



ILLINOIS STATE  
BAR ASSOCIATION

Illinois State Bar Association  
424 South Second Street  
Springfield, IL 62701

## **So You Want To Be A Lawyer!**

*Resources and suggestions for students and teachers*

*<http://www.isba.org/Sections/lawrelateded.asp>*



*A resource for students of all ages who are interested in becoming a lawyer.*

The Illinois State Bar Association is a private, not-for-profit corporation. Admission, registration and professional responsibility of Illinois Attorneys falls under the direct supervision and authority of the Illinois Supreme Court and its various branches.



## Elementary School

If you or one you know thinks they want to become a lawyer, the first question that needs to be answered is, what does a lawyer do? Lawyers are problem solvers. They help people, families and businesses. They work in small or large law offices, in government, or in big businesses and corporations. Lawyers can do things as complicated as defending people who have been accused of crimes or as simple as helping collect money that is owed to you.

Lawyers need to go to school for three years after they finish their college education.

Some of the things any good lawyer needs to be able to do are:

- Read and understand well
- Be able to write and communicate well
- Be able to speak well in front of others
- Be organized
- Be on time with their work
- Complete assignments as instructed
- Ask questions if they don't understand
- Be open minded and listen well when others are speaking
- Be honest and know how to keep secrets

These are all skills young students can start developing now.

If you have an elementary school student in your classroom who is expressing interest in a career in the law, here are a few topics and resources you may wish to use:

- For a brief description of what a lawyer does, use A. Lincoln as example.  
<http://www.isba.org/Sections/becoming%20a%20lawyer.pdf>
- ISBA has a Lincoln coloring book available <http://www.isba.org/lrc/coloringbook.pdf>
- Provide link to the ABA where the fairy tale mock trial scripts are available for purchase.  
<http://www.abanet.org/publiced/mocktrials.html>
- Encourage “being prepared”
- Read about some famous lawyers, like Abraham Lincoln, Clarence Darrow, Edgar Lee Masters, Barack Obama, Hilary Clinton, etc.
- Encourage inviting a lawyer to the classroom (list discussion topics).
- Encourage a visit to a courtroom or law office.
- Encourage reading and creative writing through a series of lesson plans and exercises that can be used in the classroom or at home

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Is justice blind? Ask students to study the image of Lady Justice above. This is a traditional symbol for Justice in the United States.

- Ask students why they think the figure is blindfolded. Discuss impartiality. Justice does not “see” the differences in those who seek help. Decisions in U.S. Courts are not to be based on how people look, whether they are friends or foe, rich or poor, old or young. Ask how students how it would feel if they were judged by how they were dressed, who was sitting next to them, how tall they were or how they looked. Should a homeless person be treated differently than someone who lives in a big house? Should a person who wasn’t born in this country be treated the same as someone who was born here? Is it a good thing for justice to be blind?

- Ask students why they think the figure is holding scales. Discuss fairness and equality. Scales represent equality and weighing the evidence to determine what is right and what is wrong, who has been hurt and how much. Ask students how they would feel if the scales could be tipped by threats to the judge or witnesses, or by bribes. What if the judge was friends with one of the parties in a trial? Would this be fair? Explain that judges need to “recuse” themselves if there is a conflict of interest to ensure fairness and equality.

- Ask students why they think the figure holds a sword. The sword is a representation that an appropriate punishment will be determined by the Court. The sword is a symbol. It does not mean that those who are guilty will be stabbed. Discuss ways of punishing those who are guilty. Explain what a “sentence” is.

- Ask students if they think they could be fair and impartial. Ask what kind of factors should be considered when deciding on a punishment?

How severe the crime was?

The accused person’s age?

The accused person’s health?

How much money the accused person has?

What color the accused person is?

Where the accused person comes from? The community, out of state, or another country?

Would the students be able to be like the figure of justice? Would they be able to “not see” some of the things about a person that could create a biased or unfair decision?

## Middle School

What does a lawyer do? Lawyers are problem solvers who have chosen a profession that offers vast opportunities to help others. Whether you think you want to work in small or large law offices, in government, or in businesses, as a lawyer you will be called upon to solve problems. These problems may be large or small. They can range from defending a criminal to helping collect a bill. Lawyers need to go to school for three years after they finish their college education.

Some of the things any good lawyer needs to be able to do are:

- Read and understand well
- Be able to write and communicate well
- Be able to speak well in front of others
- Be organized
- Be on time with their work
- Complete assignments as instructed
- Ask questions if they don't understand, and ask follow-up questions to clarify
- Be open minded and listen well when others are speaking
- Develop team working skills
- Know how to research a topic on their own
- Develop good note taking skills
- Be honest and know how to keep secrets

These are all skills young students can start developing now.

Middle school students interested in a career in the law may wish to review some of the following resources:

- Brief description of what a lawyer does, use A. Lincoln as example  
<http://www.isba.org/Sections/becoming%20a%20lawyer.pdf>
- how to take a test  
[http://www.education.com/reference/topic/StandardsAndTesting\\_TestPreparation/?cid=55000.0039616&s\\_kwcid=test%20taking%20tips|1077993115](http://www.education.com/reference/topic/StandardsAndTesting_TestPreparation/?cid=55000.0039616&s_kwcid=test%20taking%20tips|1077993115)
- study skills ideas <http://www.how-to-study.com/>
- Discuss character and fitness, classes and activities they may be interested in taking or doing to help prepare for a life in the law.
- Encourage reading about political and legal figures in history or in the news today.
- Encourage inviting a lawyer to the classroom (list discussing topics)
- Encourage exercises to develop critical thinking skills and problem solving, as well as oral advocacy. Students may benefit from becoming involved in speech and debate or theater
- Job training and resume building can start now. Every time the student volunteers to assist anywhere, helps a neighbor or does a small job for anyone, they can write it down and create a reference for the future.

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## High School

Congratulations on your interest in a career as a lawyer.

As to background education prior to attending college and law school, one concentrate on a broad range of topics. The most important aspect of the high school education for is receiving good grades, as well as developing your general communication skills. The most important function of an attorney is the communication of ideas, both verbally and in writing.

Some of the things any good lawyer needs to be able to do are:

- Read and understand well
- Be able to write and communicate well
- Be able to speak well in front of others
- Be organized
- Be on time with their work
- Complete assignments as instructed
- Ask questions if they don't understand and ask follow-up questions to clarify
- Be open minded and listen well when others are speaking
- Develop team working skills
- Know how to research a topic on their own
- Develop good note taking skills
- Be honest and know how to maintain confidentiality
- Be able to debate an issue and see both sides of an argument

These are all skills young students can start developing now.

If you think you may be seriously interested in a law career, you may wish to consider contacting local law offices, legal service organizations or other law-related entities to see if they require any assistance, even as a volunteer, during what time you have available. Any exposure you can gain in the field will benefit you in your future career.

If you have an interest in serving in the legal field, but do not wish to become a lawyer, you may choose a career as a legal assistant or paralegal. You may become a mediator, a law librarian, court reporter, or court clerk. Read the Illinois State Bar Association's brochure on careers in the law at <http://www.isba.org/Sections/legalcareers.html>

Here are some resources, ideas and links:

- Visit the Illinois Student Assistance Commission website at [www.collegezone.com](http://www.collegezone.com)
- Brief description of what a lawyer does – use A. Lincoln as example <http://www.isba.org/Sections/becoming%20a%20lawyer.pdf>
- suggest mock trials and link to our website, <http://www.isba.org/Sections/mocktrialinfo.html>
- Encourage reading newspapers and magazines to keep informed of issues important in your community.

- How to take a test  
[http://www.education.com/reference/topic/StandardsAndTesting\\_TestPreparation/?cid=55000.0039616&s\\_kwid=test%20taking%20tips1077993115](http://www.education.com/reference/topic/StandardsAndTesting_TestPreparation/?cid=55000.0039616&s_kwid=test%20taking%20tips1077993115)
- Link to financial aid resources for college  
[http://www.findtuition.com/scholarships/?r=googlescholarship&utm&gclid=COq\\_p\\_ihvZICFQVexgod1QYfbQ](http://www.findtuition.com/scholarships/?r=googlescholarship&utm&gclid=COq_p_ihvZICFQVexgod1QYfbQ)  
Or  
<http://www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov> (calculates the amount of federal financial aid a student is likely to receive)  
Or  
[www.savingforcollege.com](http://www.savingforcollege.com) is another calculator tool.  
Or  
[www.meritaid.com](http://www.meritaid.com) is a site that lists millions of dollars in merit scholarships available to students.
- Link to “Becoming an Adult” <http://www.illinoislawyerfinder.com/publicinfo/adult.html>
- Link college search tools: U.S. Department of Education’s “College Navigator” at <http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>
- Your school counselors should have resources to help prepare for ACT SAT PSAT
- List famous Illinois lawyers (See ISBA LRE Newsletter December/January 2007-08) <http://www.isba.org/sections/lre/dec07-jan08.pdf> )
- Offer course list for classes and activities that may help prepare
  - Creative Writing
  - Speech and Debate
  - High School Mock Trial involvement
  - Constitutional Rights Foundation Youth Programs
  - Social Studies and current events
  - Library science
  - Illinois and U.S. Constitution
  - U.S. History
  - Political Science
  - Theater
  - Peer mediation and conflict resolution skills development
- Stress good grades as well as extra-curricular activities
- Add discussion of character and fitness, classes and activities they may be interested in taking or doing to help prepare for a life in the law.
- Job training and resume building continues
- Encourage trips to courthouses, law libraries, law offices, government offices
- Invite a lawyer to the classroom to discuss current events issues or other topics of interest to students
- Stress the importance of developing effective study skills
- Watch lawyers and judges in film. Suggest that students watch films or television shows depicting lawyers, judges, law-related situations. This can familiarize them with terminology, responsibilities, job requirements and the stresses and rewards.
- Visit a law school campus. See what a classroom is like. Meet some law students
- Attend a law camp in your area, if possible.

## **Suggested reading list for those interested in a career in the law:**

- *A Civil Action*, by Jonathan Harr
- *Anatomy of a Murder*, by Robert Traver
- *Billy Budd*, by Herman Melville
- *Bleak House* and *The Pickwick Papers*, by Charles Dickens
- *Gideon's Trumpet*, by Anthony Lewis
- *Les Miserables*, by Victor Hugo
- *Looking at Law School*, by Stephen Gillers
- *One-L*, by Scott Turow
- *The Bramble Bush*, by Karl N. Llewellyn
- *The Paper Chase*, by John Osborne Jr.
- *To Kill A Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee

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## College

Congratulations on your interest in a career as a lawyer.

As to background education prior to attending law school, one should feel no constraints in terms of concentration as an undergraduate. Usually a liberal arts education is beneficial; however, students with backgrounds ranging from accounting, business or philosophy, to engineering or biology also become effective and successful attorneys. The most important aspect of the undergraduate education for law school is receiving good grades in whatever field of concentration you choose, as well as developing your general communication skills. The most important function of an attorney is the communication of ideas, both verbally and in writing.

Sometime prior to or during one's senior year in college, the LSAT admissions test must be taken. Similar to the ACT or the SAT, the test is used by law schools in the admissions process. Many law schools determine admissions solely on the basis of a formula computing grades and the LSAT tests score together. However, there are some law schools that have other elements added on to that computation, whether it be for affirmative action purposes or other reasons.

If you think you may be seriously interested in a law career, you may wish to consider contacting local law offices, legal service organizations or other law-related entities to see if they require any assistance, even as a volunteer, during what time you have available. Any exposure you can gain in the field will benefit you in your future career.

If you plan on being admitted to practice law in Illinois, you must attend a law school accredited by the American Bar Association. The preparation for a license to practice law requires a great deal of time, hard work and expense. In addition to graduating from an American Bar Association accredited law school, you must pass the Illinois Bar Examination, a rigid test of knowledge in all fields of law. And, you must undergo a thorough examination by the Committee on Character and Fitness to practice. Ultimately, having completed all these steps, you will be sworn in by a Justice of the Illinois Supreme Court and acquire your admission to the bar.

As to employment options and opportunities, there is a broad range of jobs available to those holding a law degree or license. You may become a corporate lawyer, a criminal defense lawyer, or a legal service lawyer working for the indigent, to name a few. You may choose to teach law or become a general practitioner. You may work in a large law firm or open your own solo practice. You may become a government lawyer and work with the federal, state or local governmental units.

If you have an interest in serving in the legal field, but do not wish to become a lawyer, you may choose a career as a legal assistant or paralegal. You may become a mediator, a law librarian, court reporter, or court clerk.

If you are wondering about how much you may earn as a lawyer, the range is broad. As a first year associate in a large, established law firm in a large metropolitan area, you can expect to earn far more than a first year lawyer in a smaller firm in a smaller community. Government attorneys often earn less than those in private practice.

What you are allowed to charge a client for the work you perform as their attorney is governed by the Illinois Supreme Court's Rules of Professional Conduct and any statutory fees that may have been established by the legislature. The Rules of Professional Conduct state that a lawyer's fees must be reasonable and may be calculated based on a variety of factors:

- Time and labor required, the novelty and difficulty of the question is involved, and the skill requisite to perform the legal service properly
- The likelihood that the acceptance of the particular employment will preclude other employment by the lawyer
- The fee customarily charged in the locality for similar legal services
- The time limitations imposed by the client and by the circumstances
- The amount involved and the results obtained
- The nature and length of the professional relationship with the client
- The experience, reputation, and ability of the lawyer performing the services, and
- Whether the fee is fixed or contingent.

The job market for lawyers may fluctuate with the economy and job opportunities could be affected, precluding employment in a large law firm or corporation.

Again, list courses that students may be able to take to prepare.

Creative writing

Library science

Business and bookkeeping courses

Speech and debate

Pre-law courses

Political science

Government

- Continue reading. Be aware of history and politics. Read about legal cases in the news.
- Visit a law school campus. See what a classroom is like. Meet some law students
- Link to financial aid resources for college

[http://www.findtuition.com/scholarships/?r=googlescholarship&utm&gclid=COq\\_p\\_ihvZICFQVexgodIQYfbQ](http://www.findtuition.com/scholarships/?r=googlescholarship&utm&gclid=COq_p_ihvZICFQVexgodIQYfbQ)

Or

<http://www.fafsa4caster.ed.gov> (calculates the amount of federal financial aid a student is likely to receive)

- Link to LSAT resources - Law School Admissions Council  
<http://www.lsac.org/LSAT/lsat-prep-materials.asp>
- ABA Accredited Law Schools  
<http://www.abanet.org/legaled/approvedlawschools/alpha.html>
- Supreme Court Admissions rules  
[http://www.state.il.us/court/SupremeCourt/Rules/Art\\_VII/default.asp](http://www.state.il.us/court/SupremeCourt/Rules/Art_VII/default.asp)
- Supreme Court Rules of Professional Conduct  
[http://www.state.il.us/court/SupremeCourt/Rules/Art\\_VIII/default.asp](http://www.state.il.us/court/SupremeCourt/Rules/Art_VIII/default.asp)

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- *Bleak House* and *The Pickwick Papers*, by Charles Dickens
- *Gideon's Trumpet*, by Anthony Lewis
- *Les Miserables*, by Victor Hugo
- *Looking at Law School*, by Stephen Gillers
- *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, by John Berendt
- *One-L*, by Scott Turow (and other books by Turow)
- *The Bramble Bush*, by Karl N. Llewellyn
- *The Common Law*, by Oliver W. Holmes Jr.
- *The Fall of a Sparrow*, by Robert Hellenga
- *The Invisible Man*, by Ralph Ellison
- *The Legacy*, by James Michener
- *The Paper Chase*, by John Osborne Jr.
- *To Kill A Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee
- Various books by John Grisham
- Biographies! Here are a few suggestions
  - Abe Fortas
  - Abraham Lincoln
  - Clarence Darrow
  - John Marshall
  - Myra Bradwell
  - Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.
  - Robert Kennedy
  - Thurgood Marshall
  - William Jennings Bryan

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## Law School & Beyond

- Link to ISBA resource *From Diploma to License*
- Link to ISBA Law Student membership information <http://www.isba.org/lawstudents/>
- Supreme Court Admissions rules  
[http://www.state.il.us/court/SupremeCourt/Rules/Art\\_VII/default.asp](http://www.state.il.us/court/SupremeCourt/Rules/Art_VII/default.asp)
- Supreme Court Rules of Professional Conduct  
[http://www.state.il.us/court/SupremeCourt/Rules/Art\\_VIII/default.asp](http://www.state.il.us/court/SupremeCourt/Rules/Art_VIII/default.asp)
- Mandatory Continuing Legal Education in Illinois <http://www.mcleboard.org/>
- Continuing Legal Education with the Illinois State Bar Association  
<http://www.isba.org/lawed/home.asp>
- Registering with the Illinois Supreme Court's Attorney Registration and Disciplinary Commission [www.iardc.org](http://www.iardc.org)
- Illinois State Bar Association members with ethics questions can access advisory opinions on professional conduct at <http://www.isba.org/EthicsOpinions/> or can call 800.252.8908 and ask for an ethics attorney.

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**AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION ACCREDITED LAW SCHOOLS IN ILLINOIS**

University of Illinois College of Law  
Law Building, Champaign, IL 61820  
<http://www.law.illinois.edu/>

Southern Illinois University School of Law  
Carbondale, IL 62901  
<http://www.law.siu.edu/>

The John Marshall Law School  
315 S. Plymouth Court, Chicago, IL 60604  
<http://www.jmls.edu/>

University of Chicago School of Law  
1111 E. 60th Street, Chicago, IL 60637  
<http://www.law.uchicago.edu/>

Northwestern University School of Law  
357 E. Chicago Avenue, Chicago, IL 60611  
<http://www.law.northwestern.edu/>

Loyola University Law School  
41 E. Pearson Street, Chicago, IL 60611  
<http://www.luc.edu/law/>

Illinois Institute of Technology  
Chicago-Kent College of Law  
77 S. Wacker Drive, Chicago, IL 60606  
<http://www.kentlaw.edu/>

DePaul University Law School  
25 E. Jackson Blvd., Chicago, IL 60604  
<http://www.law.depaul.edu/>

Northern Illinois University College of Law  
Swen Parson Hall, DeKalb, IL 60115  
<http://law.niu.edu/law/>