.
- Sadie Jones: Hopefully, you did better second semester, and so you can point to that upward trajectory.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I mean, even then, I'm not sure ... Do they need to know it was a health issue? Is personal stuff enough? You just have to be ... You have to phrase this very, very carefully, get different opinions on what makes sense and what you feel comfortable revealing, but if you think that there's absolutely no way that you're going to be hired without explaining this, then you probably do need to explain it in some way or another.
- Sadie Jones: I agree.



- Alison Monahan: Or say, for example, if you took a leave of absence.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah. Well, and that, if anything, I think is almost looked better upon, that you knew to take yourself out because you had an issue, and you came back and kind of got back at it, and hopefully, you're-
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. With that one, I might ... If it was a leave of absence, I might explain it in a separate document, just, like, "You probably noticed that there's a gap in my transcript," give some brief explanation. "That situation is resolved. I'm ready to move forward."
- Sadie Jones: Absolutely. I just think that you should be careful about overdoing it in these documents, and I agree with you it's a good idea to get a few different opinions and maybe talk to your career services, too, about what they think.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, and sometimes people, they try to explain away terrible grades by, like, "Oh. My aunt passed away," and it's just like, "Okay. That's not really actually sufficient." You know? It needs to be something major and unavoidable, basically.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, and so, that's where I would say I wouldn't put it in.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. All right. Well, let's move on, before we end, to a few more general questions. We're actually sort of addressing this one. What do I do if I took time off of work ... or took time off without working or going to school?"
- Sadie Jones: Well, I would say usually there was a reason for that. It could be a situation like we were just describing. Let's say a family member's sick or you're sick, and I think that is a chance where you can explain it either in the cover letter or another document. I think there are times, also, where you took time off, let's say, to travel or something. I would kind of indicate that somewhere, either in your resume or cover letter, and if you just leave a blank, be really prepared to explain it if you get an interview. I would never leave a blank where it's not obvious, where it's like I'm trying to pretend like it didn't happen, because I think that's what everyone sort of assumes if you do that and don't explain it. Their first question is going to be, "What happened during that year?"
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I remember someone ... I think it was my co-clerk. ... asking the judge, "Well, if you were a hiring partner at a law firm, what would you think if, after a clerkship, you saw that someone had gone off to be a ski bum for six months?" He's like, "Well, I would want to schedule extra time to talk to that person and just see what was up with them." You know? We're not saying you can't do it. You just have to be prepared, and I think another one, obviously, if people have been parenting, and then they're coming back into the workforce. I think that one's very easy. You just basically say, "Look, I was ... I took time off to be ... to



take care of my young children during that time. I did a lot of volunteer activities. Next ... Moving on."

Sadie Jones: Yeah. Absolutely. I think that everyone has life, and things happen, and people understand that, but I think the idea is you can't sweep it under the rug or ...

Alison Monahan: No. I think you just need to own it. I mean, you've got to figure out some way to make this make sense.

Sadie Jones: Yeah. I agree.

Alison Monahan: Final question, who should I have review my resume and cover letter?

Sadie Jones: I feel like you should have multiple people review it. There's the obvious, like, your friends and family and who's around and career services and things like that, but I think it's ... Anyone that you can ask who's a resource, I think, is great, and especially if it's someone who's a fresh eye to it, and you haven't showed it to before, doesn't really know your background, I think that's ideal, because you want to see what someone who doesn't know you is going to see when they see your resume, like what does it say.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think that's right, and I think it can be ... A loose professional connection can be a good one, say, that you ... a mentor, or someone that you met, a lawyer in the community, that kind of thing. If they're willing to look at your resume, that's fantastic, because they know kind of what they would be looking for if they were hiring, and also, they may not have your full background, so they're much more objective than your parents, who are like, "Oh. I love your resume. It's so great. You're such a star." You know?

Sadie Jones: But some people do have the parents that'll go to town on editing things and, you know. It's like ...

Alison Monahan: Well, and I think you just have to keep in mind, do your parents really know ... If your parents are lawyers, that's one thing.

Sadie Jones: Yeah. Exactly.

Alison Monahan: If your parents are doctors or whatever they might be, they have absolutely no conception of what people are looking for in the legal world, and so they may not be ... They can proofread for you, but they may not be the best people to really go to to figure out what should be on this document.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, and I think that's also why it's a good idea to get a few opinions so you can kind of hear different sides, but people who know the area, know what a law school resume would look like, because I agree it can be completely different



than some other industry. But also, if you just have someone who's great at proofreading, I think that's good, too, who has a good eye for just making sure everything's correct.

Alison Monahan: Well, and making sure it looks right, are your margins aligned, if you've justified, or left and right justified, all these things. It's great to have somebody who's just more of like your design eye. They can say, "Oh. You know what? I'm not even reading this for content. It just doesn't look that good. We can make it look better."

Sadie Jones: Also, speaking of design eye, I feel strongly that these resumes should just be basic and conservative and easy to read ...

Alison Monahan: Black and white.

Sadie Jones: ... and not on weird colored paper, smelly paper, or in script, I've seen recently. Don't do any of that.

Alison Monahan: Just make it-

Sadie Jones: Just keep it simple.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Keep it very, very simple. I agree with you. Absolutely. We have seen some crazy resumes, and this is not a creative profession. This is a-

Sadie Jones: Yeah. Exactly.

Alison Monahan: This is a staid profession. If you were applying for-

Sadie Jones: Yeah. Maybe you're in the wrong area. Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. If you're going to express your deepest design, whatever, aspirations with a purple resume, maybe you should go to graphic design school and not be a lawyer.

Sadie Jones: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: That's a different question. All right. Well, with that, unfortunately, we are out of time. Sadie, thank you so much for joining us.

Sadie Jones: Thank you for having me.



Alison Monahan: Our pleasure. For more career help and the opportunity to work one-on-one with us, you can check out [CareerDicta.com](https://www.careerdicta.com). If you enjoyed this episode of the Law School Toolbox Podcast, please take a second to leave a review and rating on your favorite listening app because we would really appreciate it, and make sure to subscribe, so you don't miss anything. If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to Lee or Alison at Lee@lawschooltoolbox.com or alison@lawschooltoolbox.com, or you can always contact us via our website contact form at [lawschooltoolbox.com](https://www.lawschooltoolbox.com) Thanks for listening and we'll talk soon.

RESOURCES:

- [CareerDicta](https://www.careerdicta.com)
- [Resume and Cover Letter Basics](#)
- [Resumes and Cover Letters with an Ex-Biglaw Recruiter](#)
- [Avoid these Resume No-Gos](#)