What Does a Court Clerk Do?

Written by Lauren Erdelyi

Also, Court clerks are indispensable members of the judicial system. Often considered the gatekeepers of justice, they handle an array of tasks—from scheduling trials to preparing legal documents and swearing in witnesses. While much of their work occurs behind the scenes, their impact is anything but insignificant.

So, what exactly does it mean to be a court clerk? What type of legal settings do they work in? And what sort of education is needed to step into this role? These are just a few of the questions we'll explore in this blog. Whether you're a prospective student considering this career path or weather you're in search of a clerk for your team, this piece offers a detailed look at this sought-after profession.

Court clerk duties and responsibilities

First off, what does a courtroom clerk do on a daily basis? Their specific responsibilities ultimately vary depending on their workplace. Generally speaking, though, court clerks perform a myriad of tasks to ensure the smooth functioning of the courtroom. These can include:

- **Managing and organizing documents and records**. Clerks meticulously organize and manage documents and records for a case, ensuring they are properly filed, stored, and readily accessible when needed.
- **Scheduling legal proceedings.** It falls upon court clerks to handle the timing and logistics of hearings, trials, and other legal proceedings, ensuring that all court deadlinesare adhered to.
- **Assisting judges and attorneys.** From announcing the opening of court sessions to swearing in witnesses and maintaining exhibits, court clerks provide crucial support to judges and attorneys throughout court proceedings.
- **Researching complex legal issues.** Clerks support judges and attorneys by conducting comprehensive legal research. They analyze legal precedents, statutes, and case law to provide valuable insights that help inform legal decisions.
- **Facilitating communication:** Clerks serve as intermediaries in legal proceedings, communicating important information between judges, attorneys, witnesses, and other key figures in the courtroom.

What role does the clerk play in a courtroom?

Court clerks play a pivotal role in ensuring the courtroom's smooth operation, assuming responsibilities that range from managing documents to scheduling hearings and assisting judges and attorneys with tasks like swearing in witnesses and maintaining exhibits.

Where do court clerks work?

One of the benefits of becoming a court clerk is that there are a multitude of career paths to explore. Court clerks can be found in various types of courthouses. These include:

- **District courts**: These courts handle a wide range of cases, including civil, family, and juvenile matters.
- **Bankruptcy courts:** Specializing in insolvency and debt restructuring cases.
- **Tax courts**: Dealing specifically with disputes related to taxation.
- **Courts of appeal**: Reviewing decisions made by lower courts.
- **Supreme Court**: Presiding over cases of national importance and constitutional significance.

Beyond the courthouse setting, court clerks may also find employment opportunities within governmental agencies, such as the Department of Justice or state attorney general offices. Similarly, law firms may also hire law clerks to assist with case preparation, legal research, and administrative tasks related to litigation.

The educational path to becoming a court clerk

There aren’t many formal educational requirements to become a court clerk. However, you’ll want to consider several key steps to set yourself apart as a standout clerk, which we’ve outlined below.

1. Complete your high school education

The very first step in becoming a court clerk is obtaining a high school diploma or its equivalent. For example, this could be a General Education Development (GED) certificate. This serves as the baseline educational requirement for most clerk positions.

2. Pursue postsecondary education

Aspiring court clerks may choose to pursue an associate's or bachelor's degree in criminal justice, paralegal studies, or a related discipline. While not mandatory, postsecondary education can strengthen one's candidacy for job opportunities. Additionally, some federal court clerks may opt to pursue advanced degrees like a master's or law degree—which is required by some employers.

3. Explore certification options

Along with formal education, aspiring court clerks can also benefit from certifications, such as the Certified Municipal Clerk offered through the International Institute of Municipal Clerks. It covers areas that span from e-filing court records to clerk ethics and municipal law. This also isn't an essential step. But, a certification can bolster employer prospects as it indicates that a candidate has the knowledge to hit the ground running.

4. Gain relevant experience

Internships or entry-level positions are crucial for aspiring court clerks, as they provide hands-on experience and valuable mentoring opportunities. As you prepare for this step, be sure to devote the time to crafting a strong cover letter, developing a compelling resume, and practicing your interview skills.

5. Pursue professional development opportunities

Court clerks are often required to stay updated on changes in court procedures and legal regulations through continuing education and professional development activities. Workshops, seminars, or conferences offered by professional associations like the National Association for Court Management are powerful ways to stay abreast of the latest developments in the legal industry.

6. Develop specialized skills

Along this journey, court clerks will need to develop a range of skills, including:

- **Administrative skills.** Attention to detail and organization are crucial for managing documents efficiently. Court clerks must ensure all paperwork is error-free, and they should be proficient in organizing information for quick retrieval.
- **Communication skills.** Court clerks draft a variety of court documents and serve as intermediaries between clients and legal professionals. This underscores the importance of clear and effective written and verbal communication.

- **Technological proficiency.** Proficiency in using technology for document management, legal research, and operating recording devices is crucial for court clerks to effectively carry out their duties in a world that's becoming ever more digital.

Court clerk job outlook

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, there are an estimated 159,760 court, municipal, and license clerks in the US, earning a mean hourly wage of $22.25 and a mean annual wage of $46,280. Currently, the demand for court clerks remains steady, indicating a consistent need for their specialized skills within the legal system.

Various factors influence job prospects for aspiring clerks. Education and training are major ones, with candidates who possess relevant qualifications and certifications often gaining an edge in the job market. Those with strong organizational skills, attention to detail, and the ability to harness innovative technology in the courtroom are highly valued in this profession.

Geographic location can also impact job prospects, as demand for court clerks varies across different regions. Also, urban areas typically offer more job opportunities compared to rural areas. The states with the highest employment level for court, municipal, and license clerks include Texas, California, and Florida, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The top-paying states are New York (annual mean wage of $60,080), Washington ($57,960), California ($56,670), and Massachusetts ($56,670).

The final word on the role of court clerks

While court clerks may not always be in the spotlight, their role in the legal system is profound. Working closely with judges, lawyers, and other members of the court system, they ensure the seamless operation of the courtroom. By pursuing relevant education, gaining practical experience, and staying abreast of the latest technological developments, aspiring legal professionals can position themselves for a rewarding career in this highly dynamic area of law.

In today's digital age, tools like Clio can support aspiring legal professionals. Clio's Academic Access Program provides free access to instructors, administrators, and students, offering cloud-based practice management software that prepares students for successful legal careers.

About Clio

Clio is the global leader in legal AI, powering legal work across the profession, from law firms of every size to corporate legal teams, government agencies, and courts. Its Intelligent Legal Work Platform unites the business and practice of law, connecting the people, information, and processes behind legal work. Clio's AI brings the context together with legal sources drawn from Clio Library, a growing collection of more than one billion legal documents. Over 400,000 legal professionals in more than 130 countries rely on Clio to run their legal world. Learn more at www.clio.com.