

2021-2022



# THE BASICS

MLSA COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE

ROBSON HALL, FACULTY OF LAW  
University of Manitoba

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**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 if in conflict with this document.

# A NOTE FROM THE TEAM

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*Going to law school is an experience that is unlike any other. The experience is fun, often confusing, and always stressful, no matter what year you are in.*

*Our goal in creating this handbook is to simplify the main areas that are unique to the law school experience, and provide all students with the information they need to be successful. Regardless of whether you stumbled into law school or you've been planning for it forever, this guide is meant to highlight five key areas and what you should know about them.*

*The basics covered in this handbook are academics, time management, networking, articling, and mental health. While this guide is not a comprehensive one, it provides some important tips and where to find more information.*

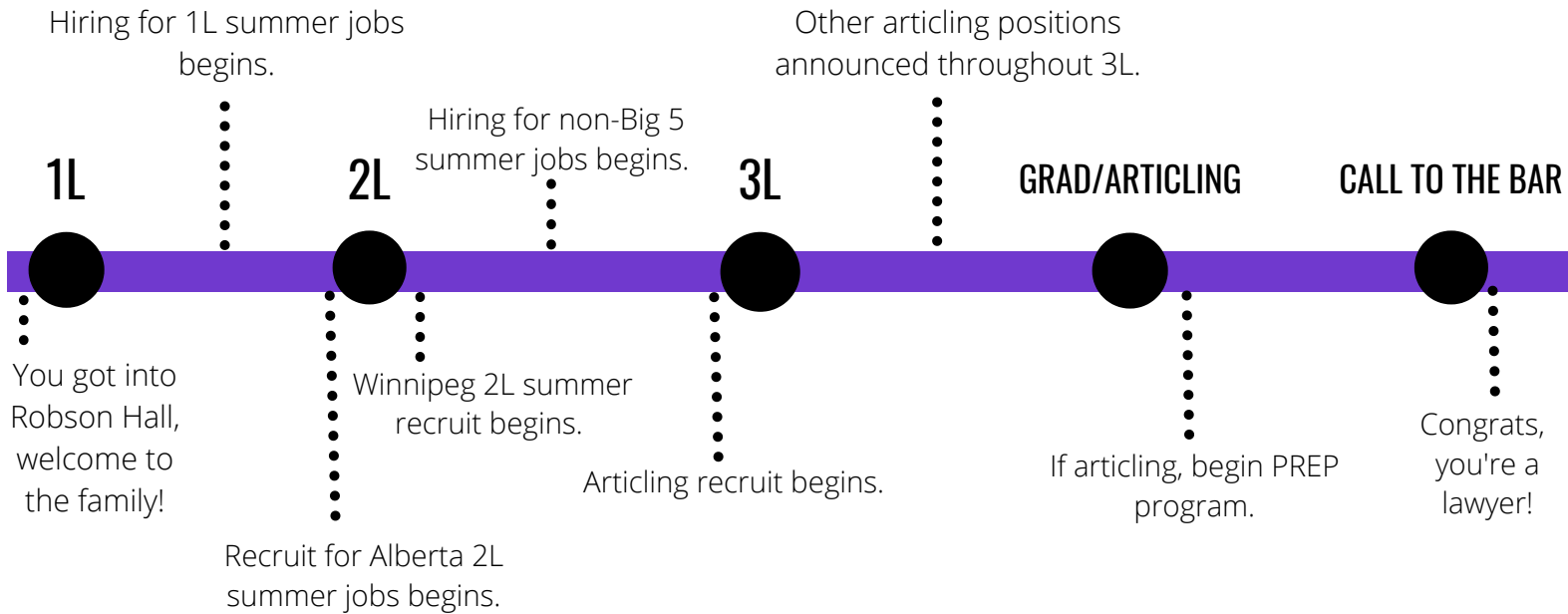
*We hope that this guide answers your questions and helps you feel more confident as you find your way at Robson Hall!*

*- MLSA 2021-2022*



# THE LAW SCHOOL TIMELINE

## How does this all work anyway?



- **1L** - Essentially your intro year to everything law related. This is the time to be open to your courses, try out different student groups, and make a bunch of new friends!
- **2L** - This is the year to focus on your interest areas and start building up your future articling applications. Stress will take its toll, so be sure to only take on what you can handle.
- **3L** - The final year! This is the time to gain clinical experience, finalize graduation, and secure an articling position if you're looking for one after the initial recruit.
- **Articling** - You officially have a J.D., but you still have to article to become a lawyer. This process begins after you graduate. The articling recruit starts in the summer following 2L, with other positions opening up throughout 3L.
- **Call to the Bar** - After completing your articles and the PREP program, you can submit your application to be called to the Bar. If successful, you're now a lawyer!

# ACADEMICS

**A quick guide on how to make it through your classes.**

## **How should I approach law school classes?**

**Law school courses and content are one of the biggest challenges for law students of all years.** It is common for a lot of students to get grades that are lower than what they are used to. The competitive nature of law school also means that many law students don't want to share when they get a low grade or are struggling with a class. **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.

## **What are some studying strategies?**

- **Read strategically.**
  - Sometimes the relevant part of a case is only a paragraph, or even a sentence. Check the class topic on the syllabus, and utilize the term search function on CanLii or Westlaw. You'll save yourself a ton of time!
- **Take good notes.**
  - This will help keep the course content organized in your mind, and easier to understand when you review. Colour coding your notes also helps break them up into more manageable chunks when you start studying.
- **Take your time going through lectures if they are recorded.**
  - If you don't understand a concept, rewind and listen until it *mostly* makes sense. Trust us, you'll be happy you took the time when exam season rolls around.

## **What are some exam prep strategies?**

- **Create your own class outlines.**
  - This helps you review, make connections between concepts, and have a concise set of notes for the exam.
- **Read the most important cases again (or for the 1st time!).**
  - The main cases in the course are usually great for summarizing the major legal concepts in a clear way, and can help you review quickly.
- **Give yourself enough time to study.**
  - Factor in the time it will take to study for multiple exams and write papers. Remember, both will take significantly longer to do than in undergrad.



# TIME MANAGEMENT

**More necessary for law students than coffee.**

**One of the biggest adjustments to law school is effectively managing your time.** You'll have to juggle school tasks, volunteering, professional work (like writing cover letters and applying for jobs), and trying to maintain a social life. It can be seriously stressful trying to manage all these different areas. Time management is one of the most critical skills you have to master in law school, and it will pay off in your legal career as well. **Here are a few tips to effectively manage your time, and avoid burnout:**

- **Be careful not to take on too much.**
  - While it may be tempting to build your resume with a large amount of volunteering projects, remember you still have to balance school, work, and some time for yourself throughout the year. It's better to do fewer things very well, rather than doing a lot of projects at a subpar level!
- **Prioritize your work and commitments.**
  - Work on projects in order of seriousness and due date. Make sure critical tasks like exams and job applications get the appropriate amount of time they need.
- **Use reminders.**
  - Pre-set reminders on your calendar to keep track of and remind yourself of class due dates, job application deadlines, or when to start studying. It can be very helpful to input all your dates at the start of the semester as well. Your future self will thank you!
- **Create daily to-do lists.**
  - Highlight your priorities for the day and what needs to get done. This can help break down large, overwhelming tasks into doable pieces. This can also push you get over procrastination.
- **Utilize Excel spreadsheets.**
  - These can be used for keeping track of the articling or summer job application deadlines, course work, and more. It helps to have all your dates and info laid out in one spot where you can access it quickly; rather than searching through handouts and emails.
- **Make time for yourself.**
  - Go for a walk, listen to music, do something that helps you relax. This is necessary to avoid serious burnout. Don't feel guilty about taking a much-deserved break!

# 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 the serious time constraints and expectations placed on you in law school, 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 this guide is not a substitute for professional help.

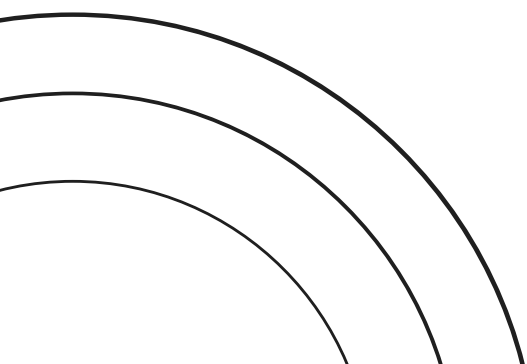
- **Don't feel pressured to take on more than you can handle.**
  - While it's easy to get caught up in building your resume or trying to match what other students are doing, don't be afraid to put a limit on your extracurricular activities. Be realistic about how much time you can actually give, and 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.** It's critical to have some knowledge of resumes, networking, and more in order to take advantage of the opportunities available at Robson. 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 sooner, rather than later. This could mean building up legal experiences, checking for errors, 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 law 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.



# NETWORKING

Get ready to go to a lot of wine & cheeses.

## 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.

## 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.



# Professional Dress Codes

A frequent source of confusion for law students is what 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.

# Networking: 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!



# THE ARTICLING RECRUIT

Otherwise known as law student free agency.

## What is the articling recruit?

**The articling recruit is where you apply, interview, and ultimately receive an offer to article at one of the available legal firms or agencies.** Manitoba's articling recruit fully begins in the summer after completing 2L. The recruit is structured by the Law Society and is made up of specific deadlines that employers and students have to follow. The firms or agencies that will be participating in the recruit will be announced in around March each year on the Robson Hall Job Board (ask another student or the Career Development Office for the password if you don't have it).

## What are the stages of the articling recruit?

As mentioned, the articling recruit is a highly structured process. **The Manitoba recruit takes place from mid-May to mid-June.**

Most articling applications will be due on the same day in May. 2 weeks later, **'interview call day'** will happen, where interested employers will call you to schedule interviews during **'interview week'**. After the interview week concludes, **'offer day'** happens; which is when employers can officially offer you an articling position for the following year. For more details about each stage and how the recruit works, head over to our 2L Survival Guide, or contact the MLSA Professional Development Committee!

