**NATURE OF WORK**

Paralegals, or legal assistants as some people call them, work under the direction of a lawyer or lawyers in law offices. Paralegals perform tasks that are delegated to them by lawyers. They perform many of the same duties as lawyers, but without legal jurisdiction.

Some tasks include helping lawyers prepare for closings, hearings, trials and corporate meetings. Paralegals also investigate facts for cases and make sure that all information pertaining to the case is considered. Paralegals identify all laws, regulations, similar case hearings and any other material pertaining to the case at hand. They ensure that the lawyer has all necessary information when dealing with a case.

Paralegals also work drafting contracts, mortgages, and separation agreements. They assist in preparing tax returns, establishing trust funds, and planning estates. They may prepare legal arguments, draft pleadings, and motions to be filed in court. They get affidavits, assist lawyers during trials and do anything else lawyers need them to do. Their job is to make lawyers’ lives more organized.

Percentage of tasks done by paralegals [3] *

- Assist at a trial: 79%
- Court Filings: 22%
- Law Library Maintenance: 76%
- Assist with Client Contact: 16%
- Prepare and Attend Closings: 64%
- Fast Checking: 14%
- Deposition Summaries: 59%
- Document Analysis: 14%
- Personnel Management: 53%
- Calendaring Deadlines: 12%

**QUICK FACTS**

- Paralegals, or legal assistants, assume a large range of tasks in legal offices. They perform many of the same tasks as lawyers; however, they are prohibited from carrying out duties considered to be practice of the law.
- The average annual salary is $53,000 [1].
- In order to become a paralegal, you must participate in a training program from a college that either leads to an associate’s degree or certificate in paralegal studies.
- Jobs as a paralegal are projected to increase 22% in the next six years, which is much faster than average compared to all other occupations [2].
EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT PARALEGAL AND LEGAL ASSISTANT CAREERS

Prepare/Attend Depositions 49%  Draft Pleadings, etc… 12%
Cite Checking 49%  General factual Research 11%
Train Employees 48%  Case Management 5%
Client/ Witness Interviews 39%  Draft Compensation 5%
Investigation 23%

*The total adds up to more than 100% because paralegals normally perform more than one task.

SPECIALTY AREAS

Paralegals usually work in a specific area of law within the organization they are employed. Some of these specific areas of study include litigation, personal injury, corporate law, criminal law, employee benefits, intellectual property, labor law, bankruptcy, immigration, family law, and real estate. Paralegals are typically employed by law firms, corporate legal departments, and various government offices. Depending on which organization they are employed determines the tasks they perform. Tasks of some specific specialties include [3]:

Litigation Paralegal
Interviewing witnesses
Analyzing and digesting legal document
Investigating facts
Performing legal and factual research
Drafting pleadings, legal memoranda and briefs
Keeping track of court dates and deadlines
Assisting in trial preparation and at trial
Aiding in preparing appeals

Estate Planning and Probate Paralegal
Interviewing clients
Arranging for collection
Valuing and transferring assets
Administering estate accounts
Drafting and filing state and federal tax returns
Drafting wills and other estate planning documents
Corporate Paralegal
- Drafting partnership and corporate formation documents
- Maintaining corporate minute books and resolutions
- Fulfilling securities reporting requirements
- Helping prepare and file annual financial reports
- Conducting due diligence for business transactions
- Drafting shareholder agreements and stock-option plans
- Monitoring and reviewing government regulations to ensure legal business operation
- Conducting patent and trademark searches
- Preparing for board meetings

Employment Law or Labor Law Paralegal
- Drafting employee policies and employment handbooks
- Drafting pleadings and affidavits in employment disputes
- Investigating wrongful termination or other claims
- Helping facilitate positions in organized labor campaigns
- Performing work similar to litigation paralegals when preparing for trial

Real Estate Paralegal
- Drafting transaction documents
- Preparing for closings
- Performing due diligence
- Managing and indexing transaction documents and closing binders
- Coordinating closing of escrow
PERCENTAGE OF PARALEGALS WORKING IN EACH SPECIALTY AREA [3]*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specialty Area</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civil Litigation</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contracts</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Estate</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Injury</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor Law</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trusts and Estates</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probate</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Law</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banking/Finance</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bankruptcy</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Product Liability</td>
<td>13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Criminal</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers Compensation</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual Property</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mergers &amp; Acquisitions</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass Tort Litigation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elder Law</td>
<td>9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Environmental Law</td>
<td>9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tax</td>
<td>9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Securities/ Antitrust</td>
<td>9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legislative Lobbying</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Admiralty/ Maritime</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The total adds up to more than 100% because paralegals often work in more than one specialty.

TRAINING & EDUCATION

In order to become a paralegal you must participate in a legal assistant training program that results in either a degree or diploma. For those just out of high school, or without any previous post secondary educational experience getting your associate’s or bachelor’s degree in paralegal studies is the best way to go.

For those who already have a post secondary degree, you will need to complete a training program to receive a paralegal certificate upon completion. Getting certified only takes a few months to complete, however, training is intense.

You can be trained or gain an education in paralegal studies from colleges, universities, law schools, and proprietary schools. Most of these programs train you in legal research, legal applications of computers, and offer practical experience.

It is important to complete an internship or assistantship program in order to gain valuable hands-on experience.

JOB OUTLOOK

Jobs in legal assisting are projected to increase 22% in the next six years [2]. This is much faster than average compared to all other occupations. Jobs in Federal, State and Local government agencies are projected to increase which provides many job opportunities for paralegals in the future.
EARNINGS

Paralegals earn a competitive salary that varies based on education, training, experience, employer, and location. According to indeed.com, the average annual salary for paralegals in 2009 is $53,000. Paralegals receive great bonuses and benefits including, vacation, paid sick leave, 401(k), life insurance, personal paid time off, dental insurance, and reimbursement for continuing legal education.

A more in depth look at salary by years experience [3]
www.aapipara.org/
American Association for Paralegal Education: http://www.aafpe.org/
National Association of Legal Assistants: http://www.nala.org/
National Association of Legal Secretaries: http://www.nals.org/
National Federation of Paralegals Associations: http://www.paralegals.org/
Standing Committee on Paralegals: http://www.abanet.org/legalservices/paralegals/

REFERENCES


