

Intellectual Property Lawyer

Protect inventions, brands and creative work. The patent side is the one law job that wants your science degree.

TYPICAL PAY

\$159,670

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$78k to \$352k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

7 to 8 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Law firms, company legal departments, the Patent and Trad...

How you get there

- 1 Bachelor's degree** 4 years
 For trademark and copyright work, any major. For patent work you need a qualifying degree in engineering, physics, chemistry, biology, computer science or similar. Choose this before you choose law school.
- 2 The admission test and applications** 6 to 12 months
 The Law School Admission Test, or in some schools an accepted alternative. Your score and your grades largely decide which schools and which scholarships you get.
- 3 Law school** 3 years
 Three years for a Doctor of Jurisprudence degree at a school accredited by the American Bar Association. Take patent law, intellectual property and licensing courses, and do a summer at a firm that does this work.
- 4 Pass a bar exam** Months of study, then the exam
 Admission is state by state. Most states use the Uniform Bar Examination, whose score is portable between the jurisdictions that accept it; California and a few others run their own.
- 5 Register with the Patent and Trademark Office** Months
 For patent practice, pass the registration exam: 100 multiple-choice questions over two three-hour sessions, then a character and fitness review. Trademark and copyright lawyers do not need this.

Pros and cons

- + The one law specialty where a science degree is an advantage, not a detour
- + Genuine shortage of qualified patent people, so the work is there
- + You learn what is being invented before the public does
- Seven to eight years and serious debt for the attorney route
- Billable hour targets at firms mean long evenings and weekends
- Patent drafting is exacting and detailed work that bores some people rigid

Good to know

It is the only law job with a science entry requirement

To practice before the Patent and Trademark Office you must show scientific and technical qualifications, normally a degree in engineering or a hard science. No amount of legal brilliance substitutes. It is the n...

You can write patents without being a lawyer

A patent agent passes the same federal registration exam, does the same drafting and prosecution work, and never goes to law school. The registration is national, so one exam covers the whole country, u...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Lawyers (23-1011.00)

United States Patent and Trademark Office: becoming a patent practitioner

United States Patent and Trademark Office

National Conference of Bar Examiners: the Uniform Bar Examination

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/intellectual-property-lawyer>



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