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Careers in law beyond the courtroom

A law degree in India leads to far more than litigation. A guide to careers in law firms, companies, the judiciary, policy, mediation and legal technology.

For most people a lawyer is someone who argues in court. Litigation remains the heart of the profession, but it is one of many paths. Students should know the full range before they choose.

Litigation

Practice before courts and tribunals, alone, in a chamber or in a firm's disputes team. It offers independence and public standing, and it demands patience in the early years.

Transactional practice in law firms

Advising on mergers, financing, real estate, projects, funds and regulation. The work is drafting, negotiation and due diligence, usually in teams, with structured training and pay.

In-house counsel

Working within a company's legal department on contracts, compliance, disputes and governance. In-house lawyers see how business decisions are made.

The judiciary

Judicial service examinations conducted in the States lead to appointment as a civil judge. Experienced advocates may be appointed as district judges and elevated to the High Courts.

Government and public service

Law officers, prosecutors, legislative drafting, regulatory bodies, public sector undertakings and the civil services, where law is a popular optional subject.

Arbitration and mediation

Counsel, tribunal secretaries, case managers at arbitral institutions, and, with experience, arbitrators and mediators. This field is growing with India's emphasis on resolving disputes outside court.

Policy and research

Think tanks, legislative research, and advisory work for ministries and regulators.

Academia

Teaching and research, usually after a master's degree and the eligibility requirements for university teachers.

Legal technology and operations

Building and running tools for research, contracts and case management. Firms and companies now employ lawyers who understand both law and technology.

Compliance and risk

Banks, insurers, technology and pharmaceutical companies need lawyers to manage regulatory obligations.

Intellectual property

Patents, trade marks, copyright and technology licensing. A science or engineering background is valuable for patent work.

Legal journalism and publishing

Reporting on courts, editing law reports and writing for the profession.

Social sector

Legal aid, rights organisations and community lawyering.

How to choose

- Intern in at least three different settings.
- Ask what the daily work is really like.
- Consider temperament: do you enjoy contest, detail, people or ideas?
- Be honest about financial needs in the first five years.
- Remember that paths cross. Many lawyers move between litigation, firms, companies and public service.

One foundation

Every one of these careers rests on the same base: knowledge of law, careful writing and integrity. Build that, and many doors stay open.

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