



STRATFORD CAREER INSTITUTE

— GUIDE TO PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR TRAINING —

THE STRATFORD CAREER INSTITUTE'S

Guide to Private Investigator Training

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HOW TO BECOME A PI (PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR)

Private investigators have one of the most fashionable and interesting jobs ever depicted on the big or small screen. While the reality of being a private investigator may not be quite so glamorous and exciting as it looks in fictionalized accounts, it is still a profitable, and necessary, job.

Becoming a private investigator means that you will be able to likely earn a decent living. After all, private investigators, who do not necessarily have to have college degrees, make a [median wage of around \\$50,700 per year](#), and do so while carrying out an enjoyable job that does not keep them chained behind a desk.

So, if you decide that you have an interest in becoming a private investigator, how do you go about accomplishing that goal? Well, the process is fairly simple, though it may change slightly from territory to territory.

Understand The Local Requirements

The first big task to becoming a private investigator is to understand the local requirements. Some cities, states, etc. require that you have certain education under your belt. Others require that you work under a licensed Private Investigator for a certain amount of time.

Being able to enter the profession requires that you know what you will need in order to enter the profession. This can range from almost no requirements to requiring classes from the local police academy in order to do things like perform surveillance or legally carry a handgun.

Understand Local Laws

While you're learning about local requirements, it behooves you to spend some time learning about the local laws and how they will impact your line of work. What are regulations in your area concerning carrying firearms (if you choose to carry one at all)? What are regulations concerning video surveillance?

Understanding the local laws that you will interact with is very important to being able to not only legally collect evidence for your employers, but making sure the evidence you collect is admissible in court. As a general rule, evidence inadmissible in court is essentially worthless to most police detectives.

Decide What Kind of PI You Want To Be

Do you want to work surveillance jobs, helping to catch unfaithful spouses, workers compensation hoaxers, and helping to find missing persons for families worried about their missing members?

Do you want to do trial work, working with law firms in order to acquire information and present it to juries?

Do you want to work to recover deleted emails and files on computers, hoping to find evidence that a suspect thought they deleted?

Do you want to investigate accounting crimes, like embezzlement and fraud?

There are many ways to help your community as a private investigator. Figuring out the one best suited to your particular set of skills (which you may or may not honed over many years) is a good way to make sure your work is profitable.

Receive Training

This is not necessarily something you will have to do, but if there are gaps in your knowledge, training is a good idea.

If you live somewhere where you can carry a concealed pistol for self-defense, for example, it is in your best interest to not only receive the training for carrying your pistol, but also for actually using it. A basic pistol defense class is important.

It may also be useful to receive training in evasive driving, as well as picking up other skills that you may be likely to need.

If you're hired by a private investigations firm, they will likely tell you what you need to learn. If you decide to start your own firm, you should spend as much time receiving training as you can.

Get A License (Where Required)

In states that require a license to be a private investigator, it is in your best interest to earn one as soon as you can. You may be able to work as a PI for a company run by a licensed PI without having your own license, but if you want to be able to find other work, or to be able to run your own PI business, you will have to get your own license.

Understand the Difference Between LEGAL and ETHICAL

Private investigators often walk a tight rope, having to do things that may be unethical but that should not be illegal. If you become a private investigator, you are NOT above the law. Quite the opposite; the things you do will receive scrutiny you never imagined.

You must seek to understand how to do your job, but do it without breaking laws. This means understanding laws as they now exist, but also keeping an eye on the laws as they change.

It also means understanding that to get information out of some people for the job, you will have to do things that may be somewhat unethical. But there's a difference between illegal and unethical. For example, lying to a person, or operating under a false pretext, is not illegal (though it is arguably unethical). However, claiming to be a law enforcement agent or federal agent in the course of that lie absolutely is illegal.

A life as a private detective can be interesting and profitable. However, it is important that you understand what the job will entail before setting off on a life as a PI.

There are courses online and at some local schools that will help better equip you to start such a career. There are also online courses, such as those as Stratford Career Institute offers, that can help you to prepare for the certification courses you will need.

It may not be the life of a Dick Tracy or the hardboiled detectives of old, but PI's provide a very real and necessary service.

PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR TRAINING PROGRAMS

For many, a life as a private investigator seems like a worthwhile and exciting endeavor. It's a job where people still get to work outdoors, and one where they could make a decent amount of money.

Further, films have spent YEARS selling people on the idea that it's a job that is exciting, kind of a cross between being a police officer, Sherlock Holmes, and a gun-toting mercenary.

However, the reality of a career as a private investigator is quite different. It's a job that rarely interacts directly with clients in this day and age, for example. Instead, many private investigators these days work to build cases for their clients, allowing their clients to take legal action.

But building such cases is not simple, and evidence gathering is not as easy as walking around with a magnifying glass, picking up anything that you'd like, and handing it over to the client.

In other words, if you want a job as a private investigator, you need to understand what you're doing.

Taking Classes

The quickest way to learn what is and is not acceptable for a private investigator to do is to take a class on being a private investigator, obviously.

Believe it or not, most regions do not require any sort of actual 'training' before becoming a private investigator.

If you don't have the kind of background, it might be in your best interest to get to a local school or an online course to learn the basics about legal investigations in your area.

What Makes A 'Good' Class?

So, if you're looking to become a private investigator, what makes a 'good' class to take? What sets one class apart from another?

Aside from the brand names attached to various classes and where they're held, the big difference is in what they cover.

A good class will cover a few of the following things.

FINDING EVIDENCE

The first, and most important thing that any class on private investigations should cover is how to 'find' evidence. This does not mean how to search for it (although many classes will cover that as well), though. What it means is how to find evidence in a way that it is admissible in court.

For example, evidence can be kept in areas legally closed off to the public, like an office, a home, or even a

car. The evidence is there, and it may be important to an investigation, but if the only way to reach the evidence involves breaking a law, that makes the evidence essentially worthless.

Illegally discovered evidence is inadmissible in court, and even a novice lawyer will be able to get it thrown out in a case. That means that if laws aren't followed when getting evidence, you're just wasting your time and possibly harming your client's case.

MAINTAINING EVIDENCE

It's also important that once a private investigator HAS evidence, they know how to legally maintain it. In some cases, this simply means making sure that computers remain removed from any person or place that could possibly tamper with them. In other cases, it could mean turning evidence over to lawyers as quickly as possible, or even to the police, depending on the nature of the evidence.

Knowing what to do with evidence is just as important as knowing where to get it.

LEGALITY

The legality of an investigation is extremely important. A good course, like the one offered by Stratford Career Institute, will teach the proper way to conduct an investigation, and what can be done to make sure that evidence collected will be admissible.

SELF-DEFENSE

Some courses will even teach a bit about self-defense. Now, this isn't required, and not every private investigator will need to know anything about self-defense laws in their area. However, some private investigators do need to know these things. Private investigators can work highly-contested and emotionally-charged investigations like divorces and child custody battles.

In such cases, sometimes people get violent. Understanding a little bit about self-defense law can be valuable for a private investigator.

Where can I learn more?

If you're looking for a place to learn about being a private investigator, there are many options. A local college, or community college, might be able to help, if you have the time (and the money).

However, if you're a busy person, as so many of us are, then you may just be better off working with an online course, something like Stratford Career Institute, that can allow you to learn at your pace and when you want to.

A new life as a private investigator is at your fingertips; all you need to do is take those first steps to begin your career.

HOW MUCH DO PRIVATE INVESTIGATORS MAKE?

Films and television romanticize the idea of being a private investigator. They make it seem like a career that is exciting, with gun fights, mob bosses, and beautiful clients flirting constantly with the investigator.

However, if you watched many of these films and shows, you notice that the investigator never seems like a wealthy man. The P.I. in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* lived in his office, after all, as do many detectives of film and screen.

The fact is that there are very few detectives who make a lot of money. Depending on the detective, they can also find that much of their income is tied up in their work, and in work equipment. Because of this, private investigators often don't seem to make as much as, say, police officers and others. But how much can a private investigator expect to make?

Determining Factors

There are many factors that determine how successful and profitable a private investigator will be. One of the first determining factors is how much experience you have.

These jobs, especially policing jobs, teach many of the basics of investigation. People who do not have knowledge concerning investigation generally will not be as desirable, or paid as well.

Of course, employers will also take into account related skills and knowledge, as well as experience in similar roles in the past.

For example, if they're looking for a private investigator to comb through banking records, a background in accounting is more important than a history as a police officer.

One can also expect that the amount of money they'll make will be different based on where they live. A private investigator who works in the middle of nowhere will not make nearly as much as a private investigator doing the same work in a big city like New York City.

Pay

Pay for private investigators can vary wildly depending on the factors above. However, even an entry-level position can pay enough to make it worthwhile for the employee, and there are numerous chances for advancement in the field.

The median pay range for private investigators is in the [\\$49,000-\\$50,000 dollar a year range](#), or somewhere between 23 and 24 dollars per hour of work.

Entry-level positions can begin as at a slightly lower wage, and for a lucky few, wages can reach into the six-figure range. However, such high wages are not common, and many investigators who make such figures either own their own businesses or work directly for well-established law firms.

If you'd like to become a private investigator, and hope that you can someday become one who earns in the six-figure range, you will need to continuously invest in yourself through education.

And if you want to begin your career with more than an entry-level paycheck, you'll need to have some understanding of the job before you apply.

That means that you will want to invest in an education before ever applying.

You could attend a local college, perhaps seeking a degree in Criminology or Criminal Justice, if you were looking to get a head start.

You could instead attend a short course, or even take one online via a school like Stratford Career Institute. Online courses in particular can help provide basic knowledge needed for the job, and with a bit of work you could find yourself in a new, exciting, and important career, one with job security and decent pay.

PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR JOB REQUIREMENTS

If you would like to become a private investigator, it's not as complex as you may believe. The job requirements for becoming a private investigator are fairly simple to understand, and they are easy to achieve for the average person.

Here are a few job requirements before you become a private investigator.

A Clean Criminal Record

This is not necessarily required in every area, but in order to become a private investigator, it is often a requirement that you have a clean criminal record.

That does not mean that you cannot have a ticket or two from driving your car around. It means that your record should be relatively free from any misdemeanors, and completely free from serious crimes and felonies.

Again, a criminal record may not necessarily be a disqualifying factor when it comes to getting a license to be a private investigator. However, it will make it much more difficult to be able to find a job in the field.

Some Education In Related Fields

If you're looking to score a job as a private investigator, you're going to need to have some education in a related field. If you don't have any skills in tracking someone, or any understanding of the legal system, you're likely to run into some difficulty finding a job as an investigator.

A few things that it may profit a private investigator to understand, include how to legally conduct surveillance, how to properly keep notes, and what is and is not legal for an investigator in your area.

In the long run, it may be best to seek an advanced education in criminal justice, accounting, internet technologies, and other areas of interest that will help with your job, but they are not always required to get your first job as a private investigator.

However, it is important to make sure that you have something that will attract an employer. If you don't have education, then you will need a related background.

A Military Or Police Background (Optional)

According to surveys, around half of all private investigators have some sort of background in policing.

Many private investigators have a background in the military. Having a background in policing is a big plus when it comes to being a private investigator. Being a former police officer provides a great stepping stone to investigative work and can equip the average person with the knowledge they need in order to properly carry out specific duties.

A military background can also provide much of the same knowledge for a prospective PI.

Ability to Qualify For and Attain A Permit Or License

Depending on the state, you may need to get a permit or license. In some states, the business you work for will provide this permit, but in others, you may need to obtain your own.

If you cannot qualify for a permit or license, or you don't want to pay for one, then this is not the field for you.

If you're looking to learn more about being a private investigator, you can always take a course to help you not only prepare for the work, but also to learn a bit more about what it will entail. Online schools like Stratford Career Institute offer such an education, and it is likely that a local school could also have a course or two that can help you learn more about being a PI.

A new life as a private investigator awaits, so long as you can meet these simple requirements.

KEY CLASSES FOR A PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR

The life of a private investigator is a fascinating one, even if it is not similar to the movies. Though they are not as likely to have walk-in clients asking them to embark on a journey of intrigue in order to find a lost loved one as the movies would have you believe, they are still performing an essential task that can be of use for many, including corporations, lawyers, and other groups.

But to become a private investigator, you need more than just an office and a wise-cracking attitude. Here are just a few different classes that you will need to take before you can be an effective private investigator.

Classes on Law Enforcement and Investigation

Before you can be an effective private investigator, you need to first understand the basics of law enforcement. Although a private investigator is NOT a member of law enforcement and does NOT have the same rights as many law enforcement agencies enjoy, the job is part of the same field, one that seeks to help achieve justice. It is important that those who want to be private investigators understand a few things about the field of law enforcement, including:

- The history of law enforcement. It's important to understand the aims and goals of law enforcement, and how they have changed throughout time, in order to understand how you, as a private investigator, may fit into the goals of attaining justice in the modern era.
- The criminal justice system in its current state. The pursuit of criminal justice is ever-evolving, and the way that the system orders itself changes with frequency. Understanding why the system is how it is, and what one must do to navigate it, is important for preventing yourself from ending up on the wrong side of the law.
- Types of evidence and how they are useful. This is very important for those looking to be investigators, for obvious reasons.

Classes On Private Investigations

A private investigator is not in the employ of the state, city, or county, and because of this, they are open to the legal ramifications of their actions to a much greater extent. Any program that purports to teach you how to be a private investigator, but that does not include information on actually carrying out investigations as a private entity, is cheating you. Such classes should include:

- Ethics. Conducting private investigations, you will not be able to back up your investigations with the clout of a law enforcement agency, so maintaining an ethical stance is much more important than for your average officer.
- Law concerning investigations. If you do not understand the law concerning your investigations, you may find that evidence you gather is not usable in court. You may even wind up in jail for failure to follow laws.
- How to conduct research and manage the products of an investigation. This will help you understand how to investigate, as well as what you will need to do with the evidence you acquire. Some evidence may need to be handed over to authorities, while other evidence will not.
- How to conduct investigations. There are various kinds of investigations, from accident investigations to criminal investigations and even missing person investigations. Each needs a different approach and understanding how to best approach the investigation will help you clear investigations more effectively.

Basics of Conduct

When working as a private investigator, your conduct will determine not only how your evidence is received, but if you will remain employed. Even if you begin your own private investigation firm, you will still be dependent upon your reputation. Any course that doesn't include some mention of how to grow professionally is one that is not complete.

If you're looking to take a good course for a private investigator, it may be in your best interest to consider a distance learning course, like those Stratford Career Institute can offer you. This type of course can help you gain the knowledge you need while studying at a time and pace that is most convenient for you.

HOW TO GET A PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR LICENSE

As with so many jobs, becoming a private investigator requires that one earns the appropriate license. And, like so many similar jobs, earning that license can require various things depending on the region.

In some areas, getting a license to become a private investigator is a simple process, one that requires only paying a fee and perhaps taking a short class. In other areas, licensure can require a test, or even attending certain courses at the local police academy!

Some regions don't even require any sort of licensure, like Alaska, where you can simply set out a shingle and begin working as a private investigator.

But, if you would like to get your private investigator license, what are the things you may be looking at? Here are just a few of the hurdles in the way of your plans.

OCCUPATIONAL TESTING

Some states have 'occupational testing' in order to provide a baseline of qualification for the tasks a private investigator will face.

This testing generally involves questions on knowledge pertaining to the particular state.

For example, the test for the state of Kentucky requires knowledge of state privacy laws, knowledge of laws concerning recording conversations, and even laws concerning when it is and isn't legal to take video tape in a public place.

In general, occupational testing will be regional in nature. What this means is that if you plan to operate in another state, or more than one state, you could end up having to study for multiple tests, much like a lawyer hoping to practice law in multiple states might end up having to pass the bar exam in each state.

A good private investigator course, such as the one offered at Stratford Career Institute, will help you understand the basics of private investigation. However, due to the constantly-changing state licensure standards, you may have to do a bit more studying before spending the money on your examination.

EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

Some states require that those attempting to become private investigators must meet some sort of minimum educational standards. This can mean that they may need an Associate's degree or higher, but most often it simply means that a private investigator will need to have some sort of education at the local police academy.

Further, in many states, investigators who plan to carry a firearm will need to take courses at the police academy. These courses can cover everything from how to properly draw and fire a firearm (a skill that many people, even those with concealed carry permits, seem to lack) to the legal use of the firearm, and local legal standards concerning the concept of self-defense.

Not every private investigator is going to need a firearm, but those who do will want to take a course on legal use of that firearm in the course of their investigations, even if the state does not offer it. There is nothing that can end a career faster than a multi-million-dollar lawsuit.

BACKGROUND CHECK

Much like becoming a police officer, one of the important steps to getting a private investigator's license is a background check.

After all, private investigators are basically private spies, who work on behalf of clients. It's a tremendous responsibility, and with that kind of responsibility comes the need for a background check.

For those living in the United States and Canada, if you can legally purchase a firearm, you can generally pass the background check. It simply exists to ensure that those seeking a career as a private investigator are not criminals with long histories of violent crimes.

Seeking a Career

If you are interested in becoming a private investigator, the best place to begin that career path is to educate yourself. Take a few classes, learn a bit about what being a private investigator will entail, and make sure that you at least understand the basics of the job.

A class from somewhere like Stratford Career Institute will help achieve this and will also allow you to learn at your own pace, which is always a good thing for those with full schedules.

WHAT ARE THE TOOLS OF THE TRADE FOR A PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR

Private investigators of film and screen seem to have relatively few tools, and they all seem to use the same tools. They have a pistol of some sort, either a revolver or an older semi-automatic. Sometimes they have a camera for taking pictures. They almost always have a vehicle, or a friend with a vehicle who drives them around.

But real life is not like a movie at all, and some of the tools of the trade are very different these days. So, if you're looking to set out on a new career as a private investigator, here are a handful of tools you'll need.

A Mobile Phone

One of the most important things any private investigator can carry around is a mobile phone. Such a phone can provide so many different useful functions to an investigator.

Firstly, it's the main means of communicating with clients, employers, and more.

Secondly, it has access to the internet on the go. If you're searching for answers, need to know what your target looks like, or if you're simply trying to find directions to someone's business for surveillance purposes, a mobile phone is essential.

A Computer

A computer is also essential for anyone working in private investigation. It's a great place for making notes, but also for tracking hours worked, writing reports, and even for keeping track of (and organizing) photographic evidence.

It's hard to work without a computer in any job, but if you're trying to provide information for civil suits, it is almost impossible to do so without a computer.

A Decent Camera

One of the few things that the movies got right was the importance of photographic evidence. If you're a private investigator working family law cases, or trying to catch individuals cheating on their spouses, nothing is better than evidence of the target 'in flagrante delicto' (a Latin phrase that translates to 'in blazing offense').

This camera should be sturdy, have decent magnification abilities, and most of all, should not be a cell phone camera. Yes, cell phone cameras make life simpler, but they are not necessarily the best when it comes to resolution, stability, and quality of picture.

A good camera with a decent set of lenses is worth its weight in gold.

A Lot of Hard Drive Space

Taking pictures, holding on to files, and even creating 'images' of hard drives takes up a lot of hard drive space. Further, due to the nature of private investigation, an investigator will eventually pass on much of this data to their clients or to legal authorities.

Because of this, it's wise to have additional hard drive space for work. However, because we live in the era of SD cards and USB drive, it's easier than ever before to store the data independent of a working computer, and to simply hand off the USB drives or SD card when the work is done.

Plus, in many cases, you can charge the cost of the storage device to the client.

Plastic Bags

If you're connecting evidence with fingerprints or DNA, such as could occur in a case related to paternity, then plastic bags are a necessity. The best plastic bags utilize zipper, not the press and seal seal, but any sort of quality plastic bag is a decent way to protect evidence until experts can analyze it.

A Handgun (Maybe)

A handgun can be a useful tool in the right hands. Some private investigations can involve a measure of danger, and in some cases (especially those involving family law, divorce, and similar cases), tempers may run hot.

So yes, a handgun is something that may benefit some private investigators. However, if you are going to carry a handgun, it behooves you to train with it, and ensure that you attend classes concerning the legal issues tied to self-defense in your area, whether the state requires it or not.

If you're looking to learn more about being a private investigator, education will always help. You can find applicable classes at your local community college, or you can find online courses at places like Stratford Career Institute.

Such classes will allow you to learn at your own pace, as well as giving you basic knowledge of the job and how to legally and effectively run private investigations.

