


# Teaching 101 for Lawyers: Basic Preparation for Attorneys-Turned-Teachers

**Career Development**





As current and former in-house attorneys, we are used to wearing many hats. In a single day, an in-house counsel may have to be a fierce advocate, practical business advisor, gentle psychologist, patient mediator, while operating with a relentless focus on business execution — sometimes all

before lunch!

However, most of us haven't considered adding one very different hat to the list: educator. Although teaching may be different from the typical set of in-house counsel duties, it has the potential to transform and enhance an attorney's in-house practice.

But where to begin? Olga Mack and Troy Foster, a partner in the emerging growth practice group at Perkins Coie, recently taught Financial Statement Analysis for Lawyers at the University of Berkeley School of Law. Their teaching experience was tremendously rewarding and a source of both personal and professional growth. They share several factors that practicing attorneys should consider before embarking on this journey.

## Where to teach

Teaching options are endless and are often flexible enough for attorneys to balance with legal practice. Many practicing in-house, law firm, and government attorneys teach semester-long classes, brief courses, and seminars. These opportunities are available at law schools, business schools, colleges, and other institutions, both on- and offline. Usually, one's alma mater provides an excellent starting point for the educational inquiry.

## Joining the academic community

For most attorneys, seeking employment in a non-legal position may be unfamiliar — and uncomfortable — territory, particularly for practitioners who are far removed from their own law school experience.

Try starting small: Lunchtime talks or panels are an excellent opportunity to join the academic community. Many student groups are eager to have an industry speaker share their experiences and interact with students. After proving yourself as a speaker and educator within the community, you may be invited to teach.

Another great strategy is to show your potential value as a member of the university community. For example, you can demonstrate that you are willing to become part of the school's overall job-placement efforts, and offer to work with high-performing students to help them find a position either at your company, one within your network, or provide mentorship and networking opportunities for law students.

## Choosing a topic

Consider teaching a topic you are passionate about and know well. Teaching is a time-consuming pursuit that includes class preparation, lesson planning, and grading, in addition to actual classroom teaching time. Eager students will often seek you out for follow-up outside your normal classroom and office hours. The classroom commitment tends to be only a fraction of the time committed to the pedagogic pursuit.

Building on a topic you already know and love will ultimately make the time you spend preparing and teaching more enjoyable. And of course, your passion for the subject matter will shine through, giving your students a more satisfying and engaging learning experience.

## How to teach

Your teaching method will be at least partially dictated by what you teach. There are many ways to enhance the typical classroom experience for your students. Going beyond lectures will engage your students and allow them to apply your lessons. However, it's important to factor in how well any add-ons will mesh with your subject matter.

In determining whether your class should include guest speakers, books, articles, videos, mock negotiations, mock arguments, field trips, or any other add-ons, consider the subject matter you want to teach and the objective for your class. For other ideas on how great teachers communicate difficult concepts to students, check out the free online educational resources at the Khan Academy.

## Online or offline

Teaching online is another great opportunity for attorneys who are interested in teaching. When deciding between online and offline options, consider what you are teaching and what you are trying to accomplish with your class.

Both online and offline teaching have their strengths and weaknesses. Online teaching is more accessible and has a higher likelihood of reaching the hearts and minds of a wider audience. Offline teaching usually leads to more personal connections and hands-on experience.

Online teaching also has unique issues to consider. If you do choose to teach online, watch other online lecturers and practice your lessons ahead of time to make sure you develop an interactive and interesting style.

## Know your audience

When developing your class, it is important to consider who you are teaching. If you teach at a law school, consider whether your class is appropriate for LLM students. These students are often not as familiar with the US legal system or as fluent in English as traditional JD students. If your class will be open to LLM students, consider working with the school to provide resources to make the class enjoyable for them. If you are teaching a first year class, by contrast, your students may be less familiar with many basic concepts that practitioners take for granted.

If you teach outside of law school, it may be a good idea to include an overview of basic legal principles and the legal system. For many people, the practice of law and its systems are mysterious. It's important to view the topic from the perspective of someone without your legal training and experience.

## Don't do it for the money

Many teachers decide to teach because they enjoy it. If you are compensated at all, it will normally be relatively nominal remuneration and certainly less than what you would typically make practicing law. Most adjunct professors make their own copies and provide their own gifts to guest speakers.

For our recent class, which commenced at 8:30 a.m., we went the extra mile of providing donuts to help "energize" the class. Many adjuncts joke that they "lose money" in the process. If you choose to embark on a teaching journey, know that you should definitely not be in it for the money.

## Emulate great teaching

One of the best ways to become an amazing teacher is to observe professors and adjunct professors who have excellent teaching reputations. Also seek out professors who have been teaching for a while and truly care about teaching.

Don’t be afraid to reach out and ask them for strategies — if they are truly passionate for teaching, they will share their craft. Visiting their classrooms to see them in action is also a useful way to explore potential teaching strategies for your own class.

## Read up a little — or a lot

Numerous books are available about teaching benefits and methods. Teaching Law for Adjuncts is a book that many adjunct professors recommend. A few other books are recommended as well: What the Best Law Teachers Do, Student Learning Outcomes and Law School Assessment: A Practical Guide to Measuring Institutional Effectiveness, and Strategies and Techniques of Law School Teaching: A Primer for New (And Not So New) Professors.

After years of working as an attorney, choosing to wear the teaching hat is a huge step. These nine factors may seem overwhelming at first, but if you are truly passionate about teaching, it will be well worth it. Ultimately, teaching is a labor of love, but ideally, your teaching gig will benefit you and your students equally. Be guided by your goals for the class and for your future students, and you will all reap the benefits.

Olga V. Mack



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Olga V. Mack is a fellow at CodeX, The Stanford Center for Legal Informatics, and a Generative AI Editor at law.MIT. Mack shares her views in her columns on ACC Docket, Newsweek, Bloomberg, VentureBeat, Above the Law, and many other publications.

Mack is also an award-winning (such as the prestigious ACC 2018 Top 10 30-Somethings and ABA 2022 Women of Legal Tech) general counsel, operations professional, startup advisor, public speaker, adjunct professor, and entrepreneur. She co-founded SunLaw, an organization dedicated to preparing women in-house attorneys to become general counsels and legal leaders, and WISE to help female law firm partners become rainmakers.

She has authored numerous books, including Get on Board: Earning Your Ticket to a Corporate Board Seat,  Fundamentals of Smart Contract Security and Blockchain Value: Transforming Business Models, Society, and Communities. She is working on her next books: Visual IQ for Lawyers (ABA 2024), The Rise of Product Lawyers: An Analytical Framework to Systematically Advise Your Clients Throughout the Product Lifecycle (Globe Law and Business 2024), and Legal Operations in the Age of AI and Data (Globe Law and Business 2024).

## Katia Bloom



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**Katia Bloom** is a fast-paced and strategic commercial lawyer. Currently, she is the associate general counsel at ForgeRock. Previously, she headed up legal for Avira, Inc., was a founding partner at E Squared Law Group, advising many start-up clients and was in-house counsel at Anesiva. She is actively involved in the Association of Corporate Counsel and a number of organizations promoting

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## Troy Foster



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Troy Foster has focused on emerging growth companies for his entire career. He has particular depth representing technology startups as well as venture capital firms that support them. After 14 years in private practice in Silicon Valley, he served as the chief legal and compliance officer of TrueCar, Inc. and led the company through its initial public offering. Currently, Troy is a partner in the emerging company and venture capital practice at Perkins Coie in Palo Alto. He also lectures at Berkeley Law School.