

## A Legal Assistant



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### **What made you pursue a career in the legal field?**

I became interested in the legal field when I went to work for a friend who was an attorney. The job was supposed to be temporary, but I really liked the work so I ended up working for that firm for three years. I have been doing this kind of work ever since.

### **What are some interesting things you have done since holding a position in this field?**

Meeting all sorts of people has been interesting in itself. The most interesting thing is when I got to go to court to hear closing arguments in a murder trial in which the attorney I was working for was defending the man on trial. After working on the case for several months, it was definitely interesting to hear what the prosecution's case was.

### **What do you find most rewarding about your job?**

The most rewarding aspect of my job is how I worked my way up from receptionist at a law firm. I was lucky enough to work with patient people who were willing to teach me things to help me succeed in this field.

### **If there is anything you could change about your position, what would it be?**

This particular law firm does not allow the Legal Assistant to do research. If I could change something, it would be that. I would like to do more research.

### **In your experience, what type of law is most interesting?**

It really depends on the person. I myself find different types of law interesting for different reasons. Here, at this firm, I work for an attorney who does personal injuries, wrongful deaths, and also contract law. Personal injuries are interesting to me in some ways because you really get

to know the clients. Contract law is interesting because you can really learn a lot about the law and how it works and applies to a particular case.

**What type of skills do you think are most important for a Legal Assistant?**

Organizational skills are definitely one of the most important skills to have. You have to be able to organize file material and help the attorneys prepare for trial, depositions, etc. I have worked for a lot of different attorneys who are unorganized themselves and they really depend in their assistant to know what is going on and when. I also think you need excellent computer skills and need to know the basics on pleadings and discovery.

**What type of part time positions or internships should I pursue to better prepare for this field?**

I think if you could do an internship at the Circuit Clerk's office that would be a great place to learn the basics and to learn the process of how things are filed with the Court. You could learn a lot just by working there. I also think that you should try to work for different types of lawyers before you completely decide which type you want to work for. For instance, you may think that working for a divorce lawyer would be great until you actually do it. Try to work for a variety so you know which you would find most enjoyable, because you will do a better job if you enjoy that you are doing.

**What is the average starting salary for a Legal Assistant?**

Of course it varies some, depending on the size of the firm and your experience. A Legal Assistant right out of school going to work for a medium size law firm in the Charleston area could expect to make \$18,000 to \$22,000 annually.

**What are your normal working hours and how often is overtime required?**

At this firm, I work nine to five Monday through Friday. Sometimes, I have worked on Saturday if my work load suddenly increases for some reason or if we are preparing for a trial. I have worked late in the evening on occasions because of deadlines that have to be met. It is rare that I have a lot of overtime, but when you work in the field, you have to be flexible to the point because attorneys work the client and sometimes that means after five o'clock in the evening or on a Saturday.

**If there was one piece of advice you could give anyone pursuing a career in this field, what would it be?**

My advice would be to find the type of law you like the best and pursue a job with an attorney in that field. If you like what you do, you will do a much better job and in turn, the attorney will too.

*Interviewed by Amy Armstrong for a College 101 assignment on 05/02.*