

## I'm thinking of becoming a legal secretary?

### 1. What are the educational requirements for a legal secretary starting position.

a. A high school education or equivalent is usually all that is required to become a start a legal secretary career. There's really nothing to stop you starting work in a law firm right after school if you fulfill the criteria I've mentioned below. There are secretarial schools that offer diplomas or certifications. These can be helpful as they focus on some of the specific tasks that you can expect to undertake when you start to work. The course content varies between schools and of course, prices vary too. Do some homework on the courses that are available in your area before you commit to a course.

### 2. I can type pretty quickly. Is there a standard requirement for a junior legal secretary working in a law firm?

a. Typing. Large law firms usually require 75-80 wpm typing. A smaller law firm may have a lower typing requirement, however don't believe that working in a smaller law firm is an easier option. Law firms also require you to be proficient in a range computer skills. You should become familiar with as many software programs as possible, especially word processing, spreadsheets, and presentation programs such as PowerPoint. There are lots of ways you can get experience of these. If you want to check on line, you'll find a lot of information about quick and easy courses for Excel and PowerPoint. If you prefer a book, there are hundreds of easy to read

and follow. (You could also buy second hand books on line)! It's also good to know that many PCs and Macs come preloaded with this sort of software so you don't have to purchase it to practice at home.

**Remember** that if you arrive at a law firm for a legal secretary interview with a typing speed of 80 wpm and also proficient experience of Excel, PowerPoint and Word, you will have a strong advantage over someone without these skills.

### 3. Is there a site where I can practice my typing skills and increase my speed?

a. Yes, there are several. One that we usually recommend is [www.typingtest.com](http://www.typingtest.com).

### 4. What are the other skills required other than typing and computer skills to begin this career?

a. Speaking, Grammar & Writing. You need to be able to speak and write correctly. It may sound strange to say this, but having good English will help you develop your career significantly. Law firms are professional environments and as a legal secretary, you will be working with attorneys. Depending on the size of the firm you are working at, you may also have to speak to clients, and the firm will expect you to represent them properly and professionally when you do so. A legal secretary should also be proficient in the composition of general correspondence.

b. Proofreading. You must be able to proofread documents that have been typed

by you or others and correct spelling and usage errors. Make it a habit to use a dictionary when in doubt. While you can sometimes rely on spell check on your computer, remember spell check can't find every mistake.

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(Spell check wouldn't find any problems with either of these sentences, a good legal secretary should!)

On starting in a law firm you will immediately start to hear (and you will have to become comfortable with using) legal words that you've likely ever heard before. They will vary greatly depending on the type of work that you are doing and what department you are doing it in. Don't worry, attorneys hadn't heard them before they went to law school. Make sure you learn these words quickly - you'll be hearing and typing them quite a lot.

## 5. What are the duties of a legal secretary?

a. Beginning legal secretaries perform a variety of duties. Among other things, they may be asked to:

- Answer the telephone and take accurate messages;
- Use a computer word processor to type correspondence and legal documents from dictated tapes or handwritten notes;

- Complete legal forms with relevant information - (there are large numbers of them)!
- Revise and format documents prepared by others;
- Organize and file correspondence and legal documents;

The work will vary according to the size of the firm that you are working in. At a larger firm, you may find yourself working with a number of other secretaries typing for a variety of attorneys. In a smaller firm, you may find that you have more varied duties.

### What sort of salary can I expect? (gina)

A junior legal secretary can expect to earn anything from \$28,000 for a permanent position. If you have previous work experience which is relevant to the department you will work in, this will increase. As a contracting secretary, you can expect to earn from \$15 an hour. While a larger firms may pay more than a smaller firm, their requirements are often more stringent.

### Any final words of advice

Even if you're just starting out, think **superstar** legal secretary - be the superstar in the office and your legal secretarial career will take off very quickly.

Even when you've got the job, you should be continually looking to improve your range of skills, improving your typing speed, the range of applications you can use and the types of documents you can work on. This will increase the variety of work that you're asked to do and will make your day more interesting.

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Have the right attitude. Be friendly but professional and adopt a “can do” style. Work pressures in law firms sometimes mean that there’s extra work to be done when caseloads demand it. Take your share of the work and contribute to the team you are in. Being the secretary that everyone wants to do their work will help the firm and your career develop greatly.

A career as a legal secretary can be very rewarding. As with many things in life, you get out of it what you put into it.