



PARALEGAL JOBS AND CAREERS: PARALEGAL JOB DESCRIPTION

If you like the nuts and bolts of the legal profession and understand the importance of careful and thorough research, then paralegal studies might just be consistent with your character. The paralegal, or legal assistant, profession is the ground floor to lawyering and every bit as important. In many distinct ways, their duties include the same things lawyers who assume responsibility for the legal work do, but paralegals do not practice law and are prohibited from dispensing legal advice, trying a case in court, or accepting legal fees. Paralegals work hand in hand with lawyers, helping to prepare cases for trial. In their preparatory work they uncover all the facts of the case, conduct research to highlight relevant case laws and court decisions, obtain affidavits, and assist with depositions and other materials relevant to cases.

For a massive number of paralegal jobs, please see www.LawCrossing.com.

A significant portion of a paralegal's work is taken up with writing reports and drafting documents for litigation. After the initial fact-gathering stage, the paralegal prepares reports which outline the case and are then used by the supervising attorney to decide how the case should be litigated. The duties of paralegals vary according to the area of work. Paralegals who work in areas other than litigation, such as patent and copyright law, real estate and corporate law, also assist in the drafting of relevant documents--contracts, mortgages, estate planning, and separation agreements. Paralegals who work for government agencies maintain reference files, analyze material for internal use, and prepare information guides on the law. Those involved with community legal services help disadvantaged persons in need of legal aid. Much of their time is spent preparing and filing documents and doing research. Employee benefit plans, shareholder agreements and stock options are the primary concern of the paralegal working for corporations.

Paying Your Dues

Paralegals usually enter the profession after completing American Bar Association (ABA) approved college or training programs or are promoted up within law firms and trained on the job. Although most paralegal programs are completed in two years, a growing number of colleges and universities offer four-year bachelor's degree programs. This is a growth profession attracting large numbers of applicants and competition is strong and healthy. A four-year program at a reputable college and certification by the National Association of Legal Assistants, the Certified Legal Assistant (CLA) designation, will greatly enhance employment opportunities. The paralegal with training in a specialized area of the law who has demonstrated competence in the legal applications of computers will distinguish himself from the pack and be able to move ahead. Practical experience gained from student internships, familiarity with legal terminology, and good investigative skills are all advantages.

Associated Careers

A number of occupations call for specialized knowledge of the law but fall short of the need for a lawyer. Should a paralegal become disenchanted with her career, there are possibilities in law enforcement, as an insurance claim adjuster, occupational safety and health officer, patent agent, and title examiner. And there is always the option of becoming a lawyer.

Past And Future

The paralegal profession is a relatively new and rapidly expanding area. Previously, much of the groundwork now covered by the paralegal was part and parcel of being a lawyer. Now lawyers can afford to focus more intently on the strategies of trying cases and resolving legal problems, thanks to the invaluable preparatory work of the paralegal. Computer technology will continue to play a significant role in the fact-finding and gathering stages of most legal cases. Instead of poring over volumes of research material in law libraries, much of this information is easily accessible from on-line digitized law libraries, and software programs. Of course the paralegal who specializes in a particular field and who is computer friendly will have the added edge on advancement. Because of the continuous enactment of new legislation and revised interpretations of existing laws, the paralegal must keep constantly updated on every change, every proposal, every nuance of the law.

Quality of Life

Two Years Out

These are the critical years for the newcomer to the profession to take stock, gain valuable all-round experience, and simply feel his way around the profession. At this stage the paralegal is probably given minimal responsibilities; his work day will be spent largely in the law library. The paralegal should expect to be under constant supervision, assist with clerical matters, photocopy articles, and compile files. The work may seem never-ending and tedious, but the paralegal with perseverance will take it in stride and absorb this experience.

Five Years Out

By now the experienced paralegal has decided on and begun to pursue a specialized field. The professional has more responsibility and significantly reduced supervision. In a corporate environment, advancement opportunities are possible at this juncture. Usually, paralegals move up to supervisory or managerial capacities, but many may find it easier to move to another law firm in search of advancement and better salaries.

Ten Years Out

The ten-year mark is the ideal time for reassessment of one's career as a paralegal. By now the professional has undergone several career-enhancing changes such as college refresher courses, workshops and seminars on changes in the law, new computer applications in legal research, and developments in an area of specialty. At this stage, if the paralegal still yearns for more responsibilities and challenges, she is wont to make the ultimate decision of whether to pursue a law degree or undertake an alternate career.

Professional Profile

# of people in profession:	95,000
% male:	70
% female:	30
average hours per week:	40

Professionals Read

Legal Assistant Journal
NALA newsletter
Paralegal

Books, Films and TV Shows Featuring the Profession

The Firm
Night Shifts
Case #11072

Major Employers

Candice Apple & Associates 403 West Fisher Avenue Greensbrough, NC 27401 Tel: 800-669-2390 Fax: 910-370-0032	Compu-Quik Paralegal Services P.O. Box 884 Gold Hill, OR 97525-0884 Tel: 514-469-2074 Fax: same	Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom 919 3rd Avenue New York, NY 10022 Tel: 212-735-3000 Fax: 212-735-2000 Contact: General Office
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You'll Have Contact With

Attorneys
Judicial Clerks
Proofreaders

Major Associations

American Association for Paralegal Education
P.O. Box 40244
Overland Park, KS 66204
Tel: 913-381-4458

National Federation of Paralegal Assistants
P.O. Box 33108
Kansas City, MO 64114
Tel: 816-941-4000

National Association of Legal Assistants
1516 South Boston Avenue
Suite 200
Tulsa, OK 74119
Tel: 918-587-6828

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