

Legal Research and Writing Careers

Lisa Solomon has always enjoyed research and writing—throughout law school, even college, and while starting her legal career as a litigation association at a small, boutique Manhattan firm. So when signs indicated that the firm was preparing to close down, Solomon decided to use her best talents to her advantage: she went to work for Lexis-Nexis as a product trainer at area law schools. Solomon was later approached by the law firm where she worked as a paralegal during college—with which she had kept in touch—to handle some of the firm’s writing remotely. While doing work for the firm, Solomon also founded and grew her legal research and writing business, providing services to small firms and solo practitioners.

For some attorneys, contract work—whether research and writing, document review, or other projects—can be a great way to supplement a solo practitioner’s income. Solomon, however, has relied exclusively on her research and writing firm since 1996, positioning herself as a research and writing attorney, working on a contract basis, and never signing on as counsel of record. “I prefer it that way,” she says. “I get to do what I want, and frankly, what I am good at.”

Solomon handles a wide variety of writing projects, from appellate briefs to trial motions. She also performs legal and factual research for clients; sometimes, she is hired to edit other attorneys’ writing. Because she handles cases in all civil areas, Solomon says she is always learning something new, which makes the work exciting. “It is intellectually stimulating,” she says. “I help strategize with the lawyers that I’m working with.” And because her clients are attorneys, Solomon says she feels her work is respected and appreciated. “It’s rewarding to have clients who really understand what you do and respect what you do,” she explains.

Solomon says much of the business’s growth can be attributed to technological advances. “When I first started, I had clients who didn’t even have email,” she says. “These days, people are getting used to the technology that enables a practice like this to grow.” Much of the work can be done remotely, through email or fax—in fact, Solomon says she has clients from all over the nation, even the Virgin Islands, and has not met the majority of them! The ability to do the work pretty much anytime and anyplace also makes for a much more flexible environment, Solomon says, which can provide better work-life balance and alternative schedule arrangements. Plus, because much of the work can be done from a small office, or even a home office, overhead tends to be pretty low.

**LEGAL RESEARCH AND WRITING CAREERS:
BREAK-IN TIP**

As with any other business, getting started can be the toughest part in legal research and writing. One great thing with this particular service? The “tools of the trade” are simple, and most JDs probably have them, Solomon points out in a recent article she wrote for *GP/Solo Magazine*, a publication of the ABA’s Section of General and Solo Practice. Generally, a computer, phone, high-speed internet access, and subscription to a comprehensive legal research database service are all that’s needed to get started, Solomon says. And because legal researchers and writers serve attorneys, getting clients often starts with networking at professional and trade association events. Research and writing attorneys—like any self-employed people—have to worry about business issues and concerns, including marketing and planning. “You have to be self-motivated; you have to have a degree of self-confidence,” says Solomon. “You have to feel comfortable with not having a paycheck every two weeks.”

Solomon says there is a huge unmet demand when it comes to legal research and writing services, particularly at small firms and sole practitioners. “Solos get overwhelmed, too, and they don’t have the employees to pass work down to,” she says. In addition, Solomon says some lawyers simply don’t like research and writing, or are not very good at them. Outsourcing research and writing tasks can prove profitable, as in most states, the hiring attorney can not only recover from the client for the writing attorney’s time, but also make a profit on it. “It’s all the benefits of having an associate without all of the ‘negatives,’” says Solomon, such as overhead costs, taxes, and long-term commitments. “Not everybody who has a temporary crunch wants to hire someone full-time.”

Plus, Solomon says opportunities for expansion aren’t just in the legal field. “Being a good writer and a persuasive writer is transferable,” she believes. “You can expand your horizons.” For example, Solomon also handles some public relations and even writes and designs greeting cards and other humorous gifts for attorneys.