



Navigating: Clerkships

What is a clerkship?

A clerkship offers the opportunity to experience life as a lawyer within a particular firm.

Many large to mid-sized law firms run structured clerkship programs designed for law students to experience the day-to-day activities of lawyers across a range of practice areas. You may also have the chance to develop professional skills through formal training sessions as well as 'on-the-job' learning and networking opportunities.

A clerkship also provides you with valuable insights into the firm's work culture.

Most clerkship programs run for four weeks and are offered during the summer break, although some firms offer winter placements during semester breaks.

When should I apply for a clerkship?

To be eligible for a clerkship you must be in your penultimate or final year of study.

Some exceptions may apply, so it is always best to contact the firm if you are considering applying outside of your penultimate year.

When do applications for clerkships open?

Check the [LIV Clerkship and Graduate Program Guidelines](#) or [firm webpage](#).

Firms that are signatories to the *LIV Clerkship and Graduate Program Guidelines* adhere to the dates set out in the Guidelines. These Guidelines (including the list of signatory firms) are available on the LIV Young Lawyers webpage www.liv.asn.au/ClerkshipGradGuidelines.

If a firm or organisation is not a signatory to the Guidelines, contact them to find out about the relevant dates.

What is the process for applying for a clerkship?

Each firm sets its own application and recruitment processes.

The application and recruitment process for a clerkship position differs between firms. You are strongly advised to check each firm's webpage for their requirements.

There are many articles, including LSS clerkship guides, offering tips on applying and interviewing for clerkships. Attending 'meet the firm' events will also help you navigate the clerkship process.

Does a clerkship lead to a graduate role?

Sometimes, but it's not guaranteed.

Undertaking a clerkship at a firm does not guarantee a graduate position, nor is it mandatory for employment at the firm.

However, many firms make 'priority offers' to candidates from their clerkship pool prior to making offers outside that pool.

Do I have to complete a clerkship?

Clerkships are not compulsory and may not suit your career goals.

There can be considerable pressure to apply for a clerkship position. But this pathway does not suit everyone. Carefully assessing the following factors may help you to make an informed decision about applying for clerkships:

- **Career Goals:** Assess how a clerkship fits into your long-term career objectives, including the type of law you want to practise and the workplace culture you want to work in.
- **Alternative Experiences:** Evaluate alternative opportunities for gaining legal experience, including internships, part-time legal jobs, volunteering, or research projects.
- **Readiness and Qualifications:** Do you meet the academic and extracurricular prerequisites for the clerkship positions you're interested in? Ask whether it's the right time for you.
- **Work-Life Balance:** Reflect on your ability to manage the clerkship recruitment process alongside your studies, personal commitments, and well-being.

I didn't get a clerkship position. Now what?

Missing out on a clerkship may seem like a major setback but it is not the end of your legal career.

Missing out on a clerkship can be disappointing but it's important to remember it's only one of many pathways to a rewarding legal career.

Read our reflections from the LIV Young Lawyers community in *Navigating: Rejection and other setbacks* to guide you during this period.

If you need additional support, LIV members have free access to 24/7 private and confidential advice through the LIV Member Counselling Service. Visit www.liv.asn.au/OurEAP to find out more.

Beyond Clerkships

There are many other opportunities to acquire legal experience beyond clerkships.

Internships: NGOs, corporations and government organisations offer internships that provide similar opportunities to a clerkship role.

Virtual Internships: Virtual internships offer a work experience placement that you can undertake entirely online.

Volunteering: Pro bono work can offer hands-on legal experience and community engagement.

Networking: Getting involved and attending LIV Young Lawyer events are a great way to develop a network that can be valuable in building potential job connections and opportunities.

Paralegal Positions: Many firms offer paralegal or legal support roles which can be a pathway to graduate roles.

Barrister's Chambers: Shadowing programs and legal research roles also offer great legal work experience.