

2021-2022

1L SURVIVAL GUIDE

MLSA COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE

ROBSON HALL, FACULTY OF LAW
University of Manitoba

TABLE OF CONTENTS

3	A NOTE FROM THE TEAM	8	ACADEMICS
4	LAW SCHOOL TIMELINE	12	TIME MANAGEMENT
5	1L: WHAT IS IT?	13	MENTAL HEALTH
6	TERMINOLOGY	14	PROFESSIONAL KNOW-HOW
7	FYI: ROBSON HALL EDITION	18	NETWORKING

Disclaimer (we are law students after all): The content of this document does not constitute legal advice and cannot be used against its authors, the MLSA, or its members in a court of law. Directives from the Faculty of Law should always be followed when in conflict with this document.

A NOTE FROM THE TEAM

Congrats! You made it to law school. You've already passed a difficult hurdle in the process of becoming a lawyer. No matter what your LSAT score was or how long it took for you to be accepted, you are now part of the amazing MLSA community - we are excited to have you here!

Starting your first year at Robson Hall is both extremely nerve-wracking and exciting. Struggling with your grades, professional expectations, and imposter syndrome happens to everyone (even if most people don't admit it)! Our goal at the MLSA is for this guide to provide information that will be useful to you throughout 1L, and help you feel more comfortable in this new setting.

This guide will highlight the main areas that are the most challenging for new 1L's; like studying, time management and professional growth. It will also provide some general tips to make life easier for you at Robson Hall.

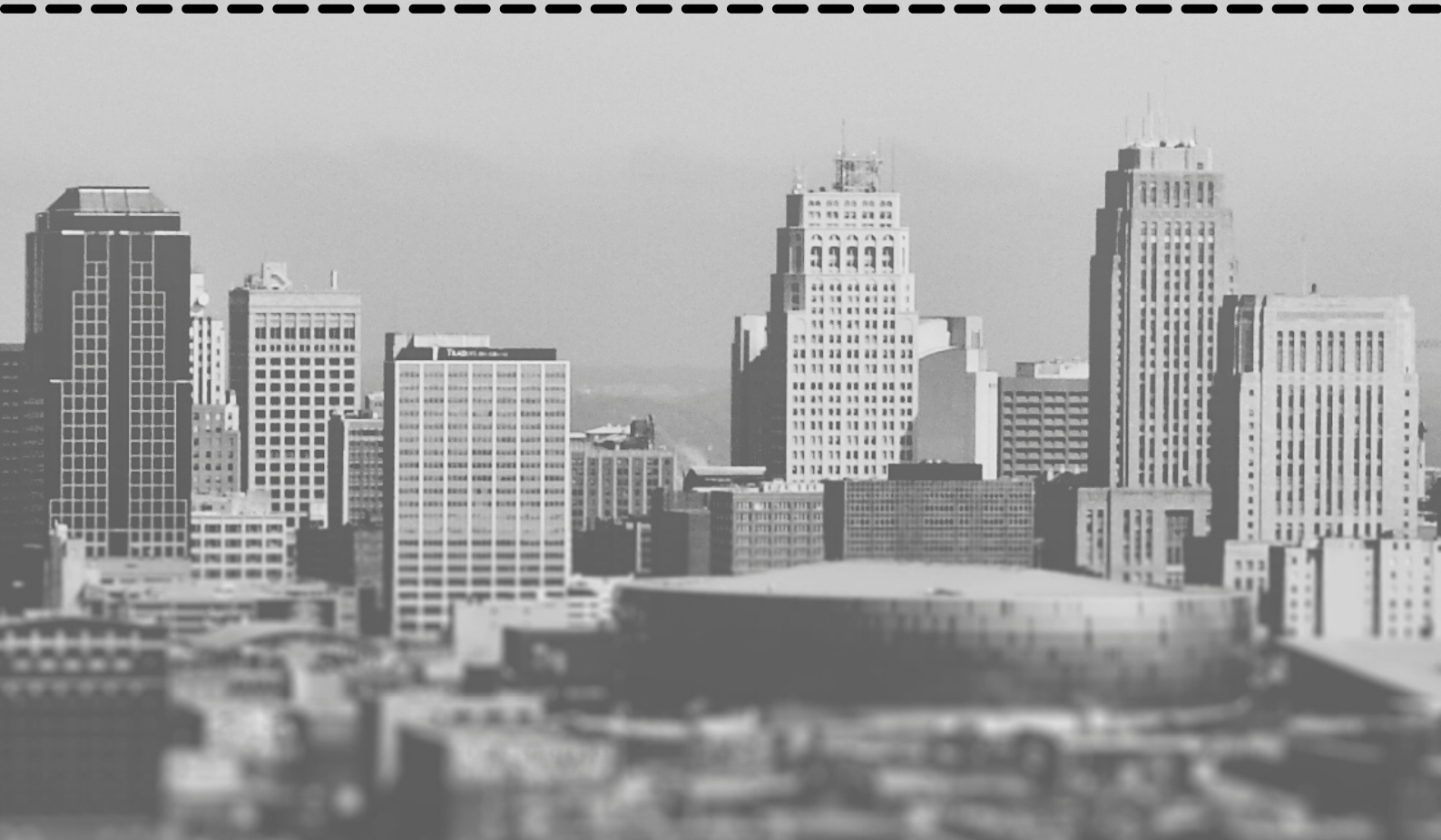
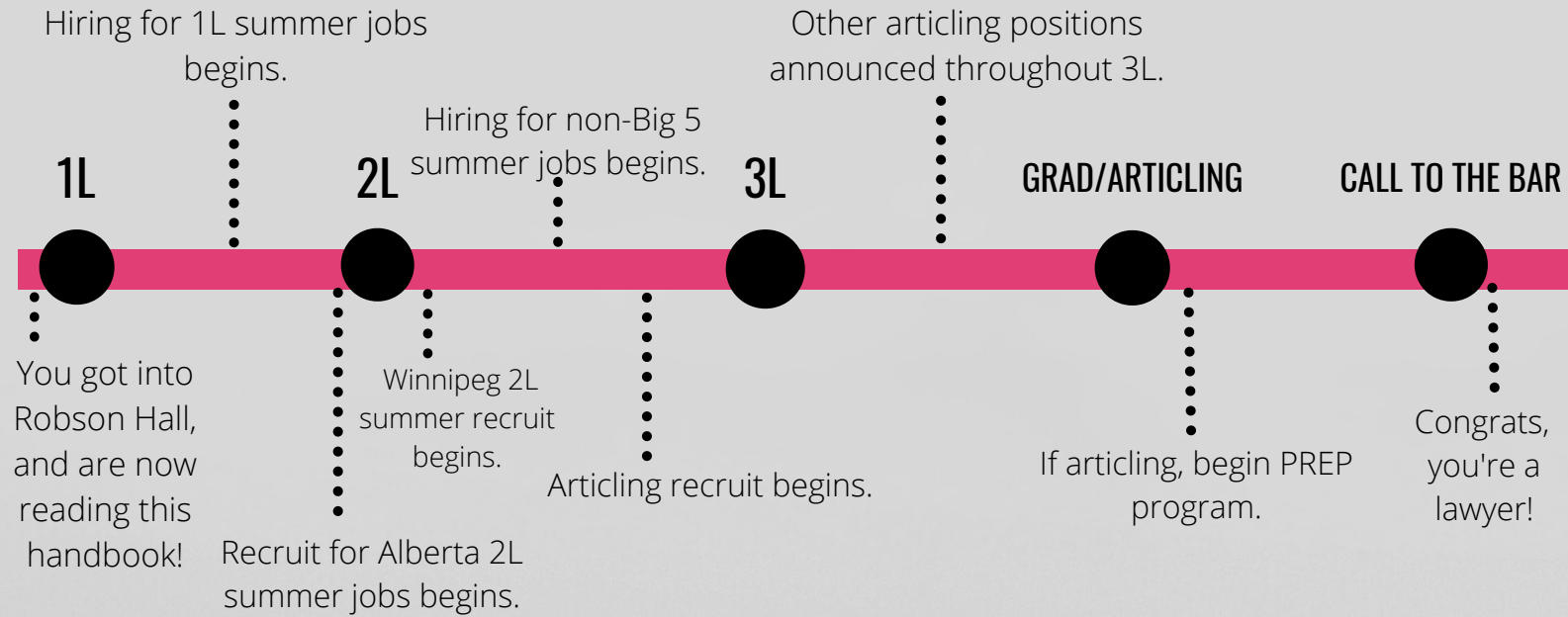
Just remember: it's okay to not have a full career plan in 1L, you're still smart even if you're struggling, and you're going to get through law school!

- *MLSA 2021-2022*



THE LAW SCHOOL TIMELINE

A timeline to help you understand the process of becoming a lawyer.



1L: WHAT IS IT?

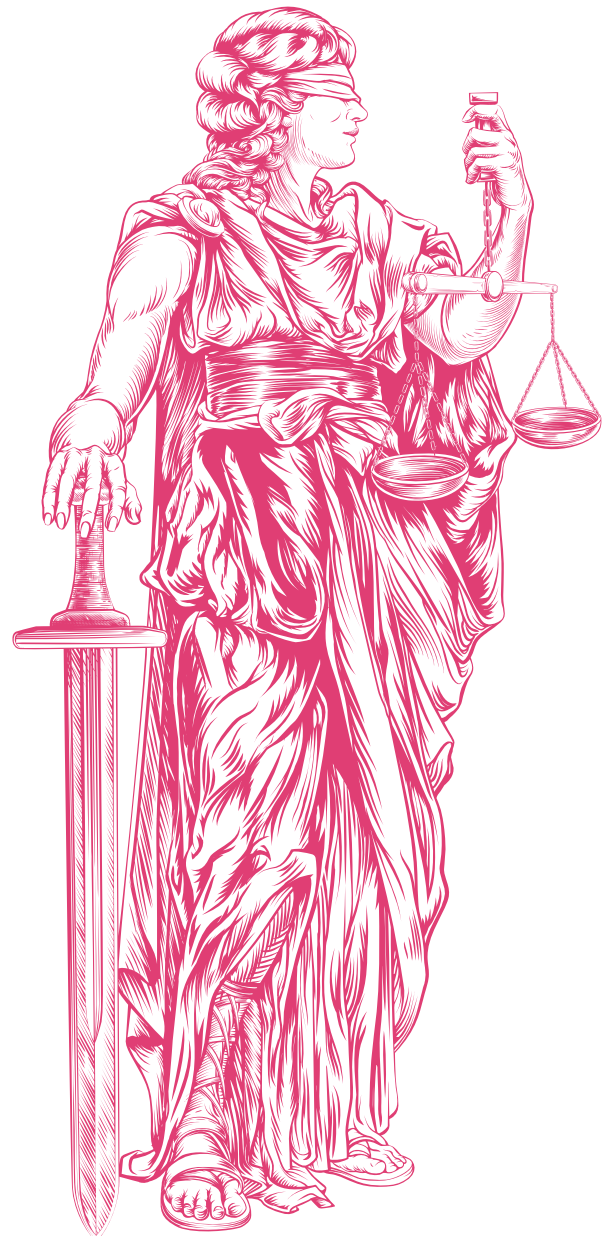
1L is the acronym used to describe **the first year of law school**. Approximately 100 or more students will make up your incoming 1L class.

Robson Hall structures its program differently than what you're used to from your undergrad experience. Your total class will be broken up into 3 sections: A01, A02, and A03. When you register for 1L courses in August, **you will be assigned a section and will stay with the same people the entire year**. For example, if A02 is your section, you'll be in all A02 classes; and not any labelled for A01 or A03. Because you spend so much time together, you'll get to know your section-mates very well!

In 1L, you have 7 required courses, and they run for the full year. **You will have to take:**

- Constitutional Law
- Contracts
- Criminal Law & Procedure
- Property
- Torts & Compensation Systems
- Legal Methods (with all sections, P/F)
- Legal Systems (with all sections, P/F)

The exam structure is different in 1L than in other years. Your midterms (in December) are usually worth 20-35% of your final grade. Why so low? Most students have a hard adjustment to legal content, new exam formats, and the sheer amount of work required by law courses; meaning their midterm grades aren't great! The low percentage gives you room to recover your course grade with assignments or during finals (in April).



TERMINOLOGY

A list of terms to help you pretend you know what's going on.

- **1L, 2L, or 3L:** The number is what year of law school you're in; the 'L' stands for law.
- **Articling:** The process of getting experience as a lawyer that takes place after you graduate law school. You have to complete articling to become a practicing lawyer, and the process will take about 1 year. The hiring recruit for these positions starts at the end of 2L, and continues until grad.
- **Call to the Bar:** In Manitoba, you will be required to complete the PREP course while doing your articles before you can be 'called to the bar'. Once articling and PREP are completed, you can apply to do so. If accepted, you're officially a lawyer!
- **Moot:** A competitive, simulated court proceeding meant to give you practical experience acting in court and effectively advocating. In 1L, you can start practicing by signing up for the Mini Moot!
- **Externship:** Valuable clinical style courses typically offered in 3L that develop your practical lawyering skills (e.g. teaching millennials how a fax machine works usually happens).
- **FILAC:** The most common way to 'brief' a case, or to figure out what's important about it. The elements of FILAC are 'Facts', 'Issue', 'Law' (more commonly called the 'Ratio' by students), 'Analysis', and 'Conclusion'.
- **The 'Big 5':** The 5 big corporate firms in Winnipeg. Includes TDS, Fillmore Riley, MLT Aikins, Taylor McCaffrey and Pitblado.
- **MILSA:** Manitoba Indigenous Law Students Association. A group made up of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students who promote the rights of Indigenous peoples and communities.
- **MLSA:** Manitoba Law Students' Association. All Robson Hall students are members, and are governed by the elected MLSA Council.

FYI: Robson Hall Edition

The stuff that doesn't fit anywhere else.

Robson Hall is a place with its own unique culture and way of doing things. It helps to know a few key pointers before you embark on your 1L journey. **Here's some tips current students wished they knew before and during 1L:**

- **Facebook is extremely popular** - it's used for socializing with other students, joining groups, getting school-related news and working on group assignments with Messenger. If you don't have an account, you'll save yourself some hassle by making a basic one before 1L starts.
- **Check your school email** - you'll receive a 'myumanitoba' email account once you start at Robson, check it frequently! Robson Hall professors and staff will prefer that you use this email account; plus weekly updates about all Robson events are sent here.
- **Branch out early** - try out different social events and push yourself to meet new people. The students at Robson are not as intimidating as they may initially seem. Join a new student group, volunteer, or go to the next party!
- **Your reputation matters** - you will hear this approximately 5000 times from lawyers, profs, advisors, and other students while at Robson Hall, but it's true. Law school and the Manitoba legal community are small, and people remember how you act. Make sure you're on good behaviour.



ACADEMICS & GRADES

You'll learn to love B's.

One of the biggest challenges new law students face is the adjustment to legal courses and content. Law courses typically use a different course structure than what you've experienced in undergrad, and the demands of the classes are higher.

It is normal for your grades in law school to be lower than what you're used to, or what you were expecting, especially in your first year. The grading for each course works on a 'curve', meaning that your work is marked against that of your classmates. The majority of students will fall around a B grade, whereas less people get grades on the high or low ends of the curve (e.g. most classes have a few people with A's- and B+'s; and a couple of people who get D's). **While grades are important, getting a bad mark doesn't mean you won't get a job.** Don't panic, talk to your prof, reevaluate the way you studied, and use it as motivation to do better next time.

This section is meant to highlight some common questions about law classes and exams. Keep in mind that you don't necessarily have to overhaul your entire studying routine - **incorporate the suggestions that work best for you and the way you learn.** For even more strategies and resources, talk to the members of the MLSA Academic Committee page and check out their events.

STUDYING

When it comes to studying in law school, you don't need to reinvent the wheel. Take the style that has worked for you in the past and tailor it to law classes as you see fit - and read some of our advice below!

How much should you be studying?

The pressure to study will be felt by Day 1 of law school from your profs, faculty members, and other students. Unfortunately, we don't have a magic number of hours that you should study for. Take your cues from class - if you're understanding what's going on, you're probably studying the right amount. If concepts are becoming unclear, pinpoint where you got lost and use your textbook, notes, and research to help catch up before you fall too far behind. Ask profs or classmates. Finally, **take other people's claims about studying for hours on end with a grain of salt**, and be confident in your own unique approach.



What about course readings?

In 1L, you will have a massive assigned reading list that will be impossible to read in completion. You simply won't have time to read everything, so read strategically. **Be aware that for a lot of cases, only one sentence or paragraph is the important takeaway.** Use your class syllabus to pinpoint what the topic is, and read the case specifically looking for that concept. Using the 'search term' function on CanLii or Westlaw is extremely helpful. However, **if you find yourself confused in a particular class, do a more fulsome read of the cases.** They often provide clear summaries of legal concepts and how they've developed.

PREPPING FOR EXAMS

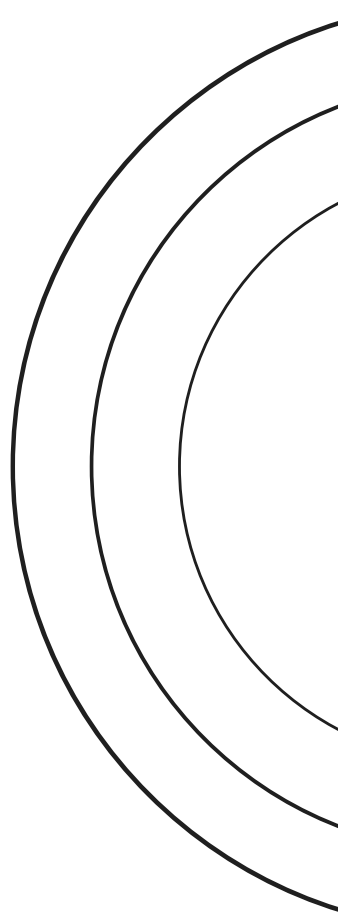
What does a law school exam look like?

The most stressful part of 1L for many students is taking exams. Law school exams are structured differently than what you've likely experienced in undergrad. **Exams typically include a large fact pattern**, and you will be asked to identify the legal issues and analyze them to come to your conclusion. A major part of your mark will be your ability to find issues within the fact pattern. Unless you want to pull multiple all-nighters, we recommend starting to prepare for your exams **at least** 2 weeks in advance - and even earlier if the exam is closed book.

What's an outline?

While everyone preps differently for exams, **one of the most popular strategies is to create an outline** for the course. Creating an outline not only helps you review the course material, but also allows you to sort through the case law development and make connections between different concepts. It will also give you a more concise set of notes for the exam.

If you don't have time to make your own, or you just need some inspiration, **check out the Outline Bank located on the MLSA website.** Keep in mind that posted outlines aren't screened for accuracy, so use at your own risk! Though outlines are often encouraged, study in whatever way feels best to you.

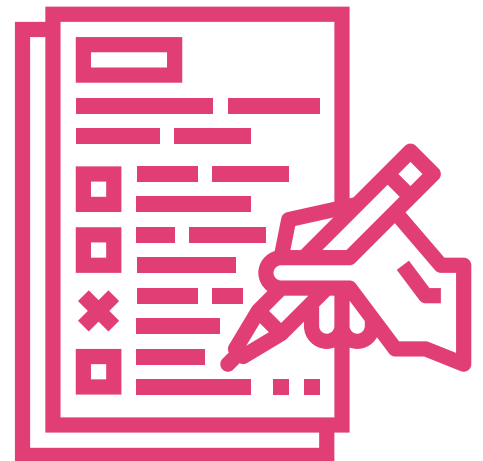


EXAMS

What does exam day look like?

For an in-person exam, make sure you arrive at the room 30 minutes beforehand, bring your student ID and have ExamSoft installed on your computer. **Plan the night before, so you're not stressed the day of.** For an online exam, ensure you are able to print off your exam questions for highlighting or notes, and keep track of your time with alarms. It goes faster than you think!

When it comes to exams, especially the day of, don't get caught up in what everyone says about how they studied or what they know. **Block out the noise** and focus on your own strategy; don't second guess yourself the day of an exam.



What if you get a low exam mark?

If you get a low mark on an exam (especially a midterm), **don't panic.** You're not the only one. Almost every law student has at least one bad exam mark on their transcript, especially in 1L. You will still find a job, trust us!

If you don't like an exam mark, **re-evaluate your approach to studying.** Should you have studied in more detail, or further in advance? Managed the exam time better? It can also be helpful to speak to your prof to get feedback, or find a student tutor.

TIME MANAGEMENT

Even more essential for law students than coffee.

Aside from adjusting to course work, one of the biggest challenges for new law students is how to manage your limited time. During Orientation Week, there is a major temptation to sign up for *everything*. While you should definitely join some new groups and volunteer, **be careful not to take on too much, too fast**. Allow yourself some time to get acclimatized to the course load and environment, and add more to your plate gradually. Doing a few things very well is better than doing a bunch halfway!

What are some time management strategies?

- **Keep track of your course deadlines.**
 - Whether this means inputting them into your phone calendar or diarizing them, monitor your due dates and set reminders for yourself. Also integrate any volunteer or work deadlines you may have.
- **Set reminders in advance.**
 - This can help you get over procrastinating on assignments or push you to start studying. Also, keep in mind that law school assignments will take more time than undergrad ones did.
- **Make daily to-do lists.**
 - This will help to break down larger tasks into smaller chunks that are less overwhelming.
- **Use whatever strategy works best for you, but remember to account for a higher workload** than what you've previously experienced.



MENTAL HEALTH

An often overlooked part of being a law student.

Making your mental health a priority is a struggle for the vast majority of law students. With a major adjustment to the new pressures and stresses placed on you in 1L, it can feel hard to justify taking a break from your work to focus on your wellbeing. Remember though, taking the time to value your mental health will pay dividends for you overall. **We've compiled a range of strategies to help you combat stress, feel healthier, and get through a challenging year.** But, remember to keep in mind that this guide is not a substitute for professional help.

- **Don't feel pressured to take on more than you can handle.**
 - While it's easy to get caught up in building your resume or trying match what other students are doing, don't be afraid to put a limit on your extracurricular activities. Be realistic about how much time you can actually give, and choose the opportunities that stand out to you the most.
- **Take a break.**
 - Sometimes you just need a break from your law courses and activities. Taking some time for yourself to do something you enjoy can help you stay grounded and focused. Don't feel guilty about taking a break, or the occasional day off.
- **Squeeze in some physical activity.**
 - Whether it's playing a sport, heading to the gym, or just going for a walk; some exercise can help you refresh and clear your thoughts.
- **Get and/or stay organized.**
 - We know it's easier said than done! However, keeping track of important dates, staying on top of readings, and making solid notes will help relieve some of your stress throughout the year.
- **Talk to people who are not in law.**
 - Your friends and family outside of law school can help give you some much needed perspective, and remind you that there is more to life than studying and work obligations.
- **Get some sleep.**
 - All-nighters are a common occurrence in law school. Make sure you get some sleep and stay in a routine (most of the time anyway). Trust us, things won't seem so bad after you've slept for a few hours.
- **Talk to a counsellor.**
 - If you're experiencing feelings of isolation, helplessness, or self-harm; it's time to seek the support of a professional. The Student Counselling Centre on campus can help put you into contact with a counsellor who can meet your needs as a law student. **However, if you feel at risk for harming yourself, call:**
 - Klinik Crisis Line: 204-786-8686 (can also call to be directed to different resources)
 - Mobile Crisis Service: 204-940-1781
 - Manitoba Suicide Prevention and Support Line: 1-877-435-7170

PROFESSIONAL KNOW-HOW

What you need to get hired.

One of the most important parts of law school is the development of your professional skills. In 1L, potential job opportunities appear almost immediately; meaning it's critical to have some knowledge of resumes, networking, and more. This section helps lay out some basic knowledge and terminology that you'll need to know. While this guide isn't meant to cover everything, **we've highlighted some of the most relevant points for getting started.**

- **Start working on your resume early.**
 - You'll be using your resume *a lot* during law school, so it's helpful to start working on it in 1L. This could mean building up legal experiences, adding volunteer opportunities, or simply updating its aesthetic.
- **Perfect the art of writing cover letters.**
 - Cover letters are a major part of all job and articling applications. The key to writing a good letter is to highlight how you and your experiences make sense for the specific job you are applying for. Explain to a potential employer why you are interested in that particular job, and why you are the best candidate for it.
- **Keep an eye out for job opportunities.**
 - Getting legal experience can be a big advantage when it's time to apply for articling positions. Monitor the Robson Hall Job Board and watch for emailed job postings. There's options through different law firms, STEP (government opportunities), Legal Aid, law journals, researching for profs, and more.

Professional Terminology

For many 1L students, law school is their first introduction to the professional world. We've gathered **a list of the most common terms you'll encounter while searching for a job or articling position.** If you know what all these terms mean, that's great! And if you didn't, we won't tell. Some basic terms are:

- **Resume:** Used to present your relevant background and experiences to an employer; including your education, previous employment, and volunteering projects. Max 2 pages.
- **Cover Letter:** Tailored to a specific job and employer. Outlines your interest and why you would be a good fit for that position. Max 1 page.
- **Curriculum Vitae (CV):** Sometimes asked for; focused on credentials and includes more details on research, academic background, and achievements. Usually around 2-3 pages.
- **Reference:** A person who provides a recommendation for you to a potential employer. They should be able to speak to your skills, character, and experience. Always check with potential references before listing them on an application.
- **Writing Sample:** A piece of your own writing that highlights your communication skills. Should be in a similar style to the writing that you would do in the position you're applying for. Typical max of 5 pages.
- **Transcript:** A listing of all your courses and grades. Make sure to send official copies, especially for articling positions. If an employer asks for 'transcripts', consider sending your undergrad one as well.
- **Interview:** Where an employer asks you questions to help get to know you, and determine if you're right for that job. Keep in mind that different places may have different styles - government interviews tend to be much more structured and formal than private firms.



Professional Dress Codes

A frequent source of confusion for new law students is what sort of standard different dress codes demand.

Here's a quick guide to what each term means.

Casual

Clothing that you would wear to go about your everyday life. Includes pieces like jeans, T-shirts, and sneakers. Fine to wear to school, but not for interviews, networking events, or to meet clients.

Business Casual

Worn in more informal offices. Clothing includes blouses, button-down shirts, khakis, polos, skirts, dresses, flats, loafers, heels, or boots. Jackets and ties are optional. Sometimes the dress code for networking events.

Business Professional

Commonly worn in most law offices. Includes button-down shirts, blazers, suits and ties, lower heels, and loafers. Dresses/skirts are usually expected to be no more than 2" above the knee. This is the expected dress code for appearing in court, job or articling interviews, and the majority of networking events.

Formal

Exclusively used for important evening events (galas, benefits, or award ceremonies). Includes pant suits, fancier dresses, suits and ties, heels, oxfords, or loafers.

Where to Work?

There are many different places to work at during and after law school. Though a lot of the conversation centres around big corporate firms, there's many other options as well! Some examples are:

- **A big firm**
 - 'The Big 5'
- **A mid-size firm**
 - Myers LLP
 - D'arcy & Deacon LLP
- **A small/boutique firm**
 - Marr Finlayson Pollock
 - Hill Sokalski Walsh
- **A rural firm**
 - Smith Neufeld Jodoin LLP
- **In-house counsel**
 - MB Hydro, MPI
- **A non-profit**
 - Legal Help Centre
- **A government agency/branch**
 - MB Prosecutions Service
 - Legal Aid MB
 - Public Interest Law Centre
 - Department of Justice/Public Prosecution Service of Canada
 - Legal Services Branch

CONNECTIONS & NETWORKING

Building social connections?

One of the best parts about 1L is meeting your new classmates and building long-term connections. Those relationships will help you get through law school, and prove valuable for your future legal career. During Orientation Week and afterwards, **push yourself to branch out and be open to meeting new people.**

Whether this means signing up to volunteer, trying a new student group, or going to the next social event; get to know the other students at Robson!

What is networking?

Another important part of building professional connections is networking.

Networking helps you understand what legal firms or agencies you're the most interested in, and what group of lawyers you'd prefer to work with. Networking events also provide you with **the opportunity to introduce yourself and make a good impression** on a potential employer.



NETWORKING

How much networking should you do?

In 1L, many students find it helpful to **try an assortment of networking events** while you're still figuring out what area of law you're passionate about, and where you want to work. Make sure you attend the events of employers you're definitely interested in, but try a couple different ones too. You might be surprised!

While networking definitely has its benefits, **don't feel pressured to attend every single event you hear about.** Balance out networking with your other obligations by attending the events most important to you. If your heart isn't in it, you won't make a good impression anyway.

What's your ultimate goal in networking?

There are 2 main goals that you should aim for while networking. **The first is to establish a connection with a lawyer** at the event; the more genuine, the better. Follow up the next day and keep cultivating that connection.

The second goal is to **determine if you enjoy hanging out with the lawyers from that firm/agency.** While you want to make a good impression, potential employers should also be trying to convince you to apply and work there. Use networking events to help give you a sense of what that workplace and your potential co-workers are like.

EVENTS

There are wide variety of networking events at Robson Hall that you can attend in your first year. **To stay on top of all the events, check out the MLSA Event Calendar, located on our website!** While we've highlighted some of the biggest events here, keep an eye out for networking opportunities at individual firms or agencies as well. **Some of the main events to consider attending are:**

- **Law Banquet**

- **Best for:** Those interested in working at one of the 'Big 5'. If you want to article at one of those firms, they will expect you to attend this event.

- **Crime & Cheese**

- **Best for:** Those who want to article within criminal law. This event provides access to prosecutors from both the provincial and federal Crown, Legal Aid defence lawyers, and the private defence bar.

- **Small Firm Wine & Cheese**

- **Best for:** Those who are interested in articling at a small or medium sized firm. Also provides the opportunity to network with rural firms and in-house counsel.

- **MBA Mentorship Events**

- **Best for:** 1L's! Fill out the questionnaire at the beginning of the school year, and you will be matched up with a lawyer who suits your interests. The Wine & Cheese portion allows you to meet your mentor lawyer, along with many others who attend. There is usually a closing event at the end of the year as well.

- **Carbolic Smoke Ball**

- **Best for:** Those who want an excuse to dress up. Carbolic is not a professional networking event, but it is a Robson Hall social staple. Students get the chance to enjoy a formal evening wining, dining and having fun together.

EVENT DO'S AND DON'TS

- **Do show off your personality.**

While making a good impression is important, you also want the lawyers to get to know *you*. Don't change your personality just because you're networking.

- **Do check the dress code beforehand.** You'll feel very awkward being the only person under- or over-dressed. If not specified, assume the dress code is business professional.

- **Do talk about topics that are non-law related.** Lawyers at events have probably heard the same questions about their practice or articling program 100 times. Talk about something that can spark a genuine interest and connection.

- **Don't drink too much.**

While an open bar is tempting (especially if you're nervous!), being drunk isn't a good look.

- **Don't hog the conversation.**

We're sure your next point was fascinating, but let other people have a chance to talk too!

- **Don't try out a new look the day of an event.** Wear something you trust and feel confident in. It's not the day to break in new shoes or try a different hairstyle.

- **Don't worry too much.**

Networking is stressful, but don't overthink it. It's just one part of finding a job!

