



## Feature

## Great Ways to Hold onto Tax Paralegal Jobs

If you have ever considered a career in the law, one of the best ways to get into the law is by becoming a **paralegal**. **Law paralegal jobs** require less study than do other legal jobs, such as becoming a lawyer. However, they are still a great way to learn a lot about the law if it interests you and you can also become a **paralegal** first and then go on to law school to become a lawyer later, if you find you like the field.

It should be noted that at present, the legal sector is cutting jobs because of the economy's current state. However, as law firms cut back on their staff, being a paralegal or having a paralegal job may actually provide greater job security, since paralegals can do many of the tasks lawyers can do and are paid less.

### Places You Can Work If You Have a **Paralegal Job**

Most paralegals work for a law firm. However, paralegals might also work for government agencies or corporate legal departments. Be aware that if you work for a government agency, you are probably going to have to take a civil-service test in addition to the background you must have to be a paralegal.

### Nature of the Work

When you are a paralegal, you assist lawyers as they prepare for events like corporate meetings, trials, hearings, or closings. You may do much of the homework assigned to a lawyer such as investigating case facts and studying precedents for cases or other things so as to make sure all bases are covered when it comes to preparing for a case. You may also identify appropriate laws, legal arguments, or other judicial decisions that back up the facts of a particular case.

Your first job is generally to organize and analyze the information and then prepare written reports for attorneys that summarize what you have found. Attorneys use this information to determine how a particular case should be managed. In the event a particular attorney's case goes to trial, paralegals may help by preparing legal arguments, drafting motions, assisting attorneys during trials, or obtaining affidavits, among other things. You may also track and organize the files involved in a particular case and make sure attorneys can find them easily.

Paralegals may also help attorneys draft separation

agreements, mortgages, contracts, or other documents necessary to a particular case. As a tax paralegal, you may also help clients prepare tax returns, plan estates, or establish trust funds. You may also operate in a more clerical sense generally, in that you may also coordinate office activities or maintain financial records for your law office.

As you can see, your job as a law paralegal is sometimes much more a jack-of-all-trades position than the more-specialized work an attorney performs. Nonetheless, it is very important.

### Background and Education

Most commonly, paralegals get associate's degrees through community colleges. If you already have a college degree, you can earn a certificate in paralegal studies. Several schools also offer bachelors or master's degrees in paralegal studies. Still another way to obtain a job as a paralegal is to be trained on the job by an employer, although this is less common than the other methods.

If you have been a legal secretary, this is another avenue by which you may become a paralegal; oftentimes, employers promote experienced legal secretaries into paralegal jobs. It is also true that those who have been in nursing or health administration positions or other types of administrative positions can become paralegals simply because of their vast knowledge of the area. For example, those who have been involved in healthcare administration can be a great asset to a law firm that specializes in personal injury cases or other similar types of work as long as they have some additional, necessary legal training.

Formal paralegal training programs vary in their quality, but some programs offer job placement in addition to training. Before you enter any paralegal program, you should research others' experiences in the program before you apply, if at all possible. In most cases, training programs include computer



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applications as they pertain to legal jobs and legal research courses.

To get further experience and thus increase your chances of landing a job, it may be a good idea to get an internship if you can through a paralegal training program. With an internship, you get several months of practice on a practical level by working at a law firm or with public defenders, etc., under the supervision of another experienced paralegal or other personnel.

In some cases, you can even specialize in the type of internship you want to do, depending on the type of paralegal work you want to get into once you graduate from school. For example, if you want to work for the government, you may do your internship in a government agency.

Finally, certification is not a must, but it helps you advance in your career and can help you stay in demand. One possible

certification to acquire is the American Alliance Certified Paralegal credential; it is a voluntary certification that requires paralegals to have at least five years of practical experience before they apply. They must also meet specific educational requirements. This certification must be renewed every two years. You can also become a registered paralegal through the National Federation of Paralegal Association if you have a bachelor's degree, have at least two years of work experience, and have passed an exam.

## Outlook and Compensation

Outlook for paralegals is quite good, partly because many law firms and other agencies are trying to cut costs by using paralegals to perform much of the work lawyers used to perform. As of 2006, paralegals made an average salary of about \$43,000 a year.

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