

# Lessons I learned while articling



In past issues of the student edition of *LAWPRO Magazine*, we've asked our articling students to reflect on what they wished they'd learned in law school. This time around, students Margaux Malkina and Noam Uri offered a slightly different perspective: they talked about some of the new insights that articling has brought them.

## Sometimes, there is no answer

When completing a legal research assignment in law school, it's safe to assume that the questions have answers that the professor is hoping you'll find. Noam discovered that the same can't necessarily be said about work assigned to articling students. When completing a research assignment for a *LAWPRO* lawyer, she found herself in the position of having to report that the research query simply hadn't yet been conclusively addressed by the courts.

Learning to know where to end one's research is an important articling lesson, agrees Margaux. She recommends checking in with your articling principal when you feel you've reached a dead end. Knowing when "no answer" is the answer is the kind of skill that comes with experience.

## Be open-minded about what interests you

Because getting an articling job or LPP position that matches precisely with your practice area aspirations is nearly impossible, "you need to stay open to discovering new interests, and new areas of law that may appeal to you," says Noam. Articling provides opportunities for exposure to areas of practice that you might not have considered, and to discover new interests and skills that you never knew you had.

## Time management is critical

The workload in law school may be heavy, but how you prioritize assignments, for better or for worse, is up to you. "During articling"

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says Margaux, “time management gets more complicated. You may be assigned work by several different lawyers, none of whom are aware of the other demands on your time.” Having the support of an articling principal who sees the whole picture can help, but you will still be expected to work on different projects with different levels of priority at the same time. “It can be tempting,” adds Noam, “to try to work with as many people as possible, but you need to be sure that you don’t go overboard. Reserve enough time to complete all the work you are assigned.”

Another challenge that is different about articling is that the time you spend on tasks is not just your own time – it’s also the clients’, and it may be billed to them. While in law school you might be motivated to invest as much time as you have available to get the best mark you can, articling requires you to begin to think about how to produce high-quality work while keeping value for money in mind.

## There’s a first time for everything

“If I could go back and do law school again,” says Margaux, “I’d look for more opportunities to learn practical skills.” Noam agrees. “Your first attempt at tasks – for example, drafting a contract – is bound to

take significant time. Getting that experience in law school instead of during articling can offer an advantage.” That said, there are some skills, like dealing with real clients, which can only be learned in a work environment. Articling involves a wide range of “firsts” when it comes to skill development. Seeking out law school courses that emphasize practical skills can help minimize articling stress.

## Learning doesn’t end when school does

Above all, both students agree that articling really drives home the realization that many of the skills a lawyer needs will be learned on the job. “You realize, when you article, that the law changes really fast, and that you can’t always expect to know everything.” There is a reason for the cliché that the most important skill that law school teaches is how to think like a lawyer. Both the substantive law itself and the way the law is practised are in constant evolution. *All* lawyers, not just articling students, should learn to be comfortable with lifelong learning. The prospect of more learning might seem discouraging if you’ve just finished law school, but it’s also reassuring to realize that no matter how confident and competent they might seem, the lawyers you’ll be working with in articling and beyond are learning right along with you. ■



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