

Paralegal

Do the research, drafting and case preparation that lawyers bill for, without going to law school.

TYPICAL PAY

\$62,890

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$45k to \$102k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

1 to 4 years

after high school

DEMAND

Limited

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Law firms, corporate legal departments, government agenci...

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma** Grade 12
 Take every writing-heavy class you can. Government and civics help you understand what a court is for.
- 2 Pick your route** 1 to 4 years
 A two-year associate degree in paralegal studies, a four-year degree in anything followed by a paralegal certificate, or a bachelor's degree in paralegal studies.
- 3 Internship or entry job** During study
 A semester in a real firm, or a starting role as a legal secretary or file clerk. Firms hire the people they have already seen work.
- 4 First paralegal job** After graduation
 Expect to learn the specific practice area on the job. Family law, personal injury, immigration and estates hire the most beginners.
- 5 Certification, if you want it** Once you qualify
 A voluntary national credential, earned by exam, that some employers pay a premium for.

Pros and cons

- + Real legal work without three years of law school and its debt
- + Cheap and fast to qualify, sometimes in a single year
- + Transferable to government, corporate and nonprofit employers
- Federal projections show little or no growth in the occupation
- Software and legal technology are absorbing document-heavy work
- You do the work and the attorney signs it, which grates on some people

Optional boosts

The Certified Paralegal credential. Advanced certification. Electronic discovery training. Notary commission.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Paralegals and Legal Assistants (23-2011.00)
 NALA certification, the Certified Paralegal credential
 University of Washington Certificate in Paralegal Studies
 USAJOBS, the federal government's official employment site

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/paralegal>

Good to know

Clients are billed for your time

Firms bill paralegal hours to clients at a real hourly rate, which is why a good paralegal is treated as a revenue source rather than an overhead cost. It is also why timekeeping is part of the job.

The growth forecast is flat

Federal projections rate this occupation as below average, with little or no change in employment expected. Openings come mostly from people leaving the job rather than from new positions being created.



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