“How do I get into law teaching?” That’s a question many students have asked me over the years.

If you have the right personality and skill set, law teaching is a wonderful career. It is one of the few jobs on the planet where you get a regular paycheck but you really have no boss. Once you have tenure, you can do pretty much what you want as long as you show up on time to meet your classes and avoid misconduct. Nobody will tell you what to write about, so you can choose whatever subjects interest you.

Control of your own agenda is very significant— in a law firm you must work on whatever the client needs (however distasteful or boring), but in law teaching you can chart your own professional agenda. Or you can work on whatever public service projects you find worthwhile (perhaps even serving as a committee chair or council
member of the Administrative Law & Regulatory Practice Section of the ABA).

While you have to teach whatever classes are assigned to you, over the years you can probably migrate into subjects that interest you and ditch the ones you find boring. And a huge upside of law teaching is working with students; in general, they are very nice and highly appreciative for what you have to teach them. You can have a life-changing impact on many students by introducing them not only to the intellectual demands of the law and the norms of appropriate professional behavior, but also by helping to direct their careers on paths to improving society. You will be one of their most crucial mentors—by both your teaching and your example.

And let’s not forget the vacations and the ability to work when you want to. If you have child care responsibilities, for example, law teaching is a dream job.

Yes, law teaching has some downsides. You have to grade exams—which is quite distasteful—and you have to sit on time-consuming committees. You have to deal with academic politics, which can be brutal at times. But hey, there are downsides in every job and law teaching has fewer of them than most.

Law teaching, however, is not for everyone. Most obviously, you need to be able to teach competently. That means, when you explain things to people, they understand what you’re talking about. Unfortunately, some people lack this ability (perhaps you encountered some of them as law school teachers). You must be comfortable standing in front of a class and talking. Also, you must enjoy doing research and analysis and be a fluent writer. It’s very satisfying to know that your books and articles may influence others for years to come.

Some people fit the law firm profile much better than the teaching profile. These are people who need constant personal contact with other human beings. They thrive on conflict and they crave big wins. They enjoy and are good at “business development.” Law teaching doesn’t really satisfy those people. Law teachers spend most of their time alone in their offices wrestling with their computers. It may take a year or two to write a single article or a book, so you have to accept deferred gratification. Indeed, you have to be a bit of a recluse. In addition, there is little drama and no big victories or big losses. Also, some people want or need more money than you can make out of law teaching (although it
is more financially rewarding than it used to be, especially as compared to other types of teaching).

OK, you’re sold. Now how do you actually get the job?

The first thing to realize is that it’s a very competitive process. Law school applications have fallen by about one-third since the 2008 recession and have not strongly recovered. As a result, the number of available entry-level positions declined sharply. According to publicly available statistics, entry-level hires went from around 150-160 in the years 2006 to 2011, then began to collapse. In 2014, only 73 people were hired for entry level law-teaching jobs. By 2016, the number had recovered slightly to 83. For the source of these statistics, see http://prawfsblawg.blogs.com/prawfsblawg/2016/05/spring-self-reported-entry-level-hiring-report-2016.html This website, updated annually has a wealth of information about getting a law school teaching job.

And let’s be candid—graduates of the more elite law schools get most of the entry-level teaching jobs. In 2016, graduates of Yale got 18 jobs, Harvard 11, NYU 9, Columbia 6, Chicago 6 (about 2/3 of the total) and all other schools got the remaining jobs (about 1/3 of the total).

If you’re still interested, read on. Your goal is to distinguish yourself from the hordes of competitors, so hearken to Asimow’s seven hot tips

1. Get good grades. Really good grades. Law teaching jobs (especially at the rookie level) tend to go to students with high grades, probably the top 10 percent of the class. Obviously, a great deal also depends on the ranking of the law school, so if you’re at a lower-ranked school and do very well in your first year, think about transferring to a more highly ranked law school. That would greatly improve your chances of getting a teaching job.

2. Publish. Get on one of your school’s law reviews (preferably the most selective one) and get an article published. This indicates that you have both the ability and the drive to do legal scholarship. Law schools expect their young faculty to publish, so you need to prove that you have a scholarly vocation.

Choosing a good topic may be the toughest part of writing an article. Aim for something theoretical or at least policy oriented. Unfortunately, theoretical articles are more highly prized in academia than doctrinal or practical ones. If you have a background in some non-
legal discipline before coming to law school (whether it’s philosophy, economics, psychology, math, science, or whatever), try to draw on that material in writing your comment, because interdisciplinary work is more highly valued than straight law. Also, if you know what area you’d like to teach (say administrative law), it would be good if your comment was about that subject.

3. **Get to know your professors.** This pays off no matter what route you take into law teaching. Basically, there are several ways to get a law teaching job. The formal way is through the annual November hiring conference run by the Association of American Law Schools (AALS), as discussed in tip 7 below. The informal (and much better) way is through personal contacts, the infamous “old boy’s [and old girl’s] network.” Obviously, you should try both ways, since they aren’t inconsistent. (See tip 6 for adjuncting as a third way into the profession.)

If you go the informal route, it is necessary to get your law school professors to make calls pitching you to faculty or deans at the schools where you’d like to teach. But the professors won’t do that unless they feel they personally know and like you. And if you’re going the formal route through the AALS hiring conference, it’s necessary to list professors as references—and they are worthless as references if they don’t know you personally.

So take the trouble to visit your professors’ offices during office hours, speak up in class, and take advantage of social networking opportunities involving the faculty whenever they arise. If you want to teach administrative law, make sure your admin law professor knows you well. Try to make that person an adviser on your student comment.

4. **Get a judicial clerkship.** A traditional way into law teaching is to come off a prestigious clerkship. So get the best one you can. During your clerkship year, try to keep publishing, in order to prove your scholarly vocation. Obviously, you should get on well with the judge, so he or she can make some strategic phone calls to law schools praising you to the skies.
5. *Think about a fellowship or a graduate degree.* Let’s say that you have no teaching or clerkship opportunities coming out of law school and you don’t want to take a law practice job. Take a look at fellowship programs; a number of law schools have such programs which involve some teaching, provide an opportunity to do research, and are intended to groom the fellows for law school teaching jobs. In 2016, quite a large percentage of those who got entry-level jobs came out of fellowship programs. The most successful ones were NYU (12), Columbia (11), Harvard (9), Stanford (6), UCLA (5). See [http://prawfsblawg.blogs.com/prawfsblawg/entry-level-hiring-report/](http://prawfsblawg.blogs.com/prawfsblawg/entry-level-hiring-report/)

Or consider a graduate degree in a different field, such as a masters or even a PhD in a subject other than law. A graduate degree in economics or philosophy, for example, can be a valuable credential in the hiring market, because interdisciplinary teaching and scholarship are very much in vogue. (This assumes, of course, that you can afford to stay out of the legal job market while waiting for that law school opportunity.)

6. *Going into practice first?* While practicing, try to do some publishing while preparing to look for a law school job. A solid published article is golden. Meanwhile, build up some solid experience in the area you’d like to teach. (Of course, it helps if you can dispense with sleeping or a personal life.)

Try adjuncting. Go ahead—give the dean a call and inform him of your availability to teach a class in the afternoon or evening. Adjuncting pays very little and is a polite form of exploitation (it enables law schools to get classes taught at very little cost). However, it enables you to get some good teaching experience and to network with the dean and the faculty. Down the road, if you’ve been really successful in the classroom and have published an article or two, you’ve got an inside track for a full-time teaching job.

7. *Game the AALS and ace your law school visits.* The AALS hiring conference isn’t called the “meat market” for nothing. It’s brutal. There are thousands of people looking for jobs and everybody has to complete the one-page registration form. Law schools have time only for a dozen or two interviews, so some unfortunate soul has to paw through that huge stack of forms trying to find the few most likely prospects. So keep this in mind when you fill out the form—make yourself seem as desirable as possible and as distinguishable from the mob as possible.
Think carefully about your teaching preferences. If you can, make some discreet phone calls to faculty at your top few law school choices, and try to find out what they’re looking for. Then tweak your résumé to include those subjects.

Don’t limit yourself to constitutional law or federal courts, even if you love these subjects. So many other registrants will pick these subjects, and most law schools already have too many people who want to teach them. Administrative law is more saleable because there are fewer people who want to teach it (the reason for that is a different story!). Other related regulatory subjects are good too, like environmental law, legislation, tax, communications law, banking, energy law, or labor law. You’re hoping to nail the subject (or combination of subjects) that the law school is particularly looking to hire in. Be flexible too—indicate that you’d be happy to teach any first-year course (in addition to those you’ve already mentioned) since law schools often have holes in the first year they need to fill along with something more specialized. But don’t be too flexible; saying you’ll teach anything suggests desperation.

Also, be flexible in the location of the law school. If you’re willing to move to remote locales, you have a better chance of getting an interview and an invitation for a full faculty visit than if you limit yourself to your own city or popular destinations like New York, D.C., or the West Coast. And after a few years you can always write yourself out of your first law school and into a more desirable locale.

When you make that full faculty visit, you’ll need to give a job talk. This should be very carefully prepared and very well delivered. Don’t read from notes. Speak in an informal and relaxed manner. Stick precisely to whatever time schedule you’re given. Be able to handle all questions gracefully (people are going to try to press you and even trip you up, so be prepared).

Finding the right topic for your job talk is tricky. Obviously, it has to be a subject you know very well (it helps if you have an article in progress on that subject). Look for a topic that isn’t too practical or doctrinal; the subject should be at least somewhat theoretical and policy oriented. Yet it shouldn’t be so technical or difficult that half of the people listening can’t follow it. You want your analysis to be provocative enough to elicit questions, but not so far-fetched as to bring your judgment into question. The goal is to come across as someone whom they’d enjoy having as a colleague and who can communicate effectively both to faculty and students.
Incidentally, your job talk should be well developed by the time of the AALS hiring convention. You should expect to be asked to summarize it and field questions about it at the screening interview.

So if you’re still interested in law teaching as a career, start preparing yourself beginning on your first day in law school and continuing after graduation. Don’t stop thinking about tomorrow, and good luck!