

How to get an internship and What to do when you get it¹

The Inspiration Behind This Piece: A Journey of Learning and Connection

Why did I decide to write this piece? Though my LinkedIn profile is old, I've recently become active. I started getting a lot of connection requests. After a while, I realised that most were students at different law schools and colleges. One common thing to most of them was requesting an internship at my firm.

They were writing to me since they assumed that, being a partner in a tier-1 law firm, I could help them get an internship.

I don't find anything wrong with their approach. They must have assumed that directly writing to a law firm partner may increase their chances of getting the internship. I guided some of them to apply through the proper channel, i.e., through the law firm's website. Unfortunately, I couldn't reply to some of them because of a lack of time. I sincerely apologise to each one of them.

After getting a lot of internship requests from students who added me as their connection, I had a sudden realisation. I understood how important it is to help these ambitious individuals get internships at top law firms in India. With my 15 years of experience at a prestigious law firm, I felt the need to guide these students and give them valuable advice on how to land internships at their dream law firms.

Through this piece, I hope to share valuable insights and practical advice to empower these students as they enter the legal profession. I sincerely hope this

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guidance proves beneficial and equips them with the tools they need to obtain internships.

But let me clarify: this piece is not meant for those—and we all know who—who quickly get internships at any law firm of their choice because of their pedigree and connection. And I'm sure none of them may have ever requested an internship by writing to a partner directly on LinkedIn. Instead, a discrete phone call will get them an internship without going through the grind of taking tests formulated for examining lesser mortals.

This writing is dedicated to the true trailblazers—the first-generation lawyers, those who lack influential connections, and those who are from universities in remote and far-flung corners of the country. Despite facing formidable odds, they carry an unwavering dream to join a prestigious law firm and make a significant impact on their careers.

So where shall I begin?

Like the king's command to the White Rabbit², I shall begin at the beginning and go on till I come to the end: then stop.

Firstly, it's crucial to comprehend how law firms search for interns and the attributes they seek in students before considering them eligible for internships. With a vast number of applications flooding in and limited available seats, law firms typically establish specific criteria to distinguish outstanding candidates from the rest, ensuring they find the most suitable interns for their programs.

As an illustration, our firm operates multiple offices nationwide, each with a designated pool of applicants vying for internships. For instance, in our Delhi litigation office, we typically have 10 to 15 interns at any given time, rotating among

² 'Read them,' said the King.

The White Rabbit put on his spectacles. 'Where shall I begin, please your Majesty?' he asked. 'Begin at the beginning,' the King said gravely, 'and go on till you come to the end: then stop.'
: Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland

partners during their tenure. Internships usually span a month, resulting in the office accommodating approximately 170 to 200 interns annually. Considering the vast number of applications, often reaching thousands, it becomes tough to accept all of them. Consequently, the firm must select the most exceptional candidates from this competitive pool.

The Process

It is a widely practised norm that nearly all law firms accept internship applications exclusively through their websites. Despite the Bar Council of India Rules prohibiting direct or indirect advertising, law firms maintain informative websites regardless of their size. However, these websites invariably contain disclaimers stating that they are not intended for client solicitation or advertising purposes, and instead, the links provided aim to facilitate access to relevant information about the firm.

If you are interested in applying to a law firm for an internship, the first step is to visit its website and navigate to the internship section. Based on my research of the top ten law firms according to my ranking, I observed that most of them seek formal information from applicants and request the submission of a CV. Additionally, some firms claim to run coordinated internship programs in collaboration with the respective campus coordination committee, while others may ask you to reach out with your resume and transcripts directly. It is essential to carefully review the specific application requirements and procedures outlined on each law firm's website before proceeding with your application.

It is an unspoken truth that certain law firms prefer interns from specific National Law Schools—a "chosen few." Unfortunately, some law firms may not consider reviewing your CV if you are not from one of these favoured law schools. They maintain a list of colleges from which they exclusively select interns, leaving students from other institutions out of the equation.

The underlying reasons for such a policy seem to stem from the firm's ego and a desire to associate with elite colleges. They may argue that these top law schools admit only the best students, implying that their internship selections reflect this high standard. This policy likely arises from limited time and a reluctance to take risks when recruiting interns.

Indeed, the flawed criterion used by some law firms can be disheartening for students who belong to colleges not included in their preferred list. In reality, a law school's ranking does not necessarily reflect the calibre of its students. All law schools have talented and capable individuals, irrespective of their ranking.

When faced with discouraging biases, it's essential to keep in mind that you have the power to overcome these obstacles. Look for law firms that value equal opportunities and welcome candidates from diverse educational backgrounds. Reputable firms prioritise talent and dedication over the name of your law school.

So, focus on honing your skills and gaining experience through internships, moot courts, and projects. Showcasing your abilities will break down barriers and prove that your worth surpasses the reputation of your law school. Stay persistent and determined; firms out there will recognise and appreciate your talents, providing fair opportunities to all aspiring lawyers. Embrace the journey, as success comes through perseverance. You've got this!

Your CV and the skill set

So, the next important element in your application is your CV. What kind of CV would a college student have? With no work experience, the only thing that sticks out in a CV, aside from the reputation of your college and, to a lesser extent, your grades, is your writing ability—whether it be an article, a research paper, or a publication.

So, the number of publications distinguishes a good CV from an ordinary one. Publications demonstrate a candidate's dedication to research, writing, interest, and expertise in a particular legal area.

In law firms where commercial laws are the core practice, having articles or research papers related to arbitration, contract law, company law, insolvency laws, and other relevant areas can be advantageous. Such publications showcase a candidate's understanding of the firm's focus and demonstrate their potential to contribute meaningfully to the organisation.

Selecting a relevant and timely topic for your publication is indeed crucial. For example, in arbitration law, issues like the challenge to an award under Section 34, the enforceability of an award, and the nature of interim orders under Section 9 of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, have always been of great significance due to their frequent application by lawyers and the evolving interpretations provided by courts.

Another intriguing aspect of arbitration law is the seat-venue conundrum (conundrum, really! Can't it be a simple problem), which puzzles courts as they seek resolutions. Writing on such engaging topics showcases your in-depth knowledge and captures the attention of those reviewing your CV.

By delving into these hot-button issues or recent developments in the field, your essay can demonstrate your awareness of the latest trends and challenges in the field of law. An insightful analysis of such topics can make your CV stand out and leave a lasting impression on prospective employers.

However, it's important to remember that a well-rounded CV should include other significant aspects, such as moot court experiences, academic achievements, extracurricular activities, and any unique skills that set you apart.

Some law firms test candidates before giving them internships. The test is mainly formulated to determine your research and writing skills. The problem posed will

have facts similar to some prominent or recent decision of the Supreme Court, with a few twists here and there. You must answer the questions arising from those facts in a given time. You are free to research however you like—something akin to an open-book examination. Since most of the propositions are from celebrated or latest judgments, it is a good habit in law school to read the latest judgments. And how do you get to know which decisions you should read? The guide is the topics you will put in your CV.

Let me tell you, nothing more impresses an interviewer than referring to the latest case laws while answering an interview question. It gives a solid impression that you are interested in law and gives sufficient time to sharpen your knowledge.

Now, the next question is how you will know about the latest developments in the field of law.

In yester years, it was a difficult task (I could have used 'arduous' instead of 'difficult') to know about the latest legal developments as no magazine or website was dedicated explicitly to legal news. Even daily newspapers would cover only those decisions of the Courts, which had some political bearing or infamous ones—like serial murder or rape trials.

Many legal news websites and apps like Bar and Bench, Live Law, and Legally India exist today. They cover all crucial judgments passed by the Supreme Court and different high courts. It comes as snippets—give you a glimpse of a particular decision. Read the full judgment—which these websites often attach with the reporting—if it interests you or from your chosen field of practice.

Download the app of these legal websites on your phone and check them at least twice daily instead of checking Instagram and Facebook—and wasting time watching unending reels of dogs/cats, dance performances of known and unknowns, or pure buffoonery.

Spending time on these legal websites is worthwhile as they contain articles on recent decisions and burning issues. It's also helpful to write an article and get it published on any of these websites—because of its vast reach to the legal fraternity. A good article published by one of these websites will give you much recognition.

If not one of these websites, try to get your research, article, or essay published in any reputed legal journal. Whenever I come across a good article, I read it and forward it to my colleagues. I am sure any reputable law firm would happily have the writer in their ranks. So, spend your time reading and writing if you wish to get an internship at a top law firm or, for that matter, a job in any of the reputed law firms.

***Writing is the painting of the voice.*³ –**

Law firms place great importance on applicants' writing skills for valid reasons. Writing is integral to a lawyer's daily activities and essential for effective communication and representation. These tasks require strong writing abilities, whether drafting legal notices, responding to legal notices, preparing petitions, applications, appeals, or even composing emails to clients.

A lawyer's ability to convey complex legal arguments clearly and persuasively through written documents is crucial in the legal profession. Well-crafted legal documents can significantly impact a case's outcome and help build a solid and convincing argument.

Moreover, effective client communication is a cornerstone of successful legal practice, and clear and concise writing is indispensable in achieving this goal. Clients often seek legal counsel during challenging and complex situations, relying

³ *Voltaire*

on lawyers to provide accurate and understandable explanations of their legal matters.

By emphasising the importance of writing skills in the selection process, law firms ensure that candidates can effectively represent the firm and its clients, demonstrating proficiency in one of the most fundamental aspects of legal practice.

Therefore, writing is a chore that you have to follow every day. I've seen lawyers, young or experienced, cringe when asked to draft something. They will avoid it till it becomes unavoidable because of the approaching deadline for court filing or the client's reminder to a senior partner.

However, for you to recognise that writing is an essential aspect of legal practice, honing this skill can be immensely beneficial throughout your career. Strong writing skills will be your top asset from interning to starting your practice.

During your internships, you will often be involved in drafting tasks, such as preparing petitions, applications, contracts, and other legal documents. Being adept at writing will ensure you can complete these tasks efficiently and precisely, making a positive impression on your supervisors and colleagues.

As you begin practising law, the importance of writing will become even more apparent. Clear and persuasive written communication will be vital when representing your clients in court, negotiating settlements, or drafting contracts. You must convey complex legal arguments and concepts in a manner that is compelling and easy to comprehend.

Thus, cultivating and refining your writing skills during college is prudent. College life offers you ample opportunities to practice writing, whether it be through essays, research papers, or legal writing assignments. Embrace these opportunities to develop your proficiency and confidence in writing, setting a solid foundation for your future legal career.

Tis skill, not strength, that governs a ship⁴ (Techniques of Legal Research, a must requirement)

In the order of skills necessary for getting an internship, and even after that, I would emphasise the research skill of an applicant at the top.

By research skill, I mean how fast you can find relevant precedents most appropriate to the legal problem at hand. It's about correctly finding and applying the right precedents to the given legal situation. This ability to conduct effective and accurate research is a fundamental aspect of being a successful lawyer and is highly valued in the legal profession.

Though I cannot put in this essay how to do legal research, I can point out some hacks that may help you reach the correct legal precedent in the shortest possible time.

When I began my legal practice in 1999, we didn't have the luxury of search engines like Google or legal websites such as Manupatra, which have become invaluable resources for today's lawyers. Instead, I recall the days when I had to visit the Supreme Court judges' library or seek assistance from Mr. K. K. Venugopal's office to obtain citations from foreign law reports. Mr. Venugopal's office boasted one of the finest law libraries among lawyers, and due to my proximity to the senior I was working with, I had the privilege of using his collection. Those were the times when accessing legal information required physical effort and assistance from well-stocked libraries.

Indeed, in the absence of freely accessible computers or legal websites, searching for a precedent on a legal issue was akin to the classic saying "looking for a needle in a haystack." It demanded substantial effort and consumed hours, if not days, to find the proper case law aligned with the required legal proposition.

⁴ Thomas Fuller, also known as "*Negro Demus*" and the "*Virginia Calculator*", was an enslaved African renowned for his mathematical abilities.

Legal research back then was a time-consuming and labour-intensive task, making it a significant challenge for lawyers to gather the necessary precedents to support their arguments efficiently.

The advent of modern technology and online legal databases has undoubtedly revolutionised legal research, simplifying the process and providing lawyers instant access to a wealth of information that was once difficult to obtain.

The drill the seniors in the profession recommended was first to read the commentary on the proposition one is looking for. For a complex proposition, one had to go through several commentaries. While going through the relevant commentaries, you would also note citations of case laws referred to there, matching the facts involved in your case.

I'm going into a bit of detail on this process because it is still relevant and handy not only because sometimes you may not reach the appropriate case despite hundreds of searches on Google and legal websites but also because you learn a lot while researching this way. Your priority is not to identify similar precedents by entering relevant search words or phrases into search engines or legal websites but to read commentary when searching for case laws. It vastly improves your understanding of the subject. Moreover, while searching for the elusive proposition, you learn several other connected propositions that may be beneficial in the future. Someone has rightly said that a journey is more important than the destination.

Similarly, finding relevant case laws by scanning commentaries and reading them seriously is more fruitful than finding a solution instantly at the click of your mouse.

Another reason for referring to commentaries is that when looking for case laws applicable to your case, you go through several other issues that stick to you. You may remember it later while researching for some other legal *quandary* (I could have used *difficulty* instead of *quandary*, but I must use legalese to sound more like a lawyer 😊)

But in the present age of instant gratification, you may not like to do your research this tedious way. And for that, you are not to be entirely blamed. Sometimes, due to a lack of time or pressure from your senior to find relevant case laws urgently, you prefer directly looking at legal websites by punching relevant keywords in the search box.

So, the next thing one must do, and I'm sure now all law students have, is to familiarise themselves with different legal search engines with a repository of decided judgments of all courts.

Manupatra and SCC online are two of the most popular legal search engines. I am sure all law firms have subscribed to these legal research websites, which have become indispensable for law practice. Though I like Manupatra for searching, I prefer SCC for quoting or referring in court because of its acceptance in all courts.

One must also familiarise oneself with foreign search engines like LexisNexis or Westlaw. Knowing how to run them becomes essential when you work with a top law firm because of the precedential value of English and US case laws.

Case laws from other jurisdictions become crucial when you do not find any precedent in India. It is incredible to see the frequency of UK and US precedents cited by the Indian Supreme Court. You will also be amazed that almost all legal principles adopted or followed by Indian courts are borrowed from other jurisdictions. See any judgment of Justice Nariman; the plethora of foreign decisions cited in them is a case in point. Nowadays, the courts invariably examine the legal position in different jurisdictions before reaching any finding.

It would help if you also acquainted yourself with some of the most celebrated authors or commentaries, like Russel on Arbitration, Chitty on Contract, Nelson on Injunction, Palmer on Company law, McCarthy and Kerly on Trademark, etc. The courts have invariably relied upon these authors when dealing with novel legal problems. You will save yourself from embarrassment and may win some brownie

points if you rely on these commentaries when researching. Indeed, you will find these books in your college library, so familiarise yourself with them.

Most law firms have good libraries, and your senior will like that you have gone through the relevant books while researching. Your senior who has given you research will definitely ask you whether you have referred to Chitty or Russel or any other relevant text on the topic while doing your research. Therefore, it is always better not to disappoint him.

Another way to do meaningful research is to read the articles you come across while searching on Google. Mondaq, for example, —a content aggregator service in the legal industry—has a massive collection of legal articles written by Indian lawyers on various topics.

Reading an article on your research issue has the tremendous advantage of getting all case laws in one place. So, look for the latest article written on your research subject. You don't have to search for case laws separately—the article's author has already done that. Please take advantage of that. It will also help in elaborating the proposition you are working on. Please read all the case laws cited in the article before quoting them in your draft.

Believe no one on the ratio of case law. Find the ratio on your own.

While on this, I strongly advise not to rely on headnotes of journals while referring to case laws. The reason for the above advice is twofold: you never know whether the ratio set out in the headnote is even there in the judgment and whether the ratio stated in the headnote is the ratio of the decision.

Headnotes are not replicas of the decision but the interpretation of the person writing it. You will learn the hard way if, to save time, you are only reading headnotes and not the entire judgment. Headnotes should only be used to find out what the decision contains.

Moreover, reading the decision as a whole has many advantages. You know the facts, the parties' arguments, the central issue in the matter, how the judge dealt with the contentions of the rival parties, and also you get to know the ratio and the obiter of the judgement.

Sometimes, you will find arguments by a party beneficial to develop your ideas. Similarly, you also get to know which contentions to avoid for your propositions.

Oft repeated phrase, you will find in judgments which want to distinguish the other decisions already holding the field: *a decision is only an authority for what it actually decides, and observations of courts are neither to be read as Euclid's theorems nor as provisions of the statutes and that too taken out of their context.*

This also teaches you that no two judgments are the same. If a judge decides to distinguish it, he will do that by quoting the above phrase.

Another critical factor is that most judges don't like lawyers reading from the headnotes to support their arguments. So, they may even rebuke you for doing that. So, in a nutshell, never rely solely on head notes of a judgment and read from the judgment while reading it to the judge or your senior.

You got an internship, then what?

You have an internship. Now what? How to convert this opportunity into an offer of a job. Let me explain to you how.

Big law firms have a pyramidal structure. Equity Partners at the top, associate or a junior associate at the lowest, and in between, senior associates or principal associates/ managers, and salaried partners. Nomenclature or designation may differ, but all the firms more or less follow the above positions.

Equity Partners often head a particular practice area, e.g., mergers & acquisitions, capital market, banking and finance, etc., on the corporate side, whereas arbitration, competition, general disputes, etc., on the litigation side. Some partners are specialists in their field, and some are generalists. Specialists focus only on a

particular area of practice, whereas generalist partners take up whatever comes their way. They do arbitration, employment disputes, consumer court cases, insolvency, or white-collar crimes. They leave no field.

First, let me tell you what is expected from an intern in a law firm or any office or independent lawyer one is interning with.

Availability is the best ability

Once you join the firm as an intern, the Internship Management Committee (or its equivalents in different law firms) will assign you to a particular equity partner. The period for assignment may vary from firm to firm, but ordinarily, you will get a week or so with a specific partner to work with. Though the time is short, you will have ample opportunity to showcase your talent and skill.

Once allocated to an equity partner, what next?

Two things: probably someone from the assigned team will contact you for work. And, if it doesn't happen, you must reach out to your allocated team members for work. Always show your eagerness to work. It works, and it works miraculously.

When someone calls you from the team, always show your availability unless you are preoccupied with other work. Team members appreciate and do not take it otherwise if told about the occupancy in advance.

But never pretend to be occupied when you are not.

Be aware that team members talk to each other and can quickly find out about your occupancy. So, a false excuse of working on someone else's matter in the team will never work. You are done if you try and get caught. It may also show on your assessment sheet. An imperfect worksheet will harm your chances for another internship and reduce any chance of a job offer to zilch.

So, Rule number 1: be always available.

And Rule number 2: Meet the timeline of the given task—come whatever may.

Seriousness to complete the assigned task within the time granted or promised is one of the most liked qualities, whether as an intern or lawyer.

Since the person who has given the work to you is working under a tight timeline, he expects the delivery of the work by you within the given time. He hates his timeline going haywire because of you breaching your timeline. So once promised, you must stick to it.

What doesn't kill you, makes you stronger⁵

Working hard won't kill you, but it will give you the willpower to stick with the task at hand. Forget work-life balance while interning. You don't have a full-time job to start with. Even otherwise, work-life balance is a myth, particularly in a top-tier law firm or, for that matter, in any law firm. Individual practitioners are no exception to this farce. Ask any successful lawyer, and he will tell you that work-life balance in this profession is like chasing a chimera. It simply doesn't exist.

Once, I asked a top Supreme Court senior advocate—he had held the position of law minister and various other ministries during the congress regime—about his daily routine. His answer blew my mind. One of the Supreme Court's busiest lawyers, his typical day would look something like this: His daily briefing for the following day's matter would begin after court hours, i.e., at around 5.30 in the evening, and end typically at around 10 pm, occasionally lasting well beyond midnight for important cases. Once his briefing ended, he would review the briefs again and assign tasks to his juniors. Dinner would be sandwiched between the briefing. His preparation would not end there. He would rise at 5 a.m. and review the brief again before heading to court at roughly 10 a.m.

⁵ comes from an aphorism of the 19th century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche.

If he, in his seventies, can put in such long hours at work, young people shouldn't whine and sob about having to work long hours. If you have the burning desire to make it big in the profession, there is no other way than to work hard.

Moreover, my brutally honest take is that the so-called work-life balance is the refuge for shirkers who must have an excuse that justifies their inaction. Anyway, even if you firmly believe in a balanced work life, the internship period is not when you strive for it. Leave it for the future—when you are a senior partner in a firm and have to manage only a team of workers and not work.

So be ready to work your *** off in a literal sense.

Long sitting or standing hours—if you have a standing table, much in fashion and often seen in a senior partner's cabin—is the norm of this profession. Clients pay for the hours you spend on your computer. So, start practising sitting for long and beyond earthly hours. Graveyard shifts are a pervasive phenomenon in the legal profession.

You won't decline work only because you must stay up late to prepare the petition for court the next day. But, if you do that, I sincerely advise you to look for a 10 to 5 job, not a legal profession. I have seen lawyers—me included—working the entire night on a petition before heading straight to court the following day to attend the case.

Hence, there is no excuse for not meeting the deadline.

Exploit the opportunity, burn the proverbial midnight oil, and complete the given task. Working hard and sticking to deadlines go hand in hand. If you want to succeed, there is no alternative to hard work in this field or any field.

The legal profession, in general, and working in a top law firm, in particular, requires too many sacrifices. Working hard and partying harder is not the mantra here. You will barely get time to meet your family members, what to say, time to party.

Although the adage "live like a hermit and work like a horse" was intended for judges, it is appropriate for young lawyers to abide by it throughout their internship and even after. It's only a matter of a month or so for the time being. The internship period is the time that will determine your prospect of getting a job in a law firm. The most admired quality in a young lawyer is their dedication to hard work and long hours.

A long time back, I asked a very senior partner of the firm about the most crucial attribute he looks for while hiring a junior. He answered, "Give me an ass, and I will make him a good lawyer if he is willing or capable of going through the grind."

So, leave no stone unturned. Impress the team you are working with your sheer hard work.

The secret of getting ahead is getting started (Skill Set for the lawyers)

Mark Twain said: "The secret of getting ahead is getting started". However, if you lack the basic skill set, no amount of effort or availability will convince a potential employer to hire you when you graduate from college.

Some law firms have a rule where they select the bulk of junior-level new hires from a pool of interns who have impressed them. Before interns completed their internships, I saw partners offer them jobs. Therefore, keep your skill set sharp and ready because you never know when you'll need it.

In the world of litigation, it's almost inevitable that as an intern in a litigation team, your first assignment will revolve around assisting with case law research for ongoing matters. Thus, at this crucial stage of your internship, learning the art of researching case laws takes precedence.

As I've already provided detailed guidance on this aspect, I can emphasise its significance again. Stay vigilant in keeping up with the latest developments in various law fields, whether constitutional, contract, criminal, or insolvency law.

Your dedication to staying informed will set you on the path to success and excellence as you embark on your legal journey.

You don't know which team you will be assigned to during your internship. You do not need to be an expert in any area of law at this point, but you should have a basic understanding of each one to know what and where to look for when you are given a research assignment.

Even if you go through Bar and Bench or LiveLaw daily, you will have a fair idea about the latest legal developments and significant judgements of the High Courts and the Supreme Court. However, you can concentrate more on a particular field if you intend to apply to a specialist firm like firms mainly dealing with IPR matters or real estate or insolvency laws.

A long time back, when I had just started working with Agarwal Law Associates (that time a two-room flat with two brothers as partners, two stenos and two juniors—now a behemoth in litigation practice), I got a chance to sit in a conference with Mr F S Nariman, one of the greatest lawyers to walk the corridors of our Courts—for a matter coming up in the Supreme Court. He asked a question on a particular section of the Arbitration Act, 1996, from the briefing counsel. The answer didn't satisfy him. His second query was whether the briefing council had even looked at the relevant section in the statute. He was furious and rebuked the advocate for not even reading the bare act. He advised us always to argue the case on the first principle and read the relevant bare act several times to understand the meaning and purport of a particular provision in a statute.

His advice has remained with me to this day.

It would be best if you also adopted the same practice of looking up first to the bare act before diving deep into research.

Therefore, when studying a particular subject in college, you must keep bare acts and familiarise yourself with the relevant sections. Every time we read a section in

a bare act, we get a new meaning, meaning closer to what the legislature intended. Therefore, trust me when I say that developing the practice of going through the bare act first will benefit you throughout your professional career.

Seriousness in the assigned work is the biggest virtue in any profession. Dedication and hard work show your seriousness. People or your future employees like it very much.

Have the necessary tools in your toolbox

There are two things wrong with almost all legal writing. One is its style. The other is its content⁶.

A common misconception prevails that proficiency in spoken English equates to writing prowess. However, writing is an art unto itself, demanding consistent cultivation to refine its nuances.

Just as carpenter relies on precise tools for Immaculate craftsmanship, lawyers wield their words to forge compelling legal arguments. The mastery of writing, indeed, emerges as the paramount weapon in a lawyer's arsenal.

Your toolbox must be like a toolbox used by carpenters, with different slots for keeping instruments needed for various purposes; achieving the result of producing beautiful furniture requires something similar to achieving your goal of becoming a good lawyer once out of school. This way, you can use the appropriate instruments from the toolbox.

The topmost slot of your toolbox should contain vocabulary and grammar, as Stephen King, the most remarkable storyteller in modern American literature, says 'On Writing'⁷. His advice is to not make any conscious effort to improve your

⁶ **Fred Rodell** (March 1, 1907 – June 4, 1980) was an American law professor most famous for his critiques of the U.S. legal profession. A professor at Yale Law School for more than forty years, Rodell was described in 1980 as the "bad boy of American legal academia"

⁷ On Writing A Memoir of the Craft by Stephen King

vocabulary. Instead, inculcate a habit of reading. Read all sorts of literature and writings, and do not limit your reading only to legal works. You will be improving your vocabulary as you read.

The tendency to look for long, complex words instead of short and plain ones must be curtailed. Never use 'emolument' when you mean 'tip', and you will never say *that the demand of illegal gratification by the accused is a **sine qua non** for the constitution of an offence...* What you want to convey is an 'essential condition' for the constitution of an offence.

Bad grammar produces terrible sentences. Through meticulous attention to the correct usage of commas and semicolons, lawyers showcase their precision and dedication to their craft. Regrettably, grammar often occupies the backseat for numerous legal practitioners.

Young lawyers are encouraged to read grammar books written by Wren & Martin⁸ to bridge this knowledge gap. This venerable grammar book serves as a trusted companion for honing language proficiency. Seek it at your nearest bookstore or amidst the forgotten articles at home. Its red-coloured cover may invoke nostalgia for the bygone days when its significance was overlooked.

The absence of this diligent cultivation can lead to the composition of unfortunate sentences, such as the illustrative example from Strunk and White⁹: "*As a mother of 5, with another one on the way, my ironing board is always up.*"

Breathe life into words

Here's another crucial piece of advice: avoid using the passive tense in your legal writing. The active voice is like a breath of fresh air in writing, infusing it with clarity,

⁸ ***Wren & Martin*** refers to a single book *High School English Grammar and Composition* or collectively, a series of English grammar textbooks written jointly by P. C. Wren and H. Martin.

⁹ *The Elements of Style*, which *Time* recognized, in 2011, as one of the 100 best and most influential books written in English since 1923

conviction, and an unmistakable sense of purpose.¹⁰ Using active voice instead of passive voice in writing offers several advantages contributing to clearer, more engaging, and concise communication.

Here are some reasons why active voice is preferred over passive voice:

Clarity: Active voice makes the sentence's subject perform the action, leading to straightforward and more accessible sentences. The reader can quickly identify the "doer" of the action, leading to a clearer understanding of the message being conveyed.

Example: Active Voice: "The chef prepared a delicious meal."

Passive Voice: "A delicious meal was prepared by the chef."

Conciseness: Active voice often requires fewer words to convey the same message, resulting in more concise writing. This is particularly important when trying to convey information efficiently, especially in business or academic writing.

Example: Active Voice: "She completed the report."

Passive Voice: "The report was completed by her."

Engagement: Active voice adds energy and dynamism to writing, making it more engaging for readers. Active sentences feel more immediate and direct, effectively capturing the reader's attention.

Example: Active Voice: "The team won the championship."

Passive Voice: "The championship was won by the team."

Emphasis: Active voice allows the writer to emphasize the subject or "doer" of the action, which can be crucial in drawing attention to specific elements of the sentence.

¹⁰ Stephen King

Example: Active Voice: "John painted the masterpiece."

Passive Voice: "The masterpiece was painted by John."

Personal Tone: Active voice often feels more personal and relatable, creating a stronger connection between the writer and the reader.

Example: Active Voice: "I designed the website."

Passive Voice: "The website was designed by me."

Directness: Active voice is more direct and assertive, which can be beneficial in persuasive writing or when presenting arguments.

Example: Active Voice: "Our product outperforms the competition."

Passive Voice: "The competition is outperformed by our product."

Instead of saying, "the present petition has been filed by the Petitioner," opt for "Petitioner has filed the Petition."

While passive voice has its place in writing and can be useful in specific situations, such as when the doer of the action is unknown or less important, active voice generally provides more effective and engaging communication.

By incorporating an active voice into your writing, you can create stronger, more impactful sentences that leave a lasting impression on your audience.

Element of Style

In crafting your legal prose, consider the Elements of Style as the second layer in your toolbox. "Elements of Style" covers various aspects of grammar, punctuation, word usage, sentence structure, and composition, making it an indispensable resource for writers, students, and anyone looking to improve their writing skills.

The most recommended guide, *The Elements of Style*¹¹, by Strunk & White, outlines principles to enhance clarity, quality, and effectiveness in writing. Regarding this book, American poet Dorothy Parker said:

*If you have any young friends who aspire to become writers, the second-greatest favour you can do them is to present them with copies of *The Elements of Style*. The first-greatest, of course, is to shoot them now, while they're happy.*¹²

Follow Strunk's 1918 recommendations for the essential elements of good writing, and you won't go wrong.":

Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all his sentences short, or that he avoid all detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but that he make every word tell.

On a humorous side, I fell in love with this book and enthusiastically recommended it to all my junior colleagues, hoping they would follow its advice. Unfortunately, although they all bought it, none of them read it. Now, I'm stuck dealing with their terrible drafts while they remain blissfully unaware of the book's valuable advice. It's like a never-ending amusement park of subpar writing!

Legal Drafting: The Quill You Can't Afford to Lose!

Let me share an amusing anecdote about how a young lawyer not only landed an internship but also clinched a job offer at our law firm during his internship.

Picture this: one of our senior partners, known for being quite orthodox and particular about etiquettes, steps into the lift on his way to the office. And there

¹¹ By Strunk and White

¹² Roberts, Sam (21 April 2009). "'The Elements of Style' Turns 50". *The New York Times*.

stands a young lad, all formally dressed, holding some papers in his hand, asked the partner which floor the firm's office was on. Intrigued, the partner couldn't resist asking the boy about his business with the firm. The boy, without hesitation, revealed that he was there to apply for an internship. As a stickler for following procedures, the partner quizzed him why he hadn't followed the official internship application process.

With a hint of mischief in his eyes, the boy replied, "I've applied to various firms, but their silence made me think a personal visit might do the trick."

The boy's honesty and spunk took aback the partner. So, he invited him into his chamber for an impromptu interview. The boy's legal knowledge and insight impressed the partner; before you knew it, he was offered the internship on the spot!

Connected to the same story, one fine morning, I received a call from the same partner to look into a draft writ petition prepared by this intern. He came to my room, soberly dressed, and addressed me politely. As I perused through the draft, I was in for a pleasant surprise. For a 5th-year student, his work was nothing short of impressive. The content was on point, but what really caught my eye was the professional look and feel of the document. It was as if a seasoned lawyer had crafted it! His seriousness and dedication to his work were genuinely commendable. So, when the time came, the firm offered him a job after he completed his studies.

It is disheartening to observe that many interns often struggle to produce satisfactory drafts of suits or petitions when asked to do so. This raises a concern about the lack of emphasis on one of the most critical aspects of lawyering - drafting - within the curriculum of law schools.

Law schools and colleges should incorporate drafting as an essential curriculum component from the beginning rather than waiting until the 4th or 5th year. During my time at the Campus Law Centre, considered one of the better law colleges,

drafting was only introduced in the 5th semester, during the final year of our course. Regrettably, how it was taught left much to be desired, rendering drafting more daunting than enjoyable.

To truly enhance the drafting skills of law students, it would be beneficial for law schools to engage practising advocates, well-versed in the art of drafting, as instructors. Such professionals can provide valuable insights on form, structure, and the art of creating an impressive brief, drawing from their real-world experience in the courts.

So, an essential piece of advice: you must take drafting seriously, very, very seriously. This tool will help you in your initial years, get a desired job, and achieve excellence in the later years of your profession.

Clothes make the man¹³

Besides your legal acumen, how you dress during your internship with a law firm holds significant importance. Trained lawyers possess keen eyes and swiftly take note of an intern's attire upon arrival at the office. The legal profession is blatantly orthodox—by sheer virtue of its history and nature.

In this environment where lawyers and judges adhere to strict clothing rules, flashy dresses during your internship are an absolute no-no. Opting for jeans and T-shirts might project a casual attitude, which is best avoided. Instead, boys should consider formal shirts and trousers, while girl interns may opt for anything formal in their wardrobe. As the legal profession is considered a serious business, steering clear of clothes designed for the fashion industry is recommended.

Remember, dressing smartly never hurts and can go a long way in making a positive impression.

¹³ Mark Twain

Another aspect one should be careful about is your cafeteria visits. Most law firms have cafeterias for lawyers and staff working there. Try to minimise your visit to this place. Huddling in a group and making noise may irk other lawyers.

And let's not forget the smokers! Puffing away in the smoking area, coffee mug in hand, thinking you are the epitome of coolness. You are highly misguided! Those ever-observant seniors are watching and won't be impressed by your caffeine-infused smokescreen.

While it is natural to seek camaraderie with peers, it is equally crucial to maintain an atmosphere of decorum and focus. Remember, your time as an intern is limited, and dedicating your efforts to substantive legal tasks is paramount to making a positive and lasting impression.

As you embark on your internship journey, ensure that every aspect of your conduct aligns with the standards of professionalism upheld within the legal community. Maintaining these principles will pave the way for a successful and meaningful internship experience.

So, dear prospective interns, heed this wise counsel: focus on the task at hand! You have but a fleeting window of 3 to 4 weeks to make your mark and win hearts. The parties and wild nights can wait until you've secured that elusive job.

Float like a butterfly and sting like a bee

To all the young budding lawyers out there, remember to embrace the spirit of Muhammad Ali's famous quote, "Float like a butterfly and sting like a bee," in your legal endeavours.

Just like a butterfly, be agile, adaptable, and graceful in navigating the complexities of the law. Develop the ability to flutter between different areas of practice, absorbing knowledge and honing your skills.

However, don't forget to sting like a bee when it's time to advocate for your clients' rights and seek justice. Be tenacious, persuasive and unyielding in your pursuit of

the truth. In the Courtroom, let your presence be felt and your arguments be sharp, leaving a lasting impact on judges and opposing counsel.

Combining butterflies' finesse with a bee's fierceness, you will become a force to be reckoned with in the legal arena.

In conclusion, getting an internship at a top law firm might seem challenging, but it's definitely doable with the right approach. Make sure to research the law firms well, customise your application to highlight your strengths, and use your network to your advantage. Showing off a solid academic record, relevant experiences and excellent writing skills will help you stand out from other applicants. By improving your skills, staying determined, and demonstrating your passion for the legal profession, you enhance your chances of landing that desired internship and starting a fulfilling journey toward a successful legal career.

I wish you the best of luck!