
Contract Work

Office of Career & Professional Development
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WHY WOULD A GRAD SEEK HOURLY WORK?

- To make money quickly and without a long commitment.
- To work between taking the bar and passing the bar.
- To work while looking for a permanent job.
- To gain practical experience.
- To show a firm what she can do in the hopes that firm will offer a permanent position.
- To have a flexible, project-oriented career doing document review work (some grads have found they like being able to pick and choose when they work and to be able to take time off to travel and continue doing it long-term).

WHAT IS THIS?

Hourly legal work has many different names:

- “contract” work (shorthand for “independent contractor” – it does **not** mean legal contract analysis)
- “temp” work
- “project” work
- “law clerk, hourly”
- “document review”
- “agency” work
- “freelance attorney” work

WHAT DO THESE JOBS HAVE IN COMMON?

- You are paid by the hour.
- You do not get benefits.
- You are not considered an employee.
- You typically work part-time or full-time, for a specific project.
- You likely will sign a contract stating the hourly rate and the at-will nature of the job.

WHAT DOES THE WORK ENTAIL?

- The large bulk of contract work is work that helps a law firm on active litigation, usually in the document review stage of discovery. This work is called “document review.”
- Legal Staffing Agencies tend to hire mostly for large document review and productions, often placing you with a firm, including large firms, simply to review, analyze, organize and produce documents.
- Legal Staffing Agencies may also have other project work available where a J.D. is preferred or required, but the firm is not seeking a full-service attorney.

WHICH EMPLOYERS HAVE HOURLY WORK TO OFFER?

- Small firms
- Solo practitioners
- Legal staffing agencies for placement at large firms or corporations, mostly for document review
- Corporations for document review and due diligence work

Apply to advertised jobs:

- Check listings daily.
- Best listings for these jobs are www.craigslist.org, www.lawjobs.com and HastingsCareersOnline.com (HCO) (www.theposselist.com is good for temp document review work -- discussed below).
- Look at “law clerk” “temp” “project” “contract attorney” jobs; apply for any that indicate students, recent grads or junior attorneys are needed (don’t apply if they are seeking 3 or more years experience).
- Apply immediately.

List of Legal Staffing Agencies that have temporary staffing departments and may staff document reviews (or have other temp work):

Black Letter Discovery -- <http://www.blackletterdiscovery.com/>

Pathways – <http://www.pathwayspersonnel.com/>

Update Legal – <http://www.updatelegal.com/>

Certified Employment – <http://www.certifiedemployment.com/>

Special Counsel – <http://www.specialcounsel.com/>

Robert Half Legal – <http://www.roberthalflegal.com/>

Davidson Legal Staffing -- <http://www.davidsonstaffing.com/>

Act One – <http://www.act-1.com/>

Spherion -- <http://www.spherion.com/>

Placement Pros -- <http://www.placementpros.com/>

Hudson Legal -- <http://us.hudson.com/legal/>

ABA Search and Staffing -- <http://www.abastaff.com/>

Exclusively Legal -- <http://www.exclusivelylegal.com/>

Strategic Legal Solutions (they have had Mandarin doc review in the past) – <http://www.strategiclegal.com/>

GCG Consulting Group -- <http://www.gcgconsultinggroup.com/>

Scion Staffing (non-profit JD preferred work): <http://www.scionstaffing.com/>

Pitch yourself to show you can hit the ground running and are versatile:

- For small firms, have your resume show your highest level, most responsible work.
- Show that you have personally researched and drafted briefs or memoranda -- put the reader in your shoes with details so they get the full picture of the real-life situation you did the work in.
- If you have negotiating, advocacy, document review, transactional, drafting, or other analytical skills, provide tangible, specific examples in your resume.
- If you have other talents that might be a plus (e.g., web design, marketing background, event planning), it doesn't hurt to show it -- a small shop can use talent wherever they can find it.

HOW DO I GET DOCUMENT REVIEW WORK?

- Staffing Agencies! There is a list at the end of this document. Also, some firms will post directly, on craigslist.com, under legal jobs, and on other sites. There is a website devoted to document review work called [The Posse List](#). You can sign up to get on their listserv, which sometimes includes job openings doing contract document review work. They also have a lot of information on electronic discovery, which is very helpful for any private practice litigator to know.
- **If you are applying to a staffing agency**, contact the rep in the legal staffing department who handles temporary staffing; ask to send a resume and see if you can get an interview. Be sure to find out at the interview how much work the agency has right now, what they pay per hour, and how they select resumes for their clients to review – do they pre-screen or simply upload the resumes for the client to review and select?
- **Be forewarned** that in tough economic times agencies might promise document review work but only be able to deliver temp paralegal or secretarial work. Unless you have a specialty language (usually one that is not well known, i.e. Korean or Danish) or a knowledge of patents, be mindful that agency promises rely on their actual workload. We also suggest grads also seek temp work themselves via direct contact with firms. Do make sure the agency doesn't have a problem with this; it can get tricky if a grad gets work on his own with a firm that also sought the agency's help. The agency might want to bill the firm and take a part of the pay. One strategy is to use the agency for big firm work and seek small firm work on one's own.
- **Be sure the person hiring knows you as well as she can**; don't hesitate to name drop (honestly) -- "so and so [someone who worked there before; an attorney at a firm that is their client] suggested I call you."
- Using agencies that solely do legal work ensures that they understand best what you are looking for and can do; but work there will be competitive because all law grads registering will register with those agencies. Agencies that have a broader client base may be less competitive, but the work might also be less interesting.

HOW DO I APPLY FOR SUBSTANTIVE CONTRACT WORK WITH A SMALL FIRM OR SOLO PRACTITIONER?

- Target the type of practice you wish to have.
- Search on Martindale-Hubbell (either www.martindale.com or via Lexis) for small firms or solo practitioners in your area who do that work.
- If you know someone at the firm, or can point to a connection (UC Hastings alum; alum of your undergraduate school; etc.), prioritize that firm and apply directly to your contact.
- Call the firm, say you are a recent grad looking to practice “X” law and ask whether they need additional hourly help now or might need help; if yes, ask who to send your resume and cover letter to and whether email is preferred; if no, say thank you and make another call.

HOW DO I EMPHASIZE DOCUMENT REVIEW WORK ON MY RESUME? (It’s easier than you think).

- Anytime you looked at a group of documents to discern key information, you have “reviewed documents.”
- If you reviewed any collection of documents for legal issues you can call it “hard-copy document review.”
- Some phrases that have worked for other grads include:

“Reviewed documents, analyzed content for relevance to legal issues, prioritized and organized documents.”

“Reviewed multilateral treaties and EC Directives and wrote legal synopses of their regulatory impacts.”

“Conducted document review of administrative record.”

“Reviewed hundreds of class action case files to summarize key issues for state-wide analysis.”

“Reviewed client documents, identified documents relating to key issues; organized documents to examine witnesses at depositions.”

- If you worked with collections of documents in non-legal jobs, let that be known, e.g., “Reviewed sales department documents for data relevant to marketing issues; analyzed the data and presented it to market researchers for use in marketing analysis.”
- Learn how to use “online” document review software used by law firms in large cases, such as [Concordance](#) or [Summation](#) (you can take tutorials online) and then put on your resume that you are familiar with them.
- Put on your resume your familiarity with databases and computer tools generally, including creating and manipulating Excel spreadsheets, creating websites, etc.