
How To Make the Most Out of Your Summer Job

Office of Career Services
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Your summer job can be an exhilarating experience. For some it will be the first exposure to the law as a concrete tool. For many students the practical functions of a law office can appear to be a mysterious process. The purpose of this hand-out is: 1) to arm you with tips to make the best impression during your summer; and 2) to suggest questions to ask whenever you receive an assignment. If you follow this advice you will find that your summer experience will be much more enjoyable.

Tips for a successful summer

1. There is no such thing as a rough draft. Many attorneys will say, "Oh, just give me a draft of this by tomorrow." Don't believe them!!! Always put your best foot forward. Sure, they might make revisions to any document you give them, but always make sure the document you have turned in reflects the best of your abilities.
2. Your interview continues throughout the summer. No doubt about it--the firm is glad to have you, but you will be evaluated, both professionally and personally, throughout the summer. This review extends to any and all social functions. Try to go to the majority of functions by yourself so that you can circulate with the attorneys rather than treating the event as an opportunity to go on a date. Some of the events might not seem like the most enjoyable way to spend your precious free time, but try to attend as many as possible. A note regarding drinking: if everyone else is drinking during an after-hours event, you might consider having one, but only one, with them. Never drink or smoke during the day, no matter what anyone else is doing. Moreover, never feel pressure to drink if you are a teetotaler. People will not be upset if you stick to Pepsi!

You will also find it quite common for attorneys to come up to you in the office and ask how your summer is going. Be enthusiastic! Let them know that you enjoy your work and your contacts with the attorneys there! Your enthusiasm will be contagious and will be remembered when the hiring committee is sitting down at the end of the summer to consider offers of permanent employment.

Your professional appearance and demeanor are important aspects of your evaluation. Business/professional attire is expected unless you are specifically instructed to dress casually. Invest in some professional outfits (including shoes). You need to dress as well as act the role.

3. Get to know the attorneys who do the type of work you hope to do (or learn more about) as early in the summer as possible. If you already know the type of law you hope to practice or if you have identified a few areas of interest, make sure to introduce yourself to the attorneys in those areas. Express interest in working for them or on their projects, ask them about opportunities to tag-along or accompany them to court appearances. Even if summer work assignments are coordinated by one staff member, getting to know attorneys in your area of interest can position you for the future. If you are supposed to report to one source (such as the recruitment coordinator) for your assignments, see if the attorney you hope to work for can route your assignment through that staff member. Some firms match their summer associates with permanent associate "mentors" who are responsible for arranging lunches with other firm members. If you have a mentor, tell him/her that you are interested in meeting with attorneys in a particular practice area.
4. Ask for feedback rather than relying on others to get it for you. Many firms claim to offer great feedback during the summer. In reality, summer associate evaluations fall to the bottom of an attorney's work pile. Don't wait until your mid-summer or end of summer review to find out that someone was dissatisfied with your work. After completing every assignment, ask to speak with the assigning attorney and express your eagerness to receive constructive comments. Even if you disagree with what is said, don't discuss your feelings during the feedback session. This will give you more time to make any necessary changes and will also reflect well on your professionalism.
5. Stay out of office politics. Avoid gossiping about anyone in or out of the office, whether they are support staff, attorneys, or fellow summer associates. Remember to be especially thoughtful to secretaries.
6. Communicate, communicate, communicate. You might be working with more than one attorney on a particular project. In the event you are working with a partner and an associate on a deal, make sure that the left hand knows what the right hand is directing. For example, a student was told by an associate not to complete a particular assignment given to her by a partner. The student did not confirm these instructions with the partner, who ended up faulting the student at the end of the summer for not completing the assignment. Avoid falling into a similar situation by verifying major instructions with the attorney who will be reviewing your work at the end of each project.

Questions to Ask Assigning Attorneys

1. "Do you want a written or oral response?" Some attorneys prefer written responses while others just want a quick oral summary of the results of your research. If you are preparing an oral response, be sure to keep accurate notes of your research and findings so you will be prepared later if you are asked to go back to the subject and prepare a piece of written work. Also consider having xerox copies of relevant cases or statutes (perhaps with highlighting over pertinent passages) just in case you are asked for them during your oral response.

2. If asked to produce a specific piece of written work:
 - A. "Do you have a model or a sample of the contract/shareholders' agreement/cable franchise?" This will prevent you from reinventing the wheel if similar work has already been done and will show you the style of writing that the assigning attorney prefers.

 - B. "How long do you want it to be, 5 pages, 10 pages, etc.?"

 - C. "Who will be the audience for this document, just the supervising attorney, or the client, government officials, etc.?" This distinction is very important. If the audience will be the attorneys in the office you might be able to presume a certain level of knowledge, while if the client is the audience you might want to adopt a more informative tone. On the other hand, if you know that the client has an extensive technical knowledge, your writing should be adapted accordingly.

3. To demonstrate a sensitivity to any billing constraints on the project:
 - A. "How long do you think I should spend on this project?" The point of this question is to save you from spending twenty hours exhaustively researching the state of the law on a particular issue if the assigning attorney believes it should only be a two hour assignment. Bear in mind, however, that most assignments will take longer than you think or were told!

 - B. "Can I go online to do my research?" This is really critical. Online research tools are the drug of choice for most law students, but there is a hefty price tag associated with these services at most law firms.

4. "Are there any materials that you think I should start with first?" Sometimes the assigning attorney knows exactly where the answer is, but forgets to mention it or assumes that you already know. You could save yourself hours in wasted research that can't be billed to the client by finding out up-front that there is a certain treatise on the subject or a case directly on point.
5. "When do you need to see/hear my findings, brief, etc.?" Be sure to get a clear picture from the assigning attorney when you need to report back. If the attorney responds with a euphemism (i.e., "put this on the front/back burner"... "I need it ASAP", "soon," etc.), try to get the attorney to clarify.

To show that you understand the nature of the assignment and to avoid the embarrassing "but I thought this was what you wanted..." scenario, always confirm the nature of the assignment before you leave by summarizing the assignment back to the supervising attorney: "So what you want from me is a brief/client memorandum/contract summarizing the state of the law in California on land use/collateral estoppel/leveraged buyouts and you need this by next week/Monday/a week from Tuesday. Is this correct?"

Good luck, be your best self, and have fun!!!!