

SECTION IV

Interview Preparation

QUICK INTERVIEWING TIPS

Do's:

- ✓ Prepare a focused response to answer "Tell me about yourself".
- ✓ Research the organization and the interviewer before the interview.
- ✓ Anticipate possible questions and formulate your best answer.
- ✓ Formulate questions to ask the interviewer.
- ✓ Make sure the questions you ask the interviewer could not be answered by researching the firm.
- ✓ Dress conservatively and professionally.
- ✓ Be on time.
- ✓ Be friendly to everyone, including people with whom you are not actually interviewing.
- ✓ Convey enthusiasm for the position.
- ✓ Use specific examples in relating your qualities (e.g., projects you spearheaded to address a certain problem).
- ✓ Concentrate on your best attributes.
- ✓ Send a thank-you note within 48 hours of the interview.
- ✓ Follow up with a note or a phone call to reaffirm your interest in the position if time has elapsed since the anticipated response from the firm.

Don'ts:

- × Sell yourself short.
- × Lose your cool during a "stress interview".
- × Use vulgar language or slang.
- × Order alcohol during an interview luncheon.
- × Wear provocative or rumpled clothing.
- × Convey non-centrist political views, unless you are sure they would be welcomed by the employer or you could not work for the employer without the employer knowing your views.
- × Address interviewer by first name before being invited to do so.
- × Act unprofessionally even if the interviewer does.

INTERVIEWING

If you are reading this, chances are you have been given an opportunity for an interview - congratulations! You now have an invaluable opportunity to convince the firm or organization that you are the best candidate for the job. This can be exhilarating, but for many it is also a bit nerve-wracking. By doing a few simple things, however, you can help ensure that you will be less stressed, more confident, and better able to convince employers that you would be a perfect fit for their organizations.

PREPARATION

The first thing you need to know is that the key to successful interviewing is **PREPARATION**. As with everything you do in law school or in your career, preparation can be the most critical component of a good performance. By the same token, lack of preparation can ruin your chances of getting hired.

There are four different kinds of interview preparation that you should consider doing: 1) researching the firm or organization and interviewer 2) practicing answers to the questions you anticipate, 3) knowing the questions you want to ask the interviewer, and 4) participating in mock interviews.

1) Research. Researching is a vital component of the interview preparation process. The more you know about the employer, the more likely you will impress the interviewer.

Basic, yet important information to gather prior to the interview:

- the number of attorneys working for the employer;
- if the employer is a judge, the areas of law the judge practiced before going on the bench;
- the number of alumni from your law school working for the employer;
- the employer's chief areas of practice;
- the employer's representative clients;
- if the employer represents the public interest/public sector, the organization's mission and the issues facing the clients being served.

All these pieces of information will help you decide which questions to ask the interviewer and how you may want to tailor your answers to their questions.

RESOURCES

There are many other directories and resources in the Career Development Office that can help you with your employer research. Many of the online resources can be found in the websites section of this manual. In addition, our CDO library contains state and local attorney directories, practice specific resources, and information on hiring trends, professional development and internship opportunities.

A few major on-line resources are worthy of specific mention below.

NALP DIRECTORY

www.nalpdirectory.com

The National Association for Law Placement (NALP) publishes significant information about large law firms. Using the NALP Directory, you can find information about a firm's billable hours, starting salary, demographic composition and the number of positions the firm expects to fill.

MARTINDALE - HUBBELL

www.martindale.com

Martindale and Hubbell is a popular national legal directory listing lawyers in most, but not all, firms in the United States. Martindale.com, the on line version of the legal directory, contains a search engine that will allow you to target searches based on location and practice area.

CORE

<https://law-commonwealth.12twenty.com/Login>

CORE is the Career Development Office's on-line job bank and recruitment software. The job bank, updated daily, includes a variety of legal and law-related jobs for law students and graduates submitted by employers contacting the Career Development Office.

WORD OF MOUTH

Another great source of information about an employer is word -of-mouth. Career Development counselors are a great source of insider information. Friends who have interviewed with an employer, with whom you may be interested, may also be good resources. Associates inside the firm can be a great source of information and they can clue you in on what the employer is looking for in a candidate.

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW

Many of you have experienced an interview that includes the usual questions: Tell me about yourself? What is your greatest strength? What is your greatest weakness? But now a different type of interview questioning is becoming popular. It is called Behavioral Interviewing. The goal of the behavioral interview is to predict future performance, often using hypothetical questions to determine how you have or will behave under certain circumstances.

Often, the questions asked encourage you to tell a story in detail about a specific incident that will give the interviewer a chance to assess your experiences, skills and professionalism. Examples of typical behavioral interview questions are: "Tell me about the time when you had a problem with a fellow co-worker and how you solved it", "What did you do upon determining you would be unable to complete a project on time?", and "State a challenge you have overcome recently?"

Through these questions, the interviewer better understands how you work, your values and skills. He will also be able to judge if you would be happy with the firm/organization. To prepare for the behavioral interview, reread your resume and review past positions, giving special attention to accomplishments and challenges. It is also wise to think about times where you have taken initiative and held leadership roles.

ANTICIPATE QUESTIONS, FORMULATE ANSWERS.

In an interview, remember that each question asked has an underlying agenda.

“Why did you apply for this position?”: The interviewer is looking for indications that you have researched the firm and demonstrated diligence in gathering thorough background research. Applicants who come prepared and have taken the initiative to learn about the organization are more likely to do the same when hired.

“Do you have any questions for me?”: Applicants should prepare for this question, and it is a red flag if the applicant has not done so. The absence of questions can lead the interviewer to think that you are ambivalent or only generally interested in his firm. If you are meeting multiple people, try to ask different questions of each interviewer.

Know the job requirements: It is of great importance that you know what the position requires. In the interview, you should stress each requirement and address it, highlighting your accomplishments or successes. In this way, the interviewer can ascertain whether the job fits with your personality and background and your chances for success.

As with any moot court argument, an essential part of preparing for an interview includes anticipating the questions that will likely be asked and formulating your best possible answers. Be careful, though, not to appear “rehearsed”. The following are some common questions that you should anticipate in advance, and suggestions of things to think about in formulating your answers:

Tell me about yourself. The response to this classic opening interview line should be a persuasive, focused “infomercial” about yourself which should be no longer than 30 seconds. **KEEP YOUR RESPONSE RELEVANT TO THE EMPLOYER!** As you decide now how you would answer this question in an interview, remember that this is one of the best opportunities you will get to sell yourself. Keep your answer brief, and focus on a few of your key attributes. Illustrate these qualities with evidence from your past and current professional experience. Remember, the answer to this question can set a positive tone for the rest of the interview so it is recommended that you spend time developing what you will say.

What do you do outside work/school? The answer to this question will shed light on how well-rounded you are. Often, an interest section provides the interviewer with important clues about yourself, so be prepared to discuss these items or use them as ice-breakers. Be sure that any such information is clear, accurate and current. Just as your interests can help you in the interview by providing a common bond between you and the interviewer, if you are inaccurate about the nature and depth of your interest, it can hurt you.

Where do you want to be in five years? It typically takes employers 3 years to recoup training expenses and start making a profit from an employee, so they are naturally

interested in employees who intend to be stable with their career and employer choices. Your answer will depend on your honest intentions and other factors, but this is a particularly important area in which you should be sensitive to the interviewer's concerns and business priorities.

What is your greatest strength? There are many different variations on this theme that could come up in an interview. As with the "Tell me about yourself" question, the employer is allowing you the opportunity to sell yourself. Ask yourself which of your best attributes would be most valuable to this particular employer? People skills? Team work? Tenaciousness? Research and writing?

What is your greatest weakness? This is a tough question, no doubt, and the experts disagree somewhat with how you should field it. One expert, Kimm Walton, J.D., in her book called Guerilla Tactics for Getting the Legal Job of Your Dreams, says that you should **not** say something that is really a strength (e.g., tend to work too hard), because employers may see that as a dishonest answer. She recommends, rather, that you admit a minor weakness that you have overcome.

Why do you want to work for us/why do you want this job? One important thing to remember is that the employer is not really interested in what they can do for you. They are much more interested in what you can do for them. They would prefer to have a person working for them who is genuinely enthusiastic about the position, rather than a person who just wants a job. Accordingly, any enthusiasm you can muster for the position or the employer, particularly honest enthusiasm, will strengthen your candidacy for the position.

Why did you go to law school? Focus on the contributions you intend to make and the skills you enjoy using that resonate with the legal profession and then follow-up with any activities or classes you participated in that helped pave the way for you (i.e. debate team, mock trial, volunteer work, externships, etc.) Do not tell the interviewer that "I have always wanted to be a lawyer" without going into the information above.

Here are common questions that you should anticipate, including:

- In which areas of law would you like to practice? Why?
- Current events questions (make sure to keep up with news around the world, in the legal community, and in the particular area of practice at issue).
- Explain xxx on your resume (could be anything, so make sure you are familiar with your entire resume).
- Substantive legal/ethical questions (especially with public defender and prosecutor positions).

No matter what, avoid negative information in your responses. Do not speak negatively about your law school, professors, curriculum, etc. It ultimately undermines the value of your own degree. By the same token, do not "trash" a former or current employer. Regardless of the experience, you can always find something positive to say which can propel you back to your ultimate interview objective: selling yourself.

3) Formulate questions. One of the biggest mistakes you can make in an interview is to not have questions ready to ask the interviewer. It is considered a serious mistake to say that all your questions have been answered during the interview. Ideally, you should ask questions a few times during the interview, as well as at the end when interviewers usually ask if you have any questions. The ability to ask intelligent questions will be directly related to the quality of the research you did before the interview. Accordingly, employers can tell a lot from a candidate by the questions he asks.

As a student, however, your best bet is to do as much research as you can, seek advice beforehand and gauge the interviewer as the interview progresses.

Among the kinds of questions you can ask are the following:

- 1) Questions regarding the interview's personal experience: Why did he choose this firm? How does he like the firm? Does he find practice here different from ____ (previous experience)?
- 2) Questions about the firm or organization or a particular area of practice: certain cases you know about, how the firm is affected by new legislation, growth areas for firm, opportunities for community involvement (such involvement inevitably leads to rainmaking), etc.
- 3) Questions about the position for which you are interviewing: What does the firm look for in a successful candidate? How will a person in the position for which you are interviewing be evaluated? How will they be supervised? To whom would you report? What types of training would you receive? When is the decision being made (and may you call if you have not heard by then)?

Be careful not to ask questions that could have been answered through reasonably diligent research.

4) Mock interviews. Your Career Development Office counselors, attorney friends, and many professors, are happy to conduct mock interviews with you. Just as you would want to practice fielding moot court questions before the competition, you want to practice your interviewing technique and get constructive feedback on your strengths and growth areas. Practicing can help you feel as prepared as possible, and can thus alleviate stress. If you are stress-free, chances are you will be more relaxed during the interview and you will make a better impression.

SHOW TIME

WHAT TO WEAR: The key word is PROFESSIONAL. Be as neat and polished as possible.

Interview tips:

- Dress appropriately and professionally
- Traditional business attire (dresses, suits, and pantsuits are always safe)
- Solid, neutral, darker colors
- Closed toe heel or dress shoes
- Dress shoes
- Knee length skirts
- Tops should not be see-through or low-cut
- Well-fitted pants or slacks

Students may dress consistent with their gender identity and/or gender expression.

“Students should follow the three Ps: Proper fit, Polishes, and Professional” Alison Doyle, Gender Neutral Interview Attire and Business Clothing, The Balance Career (Feb 13, 2020)

<https://www.thebalancecareers.com/gender-neutral-interview-and-business-clothing-2061166>.

Confidence is key in an interview so wear what you feel comfortable in. Wear clothing that highlights your personality in a professional.

MAKING A GOOD IMPRESSION

If you have done all your preparation prior to the interview, are on-time and conduct yourself in a professional manner, you should do fine. Make sure to bring extra copies of all your paperwork with you, including: a resume, a writing sample, a transcript, a reference list, and anything else you think the interviewer may need.

When greeting your interviewer, be sure to use a firm handshake and maintain good eye contact. If you are sitting when the interviewer enters the room, be sure to stand to greet him or her before extending your hand.

Keep in mind that during the interview, you need to project your best possible persona. This is your chance to put your best foot forward. As Kimm Walton notes, you would not buy a car if the salesperson says, "The car is okay, but it does not get great mileage." Like other consumers, the interviewer is expecting only the positive, and any deviation from that may be interpreted as a warning sign. Therefore, although you must be honest, it is expected that you will generally be emphasizing only your best qualities.

There comes a time in the interview process when you should relax a little, tone down the sales job, and be yourself. This is particularly true if you are invited back for a second interview. At this point, they just want to make sure your personality is a good fit. If you're not sure whether to keep selling or relax more, try to take your cue from the interviewer and the kinds of questions he or she is asking.

STRESS INTERVIEWS

Stress interviews are meant to be just that – stressful. The “stress interview” is a tactic used by employers who expect their employees to be faced with a lot of pressure, such as in the courtroom. The interview wants to see how you perform under pressure. They want to *make sure that you can remain level-headed under fire*. You can expect to be asked repeated difficult or seemingly inappropriate questions, or the interviewer may behave more aggressively than you may be used to. You will often confront this kind of situation in district attorney or public defender interviews, and it is not uncommon to receive hypothetical questions. Don’t be afraid to ask for clarification or request additional details. As long as you know this and do not take it personally, you can stay calm and concentrate on answering their questions.

INAPPROPRIATE/ILLEGAL QUESTIONS

Unfortunately, you may confront an inappropriate or illegal question during your interview. You should know that questions about your plans for marriage or starting a family, race, gender, religion, age, disability and/or national origin may be prohibited by law. Some interviewers, however, may cross the line because they have not trained in proper interviewing techniques and/or are trying to set an informal tone in the interview. If such questions come up, you can answer them if you are comfortable doing so. You may also attempt to address what you perceive to be the interviewer’s underlying concern (e.g., do you intend to fully devote yourself to your job?) or you may refuse to answer the question. In any event, if you feel you have been asked an improper question during an interview, please let the Career Development Office know.

CONCLUSION OF THE INTERVIEW

At the conclusion of the interview be sure to deliver a firm handshake, a sincere thank you, and a clear and enthusiastic reiteration of your interest in the job. While you should not seek an evaluation of your performance (“How did I do?”) or an estimate of your chances of success, as previously noted it is okay to ask when you might expect to hear from them again.

The ABA requires that law schools mandate nondiscrimination from all employers who are recruiting on campus. The provision states:

“ Non-discrimination and equality of opportunity in legal education includes equal employment opportunity. A law school shall communicate to every employer to whom it furnishes assistance and facilities for interviewing and other placement services the school’s firm expectation that the employer will observe the principles of non-discrimination and equality of opportunity on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, and disability in regard to hiring, promotion, retention, and conditions of employment.” ABA Std. R. P. § 205(d).”

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

General Interview Questions

Tell me about yourself.

What are your greatest strengths/weaknesses?

Why should we hire you?

Why do you want to work for us?

Where do you see yourself five years from now?

Why aren't you on Law Review/Moot Court?

Why did you choose to attend Widener?

Why do you want to work in (geographic location)?

What other firms are you interviewing with/applying to?

How do you like law school?

What is the biggest mistake you ever made?

What was your greatest achievement/disappointment?

What would you do if you won the lottery?

What is the last book you read/movie you saw?

What qualities do you have that will make you a successful lawyer?

What two or three things are most important to you in a job?

Do you know what type of law you want to practice?

What courses have you enjoyed the most/least?

What did you like/dislike most about your work past experiences?

What skills have you developed as a result of your past experiences?

How is your previous experience relevant to our practice?

Have you received offers from any other firms?

Why did you decide to interview with us?

What distinguishes you from other candidates?

What do you think it takes to be successful in a firm like ours?

What are the criteria you will use to distinguish our firm from other similar firms?

What are you hoping to gain from working at this firm?

What work related contributions have you found most satisfying?

What persuaded you to decide to become a lawyer?

What qualities do you possess which have led you to believe that you would make a good lawyer?

How would you describe your ideal job situation?

How would you describe yourself?

What is the most significant item on your resume?

How do you determine success?

What are your career objectives? Personal goals? How will you achieve them?

What is unique about you?

Why weren't you offered a job by the law firm where you worked last summer?

What would you do if a client did not want to work with you?

Tell me what in particular about our firm interests you.

Have you read our resume? What impressed you about it?

What part of our practice would be of special interest to you? Why?

Do you think you have the qualities that would enable you to become a partner in our firm? What are those qualities?

Do you have any ties to this community?

What familiarity do you have with the way a small/medium/large firm operates?

What do you know about our firm that leads you to believe it would be a satisfactory place for you to work? Why?
What do you want to know about this firm?
How has your undergraduate degree helped you in law school?
Why do you want to be a litigator/transactional attorney, etc.?
Do you like living in [state, city]?
In what areas do you feel most competent?
In what areas do you need the most improvement?
Tell me about a recent work assignment? How did you begin, develop and complete it?
Tell me about an occasion when you achieved a goal as a member of a team? What was your role?
In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable? Most productive?
If you had not pursued a law career, what other choices might you have made?
Why? How do you feel about those choices now?
Tell me about a time when you had to work under time constraints? How did you get the job done?
What do you do in your spare time?
What newspaper do you read?
What person do you most admire? (Philosophical questions)
Explain (grades, time gaps, etc.) on your resume?

Judicial Clerkship Questions

Why are you interested in a clerkship?
Have you any particular reason for seeking a job with me?
Why do you want to clerk on this (level and type of) court?
What are the aspects of a clerkship that you value?
What are the criteria you will use to distinguish me from other judges?
Do you think a one-year term is long enough to make a job worthwhile?
What have you done to research the particular judges with whom you are applying?
Who is your favorite Supreme Court Justice, and why?
Have you noted particular judges whose opinions you particularly admire? Why?
How important to you are the political views of the judge for whom you clerk?
What have you done to develop your research and writing skills?
What are your career plans after the clerkship?
How does this clerkship fit into your goals in life?
Tell me about your ties to the geographical area where the court is located.
(If on law review) Discuss your note/article. Why did you choose this topic?
Discuss your writing sample in detail.
What are your views on ANY topic? (This may be news, politics, or personal.)
What is your most/least favorite Supreme Court decision? How and why would you have decided the case differently?
If I ask you to write up a decision in a particular way and you disagree with the outcome, what will you do?

Government, Legal Services & Public Interest Groups

What interest do you have in service to the public generally?

How committed are you to service for the poor, and what past experiences do you have to evidence this commitment?

What do you see as the basic rewards for working for legal services, government, or public interest law?

How does your resume or background demonstrate your commitment to public service?

Corporations/Organizations

What do you know about our company?

How do you feel about having only one client?

Unlike private law firms, partnership is not an opportunity here. How do you feel about that?

Why do you want to work for a corporation as opposed to a law firm?

What advantages do you see working with a corporation as opposed to a law firm?

What disadvantages?

Questions for YOU to Ask

For a firm.

Did you participate in the summer program before joining the firm?

(If the interviewer says “yes.”) How is your practice similar to/different from your summer experience?

What do you like most about working for the firm?

What do you see as the firm’s greatest challenges?

What are the firm’s strategic plans for the next five/ten years?

Do you involve new associates in marketing? If so, how and what training is provided?

Tell me about the feedback that I will get on the work I do for the firm over the summer.

Does the firm rotate summer clerks among different practice areas?

Tell me about pro bono opportunities with the firm.

For a judicial clerkship.

What are a law clerk’s main responsibilities?

What is a typical day like for a law clerk?

How frequently will I need to work into the night or on weekends?

What is the division of labor/cases, including different tasks?

Does the Judge issue opinions from the bench, or does he/she prefer written opinions?

How do opinions get written? Who writes the first draft? How many drafts are usually needed?

Tell me about the feedback I will receive on my work. Will the Judge redline draft opinions?

How closely does the Judge work with the clerks?

Do clerks communicate with the Judge verbally, or mostly through memos?

Do law clerks spend time in court, at settlement conferences, and at oral arguments?

How much contact do clerks have with lawyers?

What are the types of cases and the size of the docket?

What is the Judge’s timetable for making a hiring decision?

What was the Judge's favorite case, most difficult decision, or most surprising jury verdict, and why?

For a public interest or government position

Do clerks/attorneys have the opportunity to work in a variety of practice areas, or are they assigned to a single section?

What does the interviewer regard as the most rewarding aspects of public service?

What are the biggest challenges of public service work?

What are the organization's plans for the next five years?

Do you believe that the number of lawyers working at your office will increase in the next five years?

Do you believe that your work makes a difference for people, and how?

THANK-YOU LETTERS

After an interview, you should always send a brief thank you note to an interviewer(s) with whom you have met. The letter should be sent within 24 hours of your meeting. If you interviewed with several individuals, it is sufficient to send one letter to the person chiefly responsible for bringing you in for the interview. The letter gives you an opportunity to reiterate your interest in the organization and also brings your application to the top of the pile in terms of refreshing their recollection of you and your particular candidacy. The thank you letter should be brief and professional. It should follow the same business format as for the cover letter.

Note: Thank you notes may be sent via email in lieu of regular mail. If sending one via email, always make sure to use a professional subject line (i.e. "Thank you – Your Name or Position Title).