

Paths to Legal Careers:

A Guide for High School Students



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This guide is designed to help you explore careers in the legal profession and what you'd have to do to pursue one of these careers. There are also a wide variety of career paths in the criminal justice and law enforcement fields. Those careers are not covered in this guide, but you can find more information at www.discoverpolicing.org. If you think you are interested in a legal career, you can also talk to your teacher or guidance counselor for specific advice.

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CAREERS IN LEGAL PROFESSIONS



With a high school diploma or two-year college degree

These careers often require a high school diploma or a two-year college degree:

- **Legal secretary**—Legal secretaries, also called administrative assistants, work in law firms, at companies, or in courts, and handle administrative duties like answering phone calls, scheduling appointments, and organizing files.
- **Court reporter**—Court reporters, also known as stenographers, are responsible for recording speeches, court testimony, legal proceedings, and statements. Court reporters create an exact written transcript of everything that is said. Court reporters must use special stenographic equipment in order to record over 200 words per minute.
- **Court interpreter**—Court interpreters are responsible for translating court proceedings for the judge, lawyers, witnesses, and the jury.
- **Facilities**—Facilities staff coordinate the space, infrastructure, people, and organization of an office. Large law firms usually have facilities departments, which might manage the building, offices, furniture, and equipment.

- **Paralegal**—Paralegals, or legal assistants, investigate, research, and organize the facts in lawyers' cases. Under lawyers' supervision, paralegals prepare a variety of legal documents, manage clients, and engage in many of the same activities as lawyers do; however, they cannot give legal advice or represent clients in court. Paralegals work in law firms, companies, and courts. Some employers require paralegals to have a four-year college degree.

With a four-year college degree

Generally these careers require a four-year college degree.

- **Legal consultant**—There are a variety of consultants a lawyer might use for specialized expertise. For instance, legal nurse consultants usually come from the medical profession and have an interest and skills in both law and medicine. They advise attorneys about medical-related issues. Other examples would be a forensic consultant, accident reconstructionist, investigator, and jury consultant.
- **Law firm marketing**—Marketing staff are responsible for creating a positive image for their law firms with a goal of attracting new clients and retaining existing ones.
- **Legal recruiting**—Recruiting and professional development personnel generally oversee the process of recruiting, hiring, and training qualified attorneys at major law firms.
- **IT**—Information Technology personnel maintain a law firm's technology infrastructure.
- **Accounting/financial**—Law firms are a business, and keeping financial records is the responsibility of the accounting department.

With a JD

- **Lawyer**—Also known as attorneys, lawyers represent, advise, and advocate for their clients in a trial, during negotiations, or while drafting documents such as wills or contracts. Lawyers research and interpret federal, state and local laws. Lawyers should be willing to read and remember lots of information, work well under pressure, and possess excellent communication and research skills.
- **Electronic discovery expert**—Electronic discovery professionals (or, e-discovery experts) are legal professionals who use technology to identify, manage, and preserve information that has been stored electronically. This might include computer files, emails, and text messages. This information is then used in the litigation process.
- **Compliance officer/specialist**—Compliance specialists ensure corporations and consulting firms are following all government rules.
- **Mediator**—Mediators facilitate negotiation and settlement between disputing parties by providing direction and encouragement, working collaboratively with the parties and finding creative ways to reach a mutual solution.

There are a number of other positions, such as elected officials, lobbyists, or policy positions for which a law degree is not required, but often helpful.

COLLEGE ADMISSION



If you want to become a lawyer, the first step after high school is to attend college. This section explores your options and the application procedures for colleges.

Types of Schools

There are three primary types of colleges: two-year colleges, four-year public or state colleges, and four-year private colleges.

1. **Two-year colleges**—include community colleges and vocational-technical colleges. These colleges offer two-year programs. Graduates earn a certificate or associate degree. Usually, two-year colleges have relatively low tuition.
2. **Public or state colleges and universities**—funded by local or state governments and traditionally have lower tuition than private schools. These schools offer a four-year bachelor's degree. Most state colleges and universities will offer a discounted tuition for students who are residents of that state.

- 3. Private colleges and universities**—These schools also offer a four-year degree but rely primarily on tuition to cover operating costs and therefore are likely to be more expensive. However, they also rely on private donations and therefore offer some students generous financial aid packages.

Which one is right for you?

Before deciding where to go to college, think about where you want to live, what you want to do after college, and whether you are willing or able to take out student loans to cover the cost of tuition. If possible, it is a good idea to visit the college or university campus so that you can see the school and talk to admission personnel as well as current students.

Application

Depending on where you apply, you may have a separate application for each school. Some schools use a single application, called the “Common App,” that you can complete once and send to several schools. For most colleges and universities, there are five parts to an application: application information, information from your school, standardized tests, letters of recommendation, and essays.

- 1. Application information**—This is the information you provide when you complete the application, such as your name and contact information, extracurricular activities, community involvement, jobs, and any internships you participated in during your high school years. Be sure to include any awards you have received or leadership responsibilities you have had.
- 2. Information from your school**—Each college or university will require that your high school send a transcript, which includes your grade point average, a list of all the coursework you completed during high school and the grades you received in those courses. In order to ensure this occurs on time, be sure

to provide accurate information about your high school to the college, and give your guidance counselor accurate information regarding the colleges you plan on applying to. Once you have submitted a completed application, let your guidance counselor know so he or she can forward your transcript to that school.

- 3. Standardized tests**—Most colleges require applicants to take one of two standardized tests—the ACT or SAT—and report to them your score. The ACT is based on a 36 point scale and covers English, math, reading, and science. SAT scores range from 400 to 1600 and the test covers math reasoning, reading, and writing. You should take these tests during your junior year of high school or early in your senior year. When you take the tests, you can select several colleges to send the results to. You can also send results to other schools later. Both the SAT and ACT offer fee waivers for students who cannot afford the cost of the test.
- 4. Letters of recommendation**—Many colleges and universities require at least two letters of recommendation. When you are thinking about who to ask for a letter of recommendation you should consider teachers, supervisors, mentors, or professionals. However, make sure the person knows you well. If you have not performed well in a class, or haven't talked to the teacher in two years, he or she may not be the best person to speak about your qualifications and potential in college. You may want to give your letter writers a copy of the application and your list of activities. Be sure to follow up with the letter writer before the deadline to make sure the letters were sent.
- 5. Essays**—Many colleges and universities also require that you complete at least one essay. Essays give you a chance to tell your story and allow application reviewers to get a sense of who you are. Each application will have its own questions. If you are doing the Common App there will be a number of questions to choose from. Remember to take time and think

about what you are writing. You should also have an adult such as a teacher, guidance counselor, or parent review the essay before you submit it. Colleges are interested in both what you have to say and how well you write.

Pay attention to application deadlines, but it is okay to submit your applications well before the deadline. Some schools have “rolling admissions” which means they review applications as they are received, rather than waiting until after a deadline to look at all the applications together. These schools will accept students until their first-year class is full. Some schools also have “early admission.” Look at these applications closely because some require a commitment to attend the school if you are admitted.

Almost all applications will have a fee associated with them, and many schools offer a fee waiver if you ask and can provide evidence of financial hardship.

Resources

- TheBestSchools.com is a website designed to help high school students think about and plan for college and the workforce (thebestschools.org)
- College Board has almost any information you need, from applying to college (including writing application essays) to picking your major (www.collegeboard.org)
- SAT (www.sat.collegeboard.org)
- ACT (www.actstudent.org)
- List of schools that accept the Common App (www.commonapp.org/search-colleges)

Don't forget to talk to your teachers and guidance counselors about your plans. Keep them informed so they are ready to answer any questions from the schools you are applying to.

PAYING FOR COLLEGE



The cost of a college education may seem too high, but financial aid can help lower your costs. Community colleges are usually the most affordable. In-state colleges are typically less expensive than going out-of state. Public colleges are usually less expensive than private schools. TheBestSchools.com is an excellent resource for those thinking about college (thebestschools.org). Below is information from KnowHow2Go that will get you started in researching how to pay for college.

Your guidance counselor is also an excellent resource with specific information about your situation.

General College Costs

There are a few things that go into the total cost of a year at college—tuition, fees, supplies, a place to live, food to eat, and more. Tuition is the biggest single cost. Tuition “sticker prices” range from about \$7,000 per year for a two-year public college, to \$26,000 or more for a four-year public college. Private universities generally have higher tuition prices—from \$45,000 to much more. Many students do not pay this full “sticker price,” however. They get financial aid to cover the portion they cannot afford. Once at college, students need a place to live, food to eat, and books to study with.

Some students live at home with their parents for free. Others live on-campus in a dorm. Fees for room and board on campus can range from \$7,000–\$9,000 or more, depending on the school. Some students live off-campus in apartments or houses they rent nearby. Many four-year universities require that you stay on campus your first year. Books and other supplies usually cost between \$1,000–\$1,500 per year. Students can often buy used textbooks, and some schools offer financial assistance for buying books and supplies. Transportation and other miscellaneous costs could add \$1,500 to \$3,500 per year, as well.

Financial Aid

Financial aid is available to cover the difference between the cost of the college and what you and your family can pay. More than half of students currently in college receive some financial aid to help pay for it. There are three main types of financial aid: grants and scholarships; work; and loans.

- 1. Grants and scholarships**—Grants and scholarships do not have to be repaid after you graduate. Grants usually come from the federal or state governments, or from individual colleges. There are thousands of scholarships available. Many are awarded to students based on academic achievement (these are called merit scholarships), but there are some that are awarded based on financial need. Some scholarships are designated for people of a specific race or ethnicity, others target certain fields of study, and some are set aside for people with specific hobbies or interests. Some awards are also available through community service, such as AmeriCorps programs.
- 2. Work**—Many students work while they are in school to pay for education costs such as books, supplies and personal expenses. Work-study is a federal program that provides students with a part-time job (usually on-campus) and uses the income to contribute to the costs of college.

- 3. Loans**—Most financial aid (54%) comes in the form of loans to students or parents, aid that must be repaid even if you don't graduate. The federal government sponsors many low-interest loans. These loans are awarded based on financial need. Some of these loans are subsidized by the government, which means you don't make any loan payments until you graduate or are no longer in college. Other loans are offered by private lenders. These loans typically have significantly higher interest rates. Some colleges also have their own loan funds.

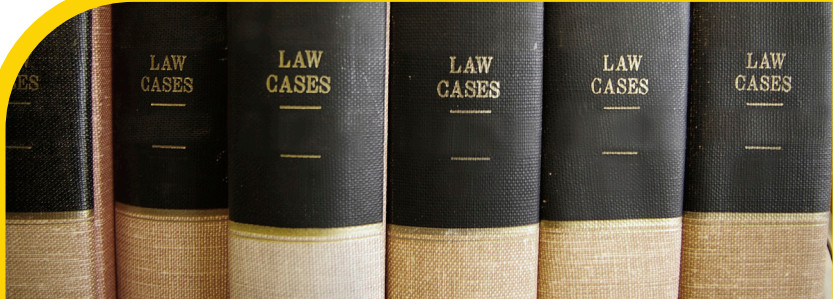
FAFSA

To apply for most forms of financial aid, you will need to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). You will need information about your household income and other financial information for these forms. Start early in gathering this information.

Resources

- U.S. Department of Education Federal Student Aid programs (<https://studentaid.gov>)
- Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form (bit.ly/3KWKJfs)
- National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators has many tools to help navigate financial aid programs (www.nasfaa.org)
- Search for scholarships at Fastweb (www.fastweb.com)
- Paying for College from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (www.consumerfinance.gov/paying-for-college)

LAW SCHOOL ADMISSION



Law school is a type of graduate school. Students attend law school after earning a four-year college degree. Law school graduates earn a Juris Doctor, or JD, degree. With a JD, graduates are eligible to take a state's bar exam. If they pass that exam, then they are allowed to practice law in that state. If you want to go to law school, you might start planning during college or you might want to work for a few years first. Law school generally takes three years for full time students.

Types of Law Schools

The American Bar Association accredits, or approves, law schools in the U.S. Most law schools are ABA-approved, which means that you will be able to take the bar exam (attorney licensing exam) in almost all states. Some schools are not ABA-approved. They are often private and smaller—be wary of these schools as they may limit job opportunities after graduating. Once again, there are both public state law schools and private law schools. All ABA-approved law schools offer a very similar course of study, and some schools have specialties such as international law, corporate law, or public interest law.

When trying to determine which law school is right for you, consider cost, location, and reputation. Consider visiting the schools and talking to an admissions person at the school. Admissions staff can help you figure out scholarships possibilities, student life, course loads, and any special qualities the school might have.

LSAT Standardized Test

Law schools require applicants to take the Law School Admission Test (LSAT), and scores on this test are a big factor in the admissions process. Scores are on a 180-point scale and will test your logic reasoning, reading comprehension, and analytical reasoning. You should plan ahead to devote time to studying for this test and taking practice tests. Free online courses are available; paid courses with live instructors or online support are also options.

Application

The Law School Admission Council (LSAC) administers the LSAT and manages the application process. You will fill out your law school application on an easy online tool from LSAC—your account will automatically be created when you take the LSAT. You will need your resume, transcript, and letters of recommendation. Your letters of recommendation should come from teachers, supervisors, or others who know you well and can speak to your professional and educational skills and potential.

The bulk of your law school application will be a personal statement. A personal statement is an essay without a prompt question. Therefore, the applicant decides what to say. There are a lot of different tips for writing a personal statement. Don't forget to proofread, and ask others to read your statement, too! There is a chance that the school will request an interview with you. If this happens, be sure to research the school and interviewing techniques.

What You Can Do Now to Prepare

If you are considering law school there are some things you can do now and in college to help you succeed.

The good thing about law school is that there are no specific college course requirements and you can major in any subject. However, there are some majors and classes that could help you develop the skills and experiences to help you succeed in law school. Any class that helps you with analysis, critical thinking, and writing will be a good course to take to prepare for law school. Consider joining clubs or students organizations that could provide you with access to legal professionals and related experience such as student government or mock trial.

If you are going to work during the summer or have an internship during the school year you can look for those opportunities at law firms, law schools, courthouses, or other legal related organizations.

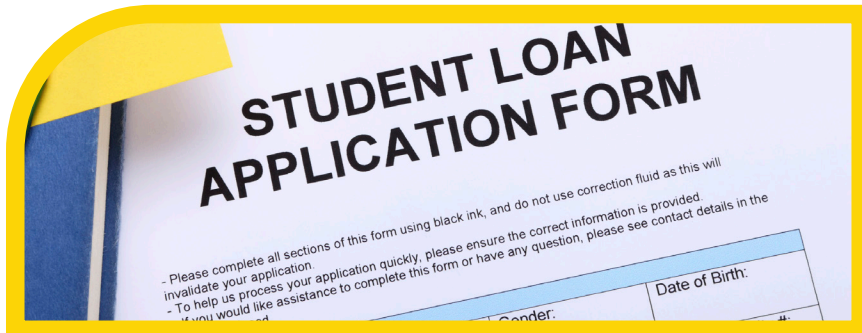
These types of jobs and internships will give you exposure to the legal field and allow you to talk with professionals already in the field. Volunteering and getting involved in your community will also help when you are applying to law schools. The most important thing will be your grades, so you should always make your school work your first priority.

Finally, remember to always consider your desire to be involved in the legal field when you are posting on social media and interacting with your community. You should strive to create a professional profile, and never post anything that you would be embarrassed or ashamed to have a future employer see.

Resources

- The LSAC has its own guides for applying to law school (www.lsac.org/jd)
- The LSAC has developed a website (www.discoverlaw.org) designed to “to encourage racially and ethnically diverse students to discover career opportunities in law and choose a path in undergraduate school to help them succeed.” Use this website to dive deeper into the topics covered in this pamphlet.
- The LSAC law school application checklist (www.lsac.org/jd)
- Some tips about writing a personal statement (bit.ly/3AY4S01)
- Talk to your college professors, current students, law school admission staff, and legal professionals!

PAYING FOR LAW SCHOOL



One of the biggest hurdles of attending law school is figuring out how to pay for it. Much like paying for college, there is financial aid available to help lower costs of law school.

General Costs of Law School

Law school typically takes three years for full-time students and four years for part-time students. Tuition ranges from a few thousand dollars to more than \$50,000 a year. Housing, food, books, transportation, and personal expenses are similar to those for college and will depend in part on where the law school is located. Law schools will establish a “Cost of Attendance” that includes both the fixed costs of tuition and fees and allowances for your living expenses. It represents the maximum financial aid you may receive from any source.

Financial Aid

The same three types of financial aid as available for college are available for law school:

1. **Grants and scholarships**—Grants and scholarships don’t have to be repaid and you don’t need to work to earn them. These

programs exist but are much more limited than they are for undergraduate colleges and universities. Most of them come from individual schools. Scholarships are most commonly based on merit (academic achievement in college).

- 2. Work**—Many law students work before and during law school to help pay the expenses. Law students can also get work-study aid, a federal program that provides students with part-time employment (either on or off campus).
- 3. Loans**—A large majority of law school students rely on education loans that must be repaid. Students can get loans sponsored by the federal government—some of these are awarded based on financial need, have low interest rates, and are subsidized by the government, meaning they don't accrue interest while you are in school. Private loans are also available, and typically have higher interest rates and are not subsidized. To apply for federal financial aid, you will need to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). You will need personal financial and other information, so start collecting it early.
- 4. Loan repayment assistance programs**—Some law schools and professional organizations have programs that allow lawyers who work for the government or in the public interest to receive funds to help pay back their loans.

Resources

- Law School Admissions Council financial aid overview (bit.ly/3TTfYMq)
- AdmissionsDean.com's paying for law school section includes a scholarship finder. (bit.ly/3AZ57be)
- Individual law school financial aid offices also have extensive information on how to pay for law school, taking into consideration the specific expenses at each school.

NETWORKING & BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS



Networking is the process of developing relationships with professionals. Getting to know people in the field you are interested in will help you learn about careers in that field, get advice about how to pursue those careers, and learn about job and internship opportunities.

By networking with lawyers and other legal career professionals you can get insight into what being a lawyer is really like.

If you don't know what you want to do yet, you can learn about a variety of options and start to figure out what jobs interest you the most. Networking is also often the best way to hear about job and internship opportunities.

Some opportunities are not advertised widely, and you may only hear about them by word-of-mouth. Networking and relationship building are skills that will be essential as you look for a job, so you should begin to practice those skills now.

Tips for building relationships:

- 1. Look for chances to meet professionals in your field**—Join clubs or organizations for students who are interested in your desired profession. Look for opportunities to shadow professionals in that field or to intern at a company or organization where you can meet those professionals. Ask adults in your life for introductions to professionals in the field that interests you.
- 2. Set a goal**—Before you go to any place where you might meet a professional in the field in which you're interested, determine what it is you hope to achieve. Is there someone in particular you are hoping to meet? Or, are you just trying to meet people who do what you want to do? If you know your goal, then you can devise a way to achieve it.
- 3. Be professional**—Dress appropriately for the event you're attending. If it's a social event, have fun, but remember your goals and act accordingly. Unless you're taking notes with it, put away your phone. No one wants to talk to someone staring at a screen.
- 4. Connect**—In a world where most of the communication you do is through a device, it may be difficult to just have a conversation with a stranger. It's easier to get in on, or start a conversation, if you arrive early. If you're jumping in, avoid groups of two where it may seem more like interrupting rather than networking. Ask well-thought out questions that inspire discussion. And remember to be yourself.
- 5. Remember**—Remembering names can be hard, yet it is so vital to good networking. A simple trick is to use the person's name right away, as in "It's nice to meet you Jane" or "John, let me ask you" Also, when you're done speaking with someone, take some notes on their business card or the notebook you brought with you to help you remember them, such as something you talked about.

6. **Follow up**—If you have a substantive conversation with someone at a networking event you should always follow up and keep building on the connection you just made. It's always nice to send an email or note saying "It was nice to meet you" or to follow up with a question you had or by providing some more information about yourself.
7. **Extra tip**—Use social media to your advantage. Connect with people who might be able to help you advance your goals and to keep up with your peers. Many professionals use LinkedIn. Just remember—the internet is forever. If you wish to pursue a career in a field like law, make sure your social media presence reflects that choice. Everything that you post should be something that you would be comfortable to have a future employer see.

