



American Society  
of International Law

# Preparing for Your Career in International Law

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2021-22



Skills you can  
develop no matter  
where you are



## Reality Check #1:

The average law graduate obtains their first international law job 3-5 years after graduation.



## Today's Topics

- Resume Target List
- Job Application Skills
- Networking



# Resume Target List



## Resume Target List:

### Have you looked at a job description recently?

- Job descriptions are a specialized form of communication; they require just as much practice to read and understand as a judicial holding does
- Learn the language of the field: Hiring staff look for jargon and their own vocabulary to sift through hundreds of job applications.
- Making career development decisions without a large sample size of job descriptions informing your choice limits your ability to prepare for potential jobs



## Reality Check #2:

The international law job market is small and competition for entry-level positions is fierce.



# Sample Job Description



**(Médecins Sans Frontières – Doctors Without Borders)**

[www.msf.org](http://www.msf.org)

Legal Officer





# Understand the Organization

- Discover what they do
- Understand how they do it
- Evaluate if the organization is the right fit for you

# The MSF Charter

Médecins Sans Frontières is a private, international association. The association is made up mainly of doctors and health sector workers and is also open to all other professions which might help in achieving its aims.

All of its members agree to honour the following principles:

Médecins Sans Frontières provides assistance to populations in distress, to victims of natural or man-made disasters and to victims of armed conflict. They do so irrespective of race, religion, creed or political convictions.

Médecins Sans Frontières observes neutrality and impartiality in the name of universal medical ethics and the right to humanitarian assistance and claims full and unhindered freedom in the exercise of its functions.

Members undertake to respect their professional code of ethics and maintain complete independence from all political, economic or religious powers.

As volunteers, members understand the risks and dangers of the missions they carry out and make no claim for themselves or their assigns for any form of compensation other than that which the association might be able to afford them.



## Initial Review

- Does this job fall within the field of practice you want to pursue?
- Keep this high level, just scanning to add this to your list for later review at a more in-depth level
- Once you've built up your list, you will return to these job descriptions for more robust evaluation



### **Position within the organization**

The Legal Officer is part of Control Unit and reports directly to Legal Counsel. The Control Unit is a department that reports to the General Director and the Board and comprises of the Controller, Legal Counsel, Compliance and Risk Management Officer, Internal Auditors, Data Protection Officers and IT Security Officer.

### **Objectives of the position**

To primarily support the MSF OCA Operations department field and head office and including its field missions with legal advice and management of legal issues. Specific focus of support will be on keeping an overview of the legal status, and registration, partnership agreements and court cases of MSF OCA missions in countries of operations as well as drafting and advising on commercial agreements for the head office Memoranda of Understanding and statutory registrations (especially taxation).



## Make sure you want this job!

- Always read the “duties and responsibilities” (or equivalent) section of a job description
- Scan for elements of the job that might mean you don’t actually want to apply
- Don’t let that stop you from using it to build out your bank of job descriptions – **SAMPLE SIZE!**

## **Main responsibilities**

- Provide legal assistance and to keep an overview of MSF-OCA registrations and partnership agreements;
- Keep an overview of all legal cases;
- Support on general legal issues mainly concerning liability and commercial contracting for the head office;
- Provide legal assistance to MSF-OCA missions related to administrative issues.
- Ensure timely and quality legal assistance to the MSF-OCA operations in the field and head office;
- Conduct legal research and make briefs on questions of public international law, principles of national laws (e.g., tax and employment law in MSF-OCA missions), commercial or contracting law in the Netherlands and other areas of law;
- Draft and advise on agreements between MSF and service providers for the head office;
- Prepare or assist in the preparation of advice on agreements between MSF and governments of the project countries, other NGOs or service providers for the field;
- Assist in the provision of legal analysis and advice on (potential) disputes or court cases in the field as well as on possibilities for the legal set-up of missions in project countries;
- Support the creation of strategies to solve or prevent potential future constraints for our operations in a project country;
- Keep track of legal risks;
- Maintain solid administration and filing of all legal cases;
- Support and keep an overview of protection of MSF trademark and logo.

## **We offer**

- A challenging, diverse and exciting position in an international organization;
- Opportunity to experience the dynamics of a globally operating, leading humanitarian healthcare organization including travel and work in a project country;
- The benefits of working within a smaller unit, whilst at the same time working with colleagues from different departments, with different specialisms and based in different locations;
- We offer you a Dutch employment contract, based on 40 hours per week.
- A contract for one year with renewal option, based on a full-time appointment for 40 hours per week (100% labor percentage);
- Other benefits include 30 holidays per annum (based on a fulltime appointment) and a premium-free pension plan.



## Deconstructing Job Descriptions

Qualifications: JD/LLM/PhD/MBA, etc. – Check box items that you must fulfill to apply for the job

Skills: Learned and developed capabilities that require effort on your part to obtain, both in and out of work environments

Experience: Can be either “time in position” or “shorthand for skills” or both



## **Candidate profile**

- A university degree (Bachelor's or Master's degree) in law;
- At least 2 years of relevant work experience in international organizations or corporations;
- Excellent contract drafting skills;
- Effective organizational skills and multi-tasking capabilities;
- Ability to get acquainted with different fields of law and legal systems swiftly;
- “Getting things done” mentality, persistent and persuasive;
- Strong in creating liaisons between different disciplines and organizational levels;
- Strong analytical and problem-solving skills;
- Excellent communication skills, oral as well as written and at ease with cultural and language nuances;
- Ability to work independently and takes initiative;
- Demonstrated ability to deliver in an international and multi-cultural environment with sensitivity and respect for diversity;
- Fluency in English required. Fluency in Dutch is highly desirable. French, Spanish and/or Arabic language skills are an advantage.



## Resume Target List: Qualifications

- “Check box” items (M.A., J.D., LL.M., Ph.D., etc.)
- Determine which of these to pursue based on postings for jobs you want
- Career-long evaluation: You may need to go back to school depending on your career aspirations



## Reality Check #3:

Your diploma usually only helps with a single entry on a job description. You can't rely on your degree for a job!

## Candidate profile

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## Strategic Planning: Qualifications

- Usually a single entry on job descriptions.
- Your transcript gets you a diploma. Your resume gets you a job.
- Allocate time to law school activities in line with what you see required in job descriptions.



## Resume Target List: Skills

- Often include overly broad or hyper specific categories:
  - “research and writing”
  - “knowledge of comparative legislative drafting on global health issues in small island developing states”
- Parse skills into categories that reflect achievable objectives
- Develop your skills! You can constantly be adding new tools to your professional skillset, even while studying

## Candidate profile

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- Ability to get acquainted with different fields of law and legal systems swiftly;
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## Finding Hidden Skills: Duties & Responsibilities

- Minimalist job descriptions are not an excuse to send in a light application package
- Look for other areas to tell you what skills they actually want
- Duties & Responsibilities section can be crucial in pointing out what skills are actually needed





## Resume Target List: Experience

- Experience entries are often skills that can only be gained by “doing”
- Learn to identify “experience” requirements that actually want you to have a skill set on your resume
- Use volunteer opportunities, student organizations, professional associations, and summer and semester internships as ways to build experience similar to job descriptions you want to pursue

## Candidate profile

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Job Search										
	Law Degree	Int Orgs	Contract Drafting	Intellectual Flexibility	Interdisciplinary	Analysis	Comms	Multicultural	Comparative	Administrative
MSF Legal Officer	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes



## Resume Target List: Reading Job Descriptions

- Remember that job descriptions are often “wish lists” not “must haves”
- Always be applying for jobs that are slightly above your current level of skills and experience: Grow into your new job!
- Gotta catch ‘em all! Build your collection of job descriptions now – even ones that you won’t be able to apply for – it will inform your choices about upcoming opportunities



## Reality Check #4:

You're gonna have to apply to a lot of jobs.

No, really.

**A LOT OF JOBS**

Job Search															
	JD	Language	Int Orgs/In- House	HR law	Administrative Law	Interview skills	Editing	Planning / Organization	Public speaking	HR Research	Advocacy	Policy Exp	Volunteer Mgmt	Contracts	Legisl drafting
MSF Legal Officer	Yes	Desirable	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
HRW Researcher	& others	Bangla	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
AI Refugee Adv	Helpful	No	No	Yes	No	Helpful	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Helpful	No	Helpful
UNHCHR Leg off	Yes	Helpful	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Helpful	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
US DOJ OFL	Yes	Helpful	No	No	Yes	No	Helpful	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
ABA ROLI	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
FCNL Policy off	Helpful	Helpful	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Helpful	Yes	Yes	No	Helpful	No	Helpful
Ref Int'l research	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Helpful	Yes	Yes	Helpful	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No



## Resume Target List: Collect & Apply Your Research

- Use specific information to guide your decisions
- Be deliberate in choosing your internship and volunteer opportunities
- Keep your resources updated!

JD	Language	Int Orgs/In- House	HR law	Administrative Law	Interview skills	Editing	Planning / Organization	Public speaking	HR Research	Advocacy	Policy Exp	Volunteer Mgmt	Contracts	Legisl drafting
Yes	Desirable	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
& others	Bangla	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Helpful	No	No	Yes	No	Helpful	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Helpful	No	Helpful
Yes	Helpful	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Helpful	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Yes	Helpful	No	No	Yes	No	Helpful	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Helpful	Helpful	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Helpful	Yes	Yes	No	Helpful	No	Helpful
Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Helpful	Yes	Yes	Helpful	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No





# Job Application Skills



## Reality Check #5:

Potential employers are looking for a reason  
to get rid of your application,  
not a reason to keep it.

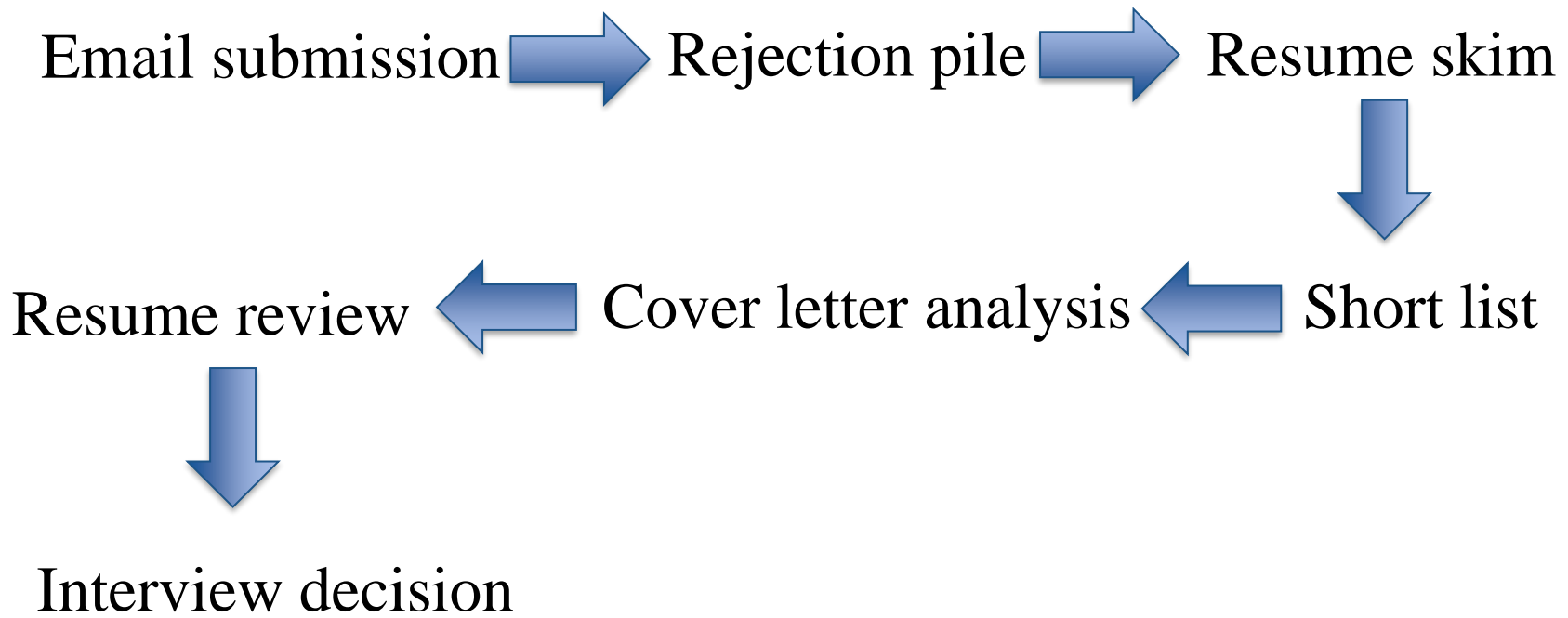


## Job Application Skills

- Know the tools in your toolbox for obtaining an internship, fellowship, or full-time job:
  - Resumes
  - Cover Letters
  - Professional Membership Associations



## Life Cycle of a Job Application





## Job Application Skills: Resumes

- Know its purpose: Checklist of Q/S/E that employer uses for first cull.
- Do your research: Know the vocabulary of the position.
- Be direct: No sentences! No “Objective” statement! Just bullet points.
- Highlight what the job description asked for:
  - List experiences first.
  - Never put real experience under your “Education” entry.
  - List work product/responsibilities.
  - List skills.

ALLEGHENY COUNTY OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER, Pittsburgh, PA

2004 - 2005 (part-time) Law school intern

Responsibilities:

- Review of trial transcripts of individuals up for possible resentencing for crimes committed under the “Sexual Offenses” section of the Pennsylvania Criminal Code (18 Pa. C.S. § 3121);
- Identification of sentencing issues for appeal under the “Post-Sentencing Procedures; Appeal” section of the Pennsylvania Code (234 Pa. Code § 234.7, part B);
- Interview clients for fact checks related to possible sentencing appeal;
- Preparation of draft post-sentence motion for supervising attorney; and
- Accompany supervising attorney for hearing on post-sentence motion.

Skills:

- Rapid review of trial transcripts (in excess of 400 pages) for specific legal issues relevant to possible appeal;
- Analysis of facts and application to legislative standards of appeals for relief;
- Legal motion and memorial drafting; and
- Client interviewing skills.

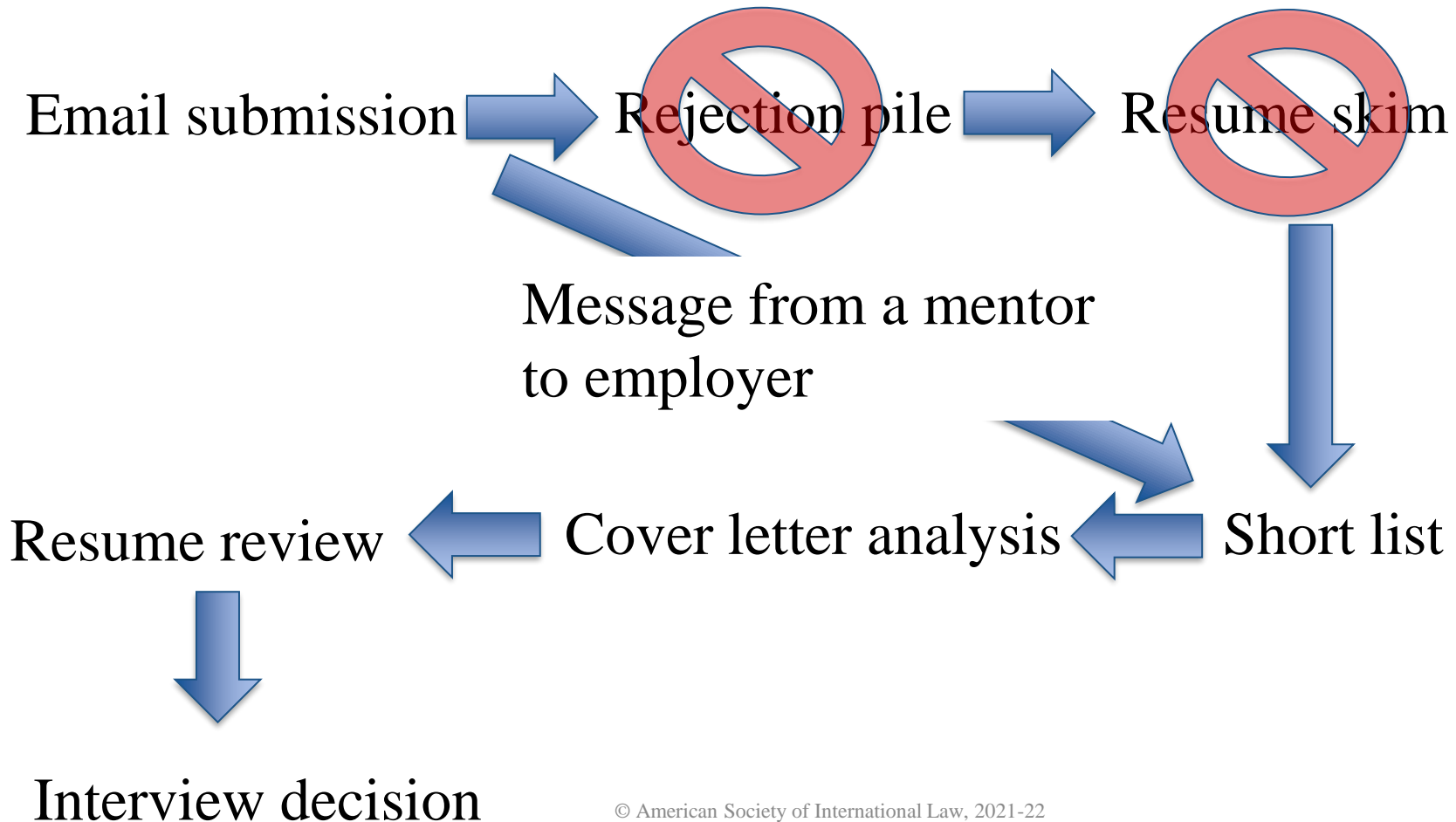


## Job Application Skills: Cover Letters

- Know their purpose: Telling the narrative of your application.
- Do your research: Know what the organization is about and what they want.
- Proper Format: No bullet points! Your resume is your checklist.
- Be direct: Only two questions to answer:
  - Why do you want this job?
  - Why should this employer want you?
- Tell the story that conveys both the value you bring and the interest you have. Passion shows through!



## The Role of Your Network







## Job Application Skills: Professional Membership Associations

- Don't do this alone! There are people and organizations that want to help!
- Spend the time to build your network: Don't do "fly-by" development.
- Build equity: The more you offer, the more you gain.
- Be deliberate: There are many int'l law associations, choose the right one for you.
- Leverage the opportunities: Professional development should be more than just building your network. Add skills, find experiences, develop substantive knowledge.



## Get Started NOW: Join ASIL!

- Access to information on hundreds of international fellowships, internships, writing contests, and moot court competitions;
- Benefit from a growing online library of video content on “Getting Started” series, substantive international law sessions, and practical advice on professional development;
- Join the New Professionals Interest Group and dozens of others;
- Attend the ASIL Annual Meeting at a significant discount – over 1,300 of the world’s leading experts in every field of international law; and
- **Student membership is just \$30 for 12 months! Join at [www.asil.org/join](http://www.asil.org/join) - Use code ASILACADPART for discount**



## Reality Check #6:

Unfortunately, being “the right person” at “the right place” at “the right time” actually does make a difference.

The good news is you can control two of those!



# Networking



## Networking

- Tools of the Trade
- Happy Hours & Receptions
- Professional Contacts

## Networking: Tools of the Trade

- Business cards: Professional name, personal email, use both sides!
- Professional membership associations: ASIL, FPA, YPFP, ABA, IBA, WFLS, etc.
- Volunteer activities: non-profits, community outreach, religious organizations, etc.
- Professional writing: ASIL Insights, Opinio Juris, JURIST, IntLawGrrls, etc.



# Networking: Happy Hours & Receptions

- Prepare
  - Research speakers and moderators; have specific targets (don't forget organizing staff!)
  - Identify areas of expertise and interest
  - Create questions on likely topics related to event
- Meet
  - KISS (Keep It Simple, Stupid)
  - Adapt to the circumstances (especially w/ bus. cards)
  - Have an exit line prepared
- Maintain
  - Follow up with another question
  - Provide value to the contact



## Networking: Professional Contacts

- Cultivating a professional contact
  - Identifying target individuals
  - Opening up an avenue of communication
  - Creating a two-way flow of information
  - Developing a mentoring relationship





# Develop Your Career Development Skills!

- Applying for a job is a job! Don't assume that because you are a good law student/lawyer, you'll be a good applicant. Create a set of job application skills to support your effort.
- Invest the time: Set aside a specific day/time
- Use the resources available:
  - Law school Career Services Office (seriously, you should be on a first name basis with CSO)
  - Professors
  - Professional network
  - Professional membership associations

# Questions

