

## Entering the unknown: the real articles experience



**Chris MacRoberts**  
Candidate attorney - Norton Rose South Africa

It's one thing ticking all the boxes, as any aspiring and self-motivated law student does at university: work hard for great marks, tick; put away 4 or 5 years behind the books, tick; get your application to the choice firms in early, tick; do a vac programme or two (and if you're charming, clever, or both), get made an offer for articles. Tick.

That takes care of that, then. If you've got your ducks in a row, that should leave you with an easy downhill coast through most of final year, making up for lost time on all the socialising you sacrificed in earlier years... Right?

Right. Well, partly. But then there's the small matter of what lies just over that promising horizon, beyond the gleaming power-suit and that first paycheque... The real business of articles.

For most law students, whether first-year or final-year, the actual substance of articles is the stuff of myth and rumour. From rehashed stories of monotonous photocopying and pagination to terrifying, quaking first appearances before unsympathetic magistrates, the life of an article clerk (or candidate attorney) seems pretty removed from the book-bound days of academia, when the easy hum-

drum of student life was rudely punctuated by assignment deadlines and sleep-deprived exam sessions. The truth is there's not a lot said at university about what you'll actually be doing in your first year or two of work in the legal profession, especially for those looking to become attorneys. That may be because it's never a linear or predictable experience, but it's also because (gasp) your lecturers actually don't know what it's like.

Working at a firm like Norton Rose, your articles experience is a steep learning curve, a fast climb to the lofty, fast-paced world of corporate law. It takes a while to get used to the fact that a deadline you would previously have sat on for 3 weeks now turns over in 2 days. And it has to be right, because somebody's paying for it. But the fun lies in the challenge of it, of meeting and exceeding expectations, of turning out quality work that impresses your colleagues. The fun lies in going to court, seeing actual matters argued by great minds, learning to work the system, and if you're lucky – perhaps even appearing yourself. Articles is a far cry from the cosseted life of the student (and you do not have to get up early everyday), but the rewards are more worthwhile, and certainly more tangible.

How do you prepare for it? Not by fastidiously revising your entire curriculum or drilling out civil procedure over the December vac before you start work. Not by buying the killer new corporate outfit to knock 'em dead on the first day of work (though that helps). The preparation for articles lies in your mindset.

Be earnest. Be eager. Be prepared to work. Know your place, but be the best at it. Keep a work-life balance. Meet deadlines. Impress your boss. Amuse your colleagues. See your friends. Don't stop living. You may not be a student anymore, but that doesn't mean you can't enjoy your work.

As you progress in your path through your degree, keep that in mind – know what to expect and be prepared for it. Polish up your social skills and know something about the work you'll be doing... But most importantly, take it in your stride.

Serving articles is the next stretch on the road to becoming an attorney, and it's not something to be feared. And one day, hopefully our paths will intersect at Norton Rose.

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