



THE CANADIAN BAR ASSOCIATION

L'ASSOCIATION DU BARREAU CANADIEN

Articling

How to begin your search



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Introduction

There's nothing like mentioning the search for an articling position to provoke some anxiety in the mind of a law student. Much of the stress flows from a sense of not having sufficient information about the process. We at the Young Lawyers' Conference of the Canadian Bar Association want to help you relax a little. Getting the straight goods is the first step. This booklet is designed to give you some basic information and practical advice about the process from the perspective of young lawyers who have recently been in your shoes.

The mandate of the Young Lawyers' Conference is to promote the professional and personal interests of young members of Canada's legal profession. The Conference helps new members of the legal profession face today's challenges in the following ways:

- ◆ By representing the interests of new lawyers and notaries inside and outside the Canadian Bar Association;
- ◆ By providing them a forum to pursue and act on issues of concern to young lawyers through continuing legal education programs.

The Conference would like to acknowledge the invaluable contribution of Ron Miller and Steven Rosenhek, as well as Stephanie Tynan. This book would not have seen the light of day without their efforts.

For more information on the Conference please contact your CBA Branch or Hannah Bernstein at the CBA national office in Ottawa. Happy reading!

Janet Hoyt
Chair, 1994-95

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Getting Started

It's never too early to begin the process. As you progress through law school, begin to consider the setting in which you wish to practise – a traditional law firm, government, legal clinic, or as in-house counsel for a social agency or corporation. There are many different possibilities. Contact the local Young Lawyers' Section of the Canadian Bar Association in your province or territory to find out about meetings on career alternatives and to network with lawyers who already practise in these settings. As well, many law schools offer mentoring programs for first- and second-year law students to give a feel for what it's like to practise in a law firm or elsewhere.

Each province and territory has a somewhat different procedure and time frame for interviewing and hiring articling students. These rules change from time to time. By the start of your second year of law school, your class will probably be buzzing about how the articling process works. If you are not "in the loop" (or choose not to be), contact your law society or school articling committee to find out what the rules are for sending out applications, arranging interviews, etc. If you're considering articling in another province or territory, contact that law society as soon as possible to make sure that you don't miss any deadlines.

In most provinces and territories, interviewing and hiring takes place between the spring term of second year and the fall term of third year. Generally speaking, larger centres have an earlier start date and a more formalized procedure. Don't overlook the fact that even in large metropolitan centres, numerous firms and all government agencies are not in the matching program. You will have to contact them directly.

Where to look for help

Most law schools offer help for their students in searching for articling positions. Often there's a student placement office located at the law school, as well as a student articling committee that collects and distributes information on articling positions, including what positions are available and how to make the applications.

Some of the resources to consider at your own law school are:

1. The student placement office and articling committee;
2. The registry of articling positions available which is posted at either the law school or the law society (often positions out of town and in smaller offices);
3. Workshops on résumé writing and interviewing skills (sometimes offered within the university or by commercial enterprises);
4. Career days during which potential employers visit the law school to provide information on opportunities;

5. Books in the law library or in bookstores that provide information on résumé preparation, interview techniques and how to secure jobs. Many of these publications include sample résumés and letters. Given that many lawyers remain with the employer they choose for an articling position, remember that the path you are embarking on may be a long one. The time spent in acquainting yourself with the process and making an informed choice is sure to be worth the effort.

The Résumé

The résumé is key to the hiring process. It provides your potential employer with a first impression of you. If your résumé is no good, you probably won't get the chance to impress the interviewers with your sparkling personality, brilliant wit and superb intelligence! You just won't get an interview.

Therefore, preparing a good résumé is very important. Make sure the résumé meets the following criteria:

1. To introduce yourself and to spark enough interest to convince your target employer to give you an interview;
2. To provide a framework for topics that can be explored and discussed during the interview;
3. To remind the interviewer who you are (hopefully he or she has not forgotten!) and what your qualifications are after the interview, but before the selection process is completed.

While there are differences of opinion on how to prepare a résumé, conventional wisdom states that it should be brief and to the point. Two pages is considered a maximum. Don't try to include every single accomplishment since high school as you will likely bore the reader to tears. Make sure you include only the relevant information, as most potential employers do not have the time or interest to pour through a treatise. You will turn off the reader with unnecessary information. Make sure your résumé is a brief, concise and accurate outline of your experience and qualifications.

While various formats can be used to create a résumé, you should probably include the following basic information:

1. **Your name, address and telephone number** where you can be reached for purposes of setting up an interview.
2. **Personal information.** It is not necessary to include your date of birth, place of birth or marital status. Virtually all provincial Human Rights Codes prevent this information from being required by the employer. Some people still include information as to their "general state of health", but this too should go the way of the dodo bird.
3. **Education.** Include all post-secondary education in reverse chronological order. List degrees obtained, years attended and years of graduation. You may wish to include information about high school, but this is not considered necessary.
4. **Previous employment.** Include all permanent, part-time and summer employment for at least the last two years, in reverse chronological order. Use your discretion in determining which jobs are relevant and how far back in time you wish to go. Some people include a summary of the work done in every position. If you are going to do this, make sure that it is brief and use your discretion. Potential employers don't want to read five lines about your duties as a grocery clerk or cashier.

5. **Academic achievements.** Include any post-secondary prizes, honours, scholarships and outstanding high school honours.
6. **Extracurricular activities.** Provide a general outline of important post-secondary activities, as well as any community or volunteer work outside law school. Some people want to include any kind of volunteer or extracurricular activity as “filler” in order to make them appear well-rounded. Bear in mind that your potential employer can usually spot the “filler”.
7. **Interests and hobbies.** Although this is optional, you may wish to highlight some specific interests or hobbies. Don’t try to cover every hobby since childhood. Stick to those areas in which you have a genuine interest and about which you can speak intelligently during the interview.
8. **References.** Common practice is to state that references are available upon request. If you wish to include the names of your references, list the names, addresses and telephone numbers of individuals in academic, employment and personal capacities. Always get permission from the individuals before using their name and ensure first that they have positive things to say.
9. **Transcripts.** Always attach an official (if available) or unofficial transcript of your law school marks to your résumé. Telephone the potential employer beforehand in order to find out what specific documents are required as part of the application.

How to avoid the “crash and burn” syndrome

1. Be concise. Don’t try to overwhelm the reader with unnecessary information.
2. Pay attention to the visual aspects of your résumé. Make sure it looks professional and that the important points stand out. Most résumé screeners spend a matter of seconds reviewing the résumé. Information, if not well presented, will be either ignored or missed. Make sure that your résumé is adequately spaced, well organized and generally looks professional. Your résumé should be well typed. Use good quality paper.
3. Make absolutely sure that there are no typographical, spelling or grammatical errors. This is a real turn off for résumé screeners.
4. List all information in reverse chronological order.
5. Use a consistent style throughout.
6. List information in point form rather than in narrative.
7. Include a transcript of your marks.
8. Last but not least, make it interesting! You want to spark the reader’s interest and make yourself stand out. If you feel comfortable using a bit of humour, do so. But bear in mind that not everyone shares the same sense of humour and weigh the risks before going overboard.

Covering letter

The covering letter is an extremely important document as it basically introduces you to your potential employer. More importantly, it's another vehicle to sell yourself and your skills.

You must include a covering letter with your résumé. When trying to decide what to include in your covering letter, bear in mind these points:

1. Introduce yourself and tell your potential employer why you have chosen to apply to them specifically.
2. Emphasize information that you think is important or interesting.
3. Request an interview.

Personalize the letter so that it is addressed specifically to your potential employer. Find out precisely to whom your letter should be addressed and, if you are not sure whether that individual is a man or a woman, confirm that information by telephone. There is nothing worse than receiving a letter addressed to Dear Mr./Ms. Pat Smith" or "Dear Recruiting Officer".

Here is the basic format:

1. Introduce yourself briefly at the outset, and tell the employer what position you are applying for and when you would like to start working.
2. Make sure that the letter communicates something about yourself that you think is of value to your potential employer.
3. You may also wish to include a paragraph to convey why you are interested in a particular employer, or areas of particular interest. This is an opportunity to show potential employers that you know something about them and their activities.
4. The last paragraph should request an interview and thank the reader for his or her attention and consideration.

Here are some "do's" and "don'ts" for the covering letter:

1. Make sure that your letter is personalized and originally typed. Use good quality paper.
2. Visual presentation is important. Proper business form and layout should be followed.
3. Three or four short paragraphs on a single page is the maximum and looks best. If your letter exceeds that length, edit it. Do not repeat all the information included in your résumé. Focus on one or two points that you think are significant or of interest to your target employer.
4. Use concise sentences and the active tense.
5. Have a friend or family member review your letter and evaluate it honestly.

Follow-up to the application

Your potential employer should acknowledge receipt of the application. If you haven't received a reply within two weeks, you may wish to confirm that your application was received and obtain any information as to its status.

When you receive an invitation to be interviewed, you will likely get a letter from your employer to confirm the time and place.

After the interview, you may want to send a follow-up letter to the interviewer, expressing your thanks for the interview. This is an opportunity to confirm your interest in the firm. It may also stimulate some action on the part of the interviewer.

If you receive and accept an offer, send a written confirmation. If you receive and reject an offer, confirm your decision in such a way that you keep open the option to apply again in the future.

The Interview

Hooray! You've done everything right so far and have scored an interview. You're ecstatic. You know you can impress them, but you've never been on an interview before. What exactly goes on during this little meeting?

The interview provides an opportunity for both you and the interviewer to decide if you like each other and will work well together. This is a chance for you to obtain information about your potential employer, and to decide whether you want to work there. Likewise, the interviewer will want to find out whether you are a good "fit" and have the right qualifications.

Obviously, interview styles will vary from interviewer to interviewer. In general terms, interviews follow a basic pattern. There is some initial small talk to enable both of you to get acquainted and feel at ease with each other. Your interviewer or interviewers will then question you. After that, you will likely be asked whether you have any questions about the potential employer. Make sure you prepare some questions beforehand. The interview will come to an end and you should be alert for signals that the interview is over. Don't over-stay your welcome.

Before the interview

Preparation is key. Here are some suggestions:

1. Obtain information on the employer from sources at your law school, current articling students, acquaintances and lawyers who work there.
2. See if you can find some information about your particular interviewer, so that you can develop some common ground and show some interest in his or her activities.
3. Try to anticipate some of the questions that you may be asked.
4. Dress neatly and professionally.
5. In scheduling interviews, you may wish not to line up your first interview with your preferred employer. "Practise" with another one first. Also, allow yourself sufficient time between interviews so that you are not frazzled when you arrive at the interview. Rushing out of an interview to make the next one can leave a negative impression.
6. Consider having a "dry run" with a friend, family member or professor who is willing to provide feedback.
7. Be on time.
8. Bring along an extra copy of your résumé and transcript as well as marks you may have received since your résumé was mailed. Focus on your best qualities and be prepared to tell your interviewer why you feel they are your strengths without boasting.
9. Be yourself.

The day of the interview

The day has arrived. You look sharp and are ready to go. How do you psyche yourself up? Everyone has unique and valuable qualities. The interview is your opportunity to present your special qualities in a positive fashion. The most important thing is to relax and be yourself.

The qualities that the interviewer may look for are:

- (a) well-defined career goals;
- (b) an ability to express yourself clearly;
- (c) evidence of achievement, and ability to work with and motivate others;
- (d) preparation and organization;
- (e) genuine interest in the particular employer;
- (f) enthusiasm and self-confidence (and sometimes a sense of humour!);
- (g) intelligent questions about the particular position and employer;
- (h) a desire to work with firm members in a long-term relationship;
- (i) honesty and good eye contact;
- (j) professional personal appearance.

Questions you may be asked

Here is a sample of some questions that might be thrown your way. You will be in a better position to field them if you have thought about them beforehand:

1. Have you established any long-range goals and objectives?
2. When and why did you establish these goals?
3. How are you preparing yourself to achieve these goals?
4. What goals, other than those related to your work as a lawyer, have you established for yourself for the next 10 years?
5. What are your greatest concerns about the articling year?
6. Why did you choose to go to law school?
7. What is the last non-legal book you read?
8. How would you describe yourself to a stranger?
9. What is your greatest strength/weakness?
10. How do you plan to establish a client base?
11. What accomplishments are you particularly proud of?
12. How has law school prepared you to work here?

13. What do you do with your leisure or vacation time?
14. What are your interests outside of work?
15. Why should we hire you?
16. In what ways can you make a contribution to our firm/agency?
17. What qualifications do you possess that will make you a successful lawyer?
18. What has been your most rewarding law school experience?
19. What law school subject have you enjoyed the most/least?
20. Do you think your grades reflect your academic achievement?
21. What was your favourite/least favourite job?
22. What have you learned from participation in moot court/clinical program/law school committees?
23. Do you have an interest in a particular area of law at this stage?
24. In what kind of environment are you most comfortable?
25. Why did you apply to this particular firm/agency?
26. What public policy interests do you have and why?
27. What do you know about our firm/agency?
28. What factors are most important to you in a job?
29. Why would you like to live in the community where our firm/agency is located?

Questions you might ask

You think you've handled the questions thrown at you quite well. Now the interviewer asks what questions you have. What's on your mind? Other than, "Do I have the job?" Just kidding! The following are some things you might want to know:

1. What will I be doing as an articling student at your firm/agency?
2. What particular areas of law will I be exposed to?
3. What type of work will I be exposed to?
4. How much responsibility will I be given?
5. What's the advantage of working for your firm as opposed to another?
6. What is the hiring philosophy of the firm? Do you hire with the intention of eventually making the individual a partner with the firm?
7. What criteria does the firm use during the year to evaluate a student's performance, and how frequently is the student's performance reviewed?
8. How do students get feedback?
9. How is work assigned?

10. Who will I work for? Will I work for a group of partners or for a particular lawyer or client?
11. How is your firm structured?
12. Do you want your lawyers to be generalists or specialists?
13. What type of clients does the firm have?
14. Is the firm dependent on a few major clients?
15. What is the long-term growth plan for the firm?
16. Describe some of the cases/transactions/issues you are involved in?
17. Why did you choose your field of law?
18. Why did you choose to work for this firm?
19. How quickly will I be able to do my preferred type of work if I become an associate?
20. What sort of formal or informal associate training do you offer?
21. Are associates involved in firm administration and committees?
22. What's the relationship between partners and associates?
23. How would you describe the general mood or atmosphere around the office?
24. Is there a core group of people responsible for running the firm? Who are they?
25. Are there additional areas of law into which the firm plans to expand in the future?
26. At what point is an associate considered for partnership and under what conditions?
27. What is the short- and long-term salary and benefits situation?
28. Is there a part-time policy for partners?
29. What is the parental leave policy? Can lawyers work at home?
30. What type of pro bono work does the firm allow associates or students to do?
31. What sort of hours are worked by associates and partners?
32. Is there a sabbatical policy?

The Offer

You are now in the fortunate position of having received an offer. In fact, you've aced the interviews and received more than one offer. How will you assess and compare the job offers you have received? Here are some criteria you may wish to consider:

- (a) the position;
- (b) the training;
- (c) the degree of supervision;
- (d) the employer's reputation and quality of work;
- (e) working conditions and facilities, including ability to work flexible hours, work at home, parental leave;
- (f) potential for advancement;
- (g) level of remuneration;
- (h) non-monetary benefits;
- (i) the "ratings" by other current or former students who have articulated at the particular firm or agency in the past;
- (j) the variety of experience during articling;
- (k) past hire-back ratio of the particular firm;
- (l) personality fit (i.e. Can you see yourself working here?).

Freedom from bias in the recruitment process

It is the responsibility of all lawyers who participate in the articling recruitment process to ensure that the process reflects favourably on the profession, is free from bias or the appearance of bias, and adheres to the rules of professional conduct and the applicable human rights code. Both the interviewer and the student have the right to expect that all aspects of the recruitment process, as well as the employment relationship, will be free of discrimination. For example, behaviour deemed discriminatory by the Law Society of Upper Canada (Ontario) can consist of:

1. any act of sexual harassment
2. different treatment of candidates on the basis of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, age, record of offences*, marital status, family status, or disability;
3. any inquiry which would elicit information about the above;

* "Record of offences" means an offence for which a pardon has been granted under the *Criminal Records Act (Canada)* and not revoked, or an offence under provincial enactment. Discrimination in employment on the basis of record of offences does not infringe the Code if the requirement is a reasonable and a bona fide occupational qualification because of the nature of the employment. For guidance on when a record of offences might be a bona fide occupational qualification, see *Woodward Stores v. McCartney (1983)*, 4 C.H. R.R. D/1325 (B.C.S.C.)

4. derogatory or degrading remarks directed towards members of a group based on the above characteristics;
5. racist, sexist, or otherwise improper jokes causing embarrassment or offense, told or carried out after the interviewer has been told they are embarrassing or offensive, or that are or ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome.

This is obviously an aspect of the articling process for which an applicant cannot be fully prepared. However, it is important that if you do experience discriminatory practices, you report these to the appropriate governing body, usually the law society, as well as to your articling committee or dean. This will ensure that lawyers are made to conform to the ethical standards of the profession and to human rights legislation.

Some examples of questions that are deemed inappropriate during articling interviews are as follows. [These have been adapted from students' experiences and are found in the *Articling Interview Guidelines* published by the Law Society of Upper Canada (Ontario) in June 1998.]

- (a) How old are you?
- (b) Are you what is referred to as a "mature student"?
- (c) Do you have a girlfriend/boyfriend? Are you married?
- (d) Questions regarding marital/family status (e.g., would your spouse be happy living in Ottawa? Are you a "family man/woman"?)
- (e) Questions relating to whether or not you plan to have children and daycare requirements.
- (f) Heritage/country of origin. Years of residence in Canada.
- (g) Religious affiliation affecting the loyalty to the firm and desire to remain there.
- (h) Questions regarding club memberships.
- (i) Questions relating to your feelings on gender issues and feminist politics.
- (j) Disparaging remarks about gays, lesbians, or any ethnic or racial group.

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A VOICE

- Be heard – the OBA Student Division represents law and articling student members of the Canadian Bar Association in Ontario and is your voice on student member issues

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