What Education is Required to Become a Lawyer?

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If you're thinking about becoming a lawyer in Canada, you might picture yourself passionately arguing before the Supreme Court. Or maybe sitting across from a client in a plush corner office, donning a sharp suit. But more practically, what kind of education do you need to get there?

When it comes to the education required to become a lawyer in Canada, the answer isn't so straightforward. Requirements vary across the country—especially in Quebec, which follows civil law rather than common law. To make sure you meet your province's requirements, always check with your local bar association.

With that in mind, this article outlines the key steps on your path to becoming a lawyer.

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Education required to become a lawyer: Step-by-step

Here are the main steps you'll need to follow to become a lawyer in Canada.

1. Get your undergraduate degree

Most law schools in Canada require you to complete an undergraduate degree before admission. At a minimum, you will usually need at least three years of undergraduate study, though many law schools prefer students with a four-year bachelor's degree.

In Quebec, there's a different path: you can enter law school directly after completing a CEGEP diploma—a two-year pre-university program after high school.

Because admission policies vary, it's always best to review the specific requirements of the law school you're interested in attending.

What undergraduate degree do you need to become a lawyer?

While there's no specific "pre-law" major in Canada, many aspiring lawyers choose programs that build strong research, writing, and critical thinking skills—such as political science, philosophy, history, or economics.

What undergraduate degree do you need to become a lawyer?

In Canada, there are no specific undergraduate degree requirements for law school. Candidates come from a wide range of educational backgrounds, from business to psychology to engineering. However, admissions committees tend to look for a strong academic record and skills that will help you succeed, such as research, analysis, and communication.

Majors that can help develop these skills include:

- Political Science
- History
- Philosophy
- Economics

These fields can provide a solid foundation for law school. But regardless of the program you choose, the real keys to success are:

- Maintaining a high GPA
- Building relevant skills
- Gaining experience through extracurriculars, work, or volunteering

Doing so will not only strengthen your law school application but will also prepare you for the demands of a legal career.

2. Take the LSAT

The second step in the education required to become a lawyer is writing the Law School Admission Test (LSAT). The LSAT is designed to measure skills essential for success in law school, including reading comprehension, logical reasoning, and written communication.

The LSAT has two main components:

- **Multiple-choice sections:** Four sections of multiple-choice questions intended to assess reading comprehension, logical reasoning, and analytical reasoning. Each section takes about 35 minutes, with the full multiple-choice portion lasting roughly three hours.
- **LSAT Writing:** This is an essay to be drafted and submitted online. LSAT Writing can be completed up to eight days before the multiple-choice sections. While it's not scored, it demonstrates your ability to construct a clear and persuasive argument.

Most Canadian law schools require you to take the LSAT and submit your score, which will play an important role in the admissions process. You're allowed to take the LSAT multiple times if you want to improve your score.

A score of 160 or higher will significantly improve your chances of acceptance, especially when it comes to more competitive programs. At Queen's Law, for example, the average LSAT score of accepted applicants is 162.

Once again, law schools in Quebec are exceptions, as they do not require the LSAT. Admission decisions are based primarily on your academic record rather than standardized test scores. That said, if you do take the LSAT, Quebec law schools will still consider your results.

If you're planning to take the LSAT, pay close attention to application deadlines. Each law school sets its own rules for when the test must be written.

What is the LSAT?

The Law School Admission Test (LSAT) is a standardized exam required for admission to most law schools in Canada (and the United States). It's designed to measure skills that are essential for law school success, including reading comprehension, logical reasoning, and analytical thinking.

Do you need to take the LSAT to attend law school?

For most Canadian law schools outside Quebec, the LSAT is required. Your LSAT score, along with your undergraduate grades, is a key factor in the admissions process.

3. Go to law school

With a strong undergraduate GPA and LSAT score, you'll be well-positioned for admission to law school. In Canadian schools outside Quebec, law school typically takes three years to complete, leading to a JD (Juris Doctor) degree.

During your first year, you'll take foundational courses in key areas such as constitutional law, criminal law, civil procedure, property law, and tort law. You'll also learn the fundamentals of legal research and writing.

Starting in the second year, students can select from a range of specialized courses tailored to their specific interests and career goals, including corporate law, tax law, real estate law, and family law.

If you're still exploring your options, take our "What Type of Lawyer Should I Be?" quiz to see which path might be right for you.

Many students seek out positions on their school's law review or other legal journals, which helps develop research and writing skills while enhancing their resumes. They can also pursue externships, co-op programs, and legal clinics to gain practical, hands-on experience in real-world legal settings.

A well-rounded legal education reflects the realities of practising law in Canada. The day-to-day work at law firms, government departments, or legal aid clinics can be very different from what you see in the classroom. By participating in experiential learning opportunities during law school, you'll not only prepare yourself for professional practice but also gain insight into the kind of law you'd like to practise.

Can you be a lawyer without law school?

To become a lawyer, you must complete a law degree (JD) from an accredited Canadian law school. If you have a foreign law degree, you may be able to have it assessed and accredited before starting the bar admissions process.

What education do most lawyers have?

Most lawyers in Canada first complete a bachelor's degree before attending law school to earn a Juris Doctor (JD). After that, they must complete their province's bar admission process, which involves a combination of licensing exams and a period of articling, before becoming fully licensed to practise law.

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4. Complete your articles

After graduating from law school, you'll be required to complete a period of articling with a law firm or legal organization. During this time, you'll gain practical experience under the supervision of a licensed lawyer, developing the skills needed to practise law independently. Articling typically involves performing legal research, drafting documents, attending client meetings, and observing court proceedings.

In Canada, articling is typically about 10 to 12 months of full-time work, though the exact length can vary by province. Some provinces also allow part-time articling, which may extend the duration.

The Law Practice Program (LPP) in Ontario is a notable exception to traditional articling. It's a relatively new alternative for law graduates that combines a four-month skills training course with a four-month work placement at a law firm or legal organization.

This hands-on training, along with any necessary licensing exams or bar admission courses, is essential before you can be called to the bar and begin practising law in your province.

How long does it take to become a lawyer?

It usually takes around eight years (after high school) to become a lawyer in Canada. This typically includes a four-year undergraduate degree, three years of law school, passing your province's licensing exams, and completing a period of articling that takes about one year.

5. Pass the bar exam

In Canada, you must complete your province's bar admission process to be licensed to practise law. This involves passing a bar exam (sometimes called the licensing exam).

The bar exam is comprehensive and tests your knowledge of both substantive and procedural law. Requirements and exam formats vary by province, so it's important to review the rules for the jurisdiction where you plan to practise.

In addition to passing the bar exam, most provinces have other licensing requirements, such as completing a professional responsibility course and meeting character and fitness standards. These standards may include background checks and disclosure of any past criminal or professional issues.

In Quebec, the process is slightly different. After law school, candidates complete the École du Barreau program, which combines professional training with a supervised internship. Students are assessed on a series of evaluations and exams throughout the process. Upon successful completion, they're admitted to the Barreau du Québec and are licensed to practise law in the province.

A final word on the education required to become a lawyer

The education required to become a lawyer in Canada might seem daunting, but it can lead to a deeply rewarding career. Planning and preparing carefully for each step of the journey is essential, as is having contingencies in place for unexpected delays, such as not passing the bar exam on your first attempt.

The process can feel discouraging at times—whether it's a low LSAT score, a tough semester in law school, or late nights during articling—but rest assured that these setbacks are temporary. The key is to stay focused, keep moving forward, and approach obstacles with resilience. Developing a positive mindset and effective strategies for managing stress during your legal education will pay dividends throughout your career.

So, in addition to picking out your power suit and future office decor, you can now go ahead and start planning your education today.

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Frequently asked questions

How do you start being a lawyer in Canada?

First, complete a bachelor's degree in any discipline. Next, take the LSAT (required by most law schools outside Quebec) and apply to law school. After earning your Juris Doctor (JD), complete your province's licensing process. Once all requirements are met, you can be called to the bar and start practising law.

What are the requirements for a career in law in Canada?

A career in law requires a Juris Doctor (JD) degree and completion of your province's licensing process.

What degree do you need to be a lawyer?

To become a lawyer in Canada, you need a Juris Doctor (JD) degree from a recognized law school. Before law school, most students will also have completed a bachelor's degree in any field.

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