

Interviewing

Interviewing is a skill that can be learned and will improve with practice. Your experience, your grades, what classes you took or your extracurricular activities are NOT the keys to a successful interview. Those are just the elements that got you the interview. If you got the interview then you are qualified to do the job. What the recruiter is looking for in the interview is a good “fit” with their organization.

Preparation

The key to a successful interview is preparation. Know yourself and know the organization that is interviewing you. Be able to articulate why you would be a good “fit” for that particular organization.

- **Know Yourself**
Be prepared to discuss anything on your resume in detail. Clarify your goals. Know your strengths and decide how to handle your weaknesses. Be prepared to discuss your non-legal experience as well. Interviewers often ask about non-legal experience to get a sense of who you are as a person.
- **Research**
Know as much as you possibly can about the employer with whom you are interviewing. Employers consistently rank lack of knowledge of the organization as one of the primary reasons for not extending an offer to a candidate.
- **Develop a Strategy**
The underlying question in every recruiter’s mind is “Why should our organization hire this person?” The specific experiences, credentials and/or achievements you will emphasize need to be fine-tuned depending on the employer and the position. Just as you must tailor a resume to a specific employer, it is critical to differentiate each interview and focus on the unique fit between your background and that employer. Carefully prepare an outline and focus on the information you want to emphasize for each interview. For each outline, consider what particular skills the organization is seeking. Is the position litigation, transaction or policy oriented, and how does your experience relate to the position?
- **Develop your questions**
Prepare a list of questions relevant to the employer and, if possible, the interviewer. Be careful not to ask questions that could have been found easily by looking on their website or the NALP Directory of Legal Employers, or another easily accessible source. Asking questions you easily could have found out through your research shows gross lack of preparation.

- **Time Management**

Confirm the time and location of your interview one day prior to your meeting. You should arrive 5-15 minutes before the scheduled time. Don't be late. Don't arrive too early, either. Be sure to bring any documentation requested by the employer. Always bring updated copies of your resume, transcripts, references and writing sample.

Presentation

Interviews give employers the opportunity to get to know you as an individual. Personality and "fit" with the organization are often the critical factors in hiring decisions.

- **Be confident, enthusiastic and engaged**

Present yourself in a confident, enthusiastic and engaged manner. Make good eye contact and play an active role in the conversation. Listen attentively and show enthusiasm about the employer and the individual with whom you are interviewing.

- **Anticipate difficult questions**

Prepare for open ended questions such as "What can you tell me about yourself?" In addition, prepare responses to difficult questions such as "Why is your GPA not on your resume?" Employers are more interested in how well you respond to such questions than they are in the actual responses themselves.

- **Consider your first impression**

Be punctual, prepared, well groomed, professionally dressed and personable.

- **Practice**

Practice is the most effective method to improve your interviewing skills. Research the employers and individual interviewer, prepare responses to anticipated questions, and be prepared to discuss every detail of your resume. Then, make an appointment for a mock interview in Career Services, or have a friend or family member help you act out a mock interview.

Phases of an Interview

I. Greeting

The greeting portion of an interview will establish rapport and set the tone for the entire interview. Shake each interviewer's hand and make sure to establish eye contact. A firm, but not bone-crushing, professional handshake is a necessity. The interviewer may explain the structure of the interview or may simply start asking open ended questions. Sometimes an interviewer will not have read your resume before meeting you, or will not have it with him/her. It is important to carry extra copies of your resume when you go to any interview.

II. Discussion

This is the heart of the interview. The interviewer may ask open ended or probing questions depending on their individual style. Your goal should be to convince the interviewer that your qualities and skills match the values and needs of the interviewer's organization. Interviewer styles vary greatly, and some may ask substantive legal questions while others may choose simply to "chat" with you. Use the discussion phase to ask questions you have prepared for the interview.

III. Closing

As the interview comes to an end, the interviewer will usually give you a sense of how the organization will follow-up and may even give you a time frame. If the interviewer does not tell you, you should feel confident about asking. If you have not already done so, offer your writing sample, list of references, and/or transcript. Before you leave, request a business card for each person with whom you met. At a minimum, make sure that you know each interviewer's name and the proper spellings. Thank the interviewer(s) for his/her/their time and shake hands. Take a few minutes after the interview to take notes on information about the employer and any general impressions. This will be valuable when trying to make a final decision and when writing a thank you letter.

Follow Up

Thank you Letters

Write a thank you letter, unless it was an on-campus first interview. (See Thank You Letter section).

Additional information

If the employer requested any additional information, send it along with your thank you letter.

Interview Do's and Don'ts

Do's

- ✓ **Do** your homework.

Gather as much information about the employer and the position as possible before the interview. Your questions and responses should be based on thorough research, but should stem from your actual interests in the employer.

- ✓ **Do** be punctual.

Plan to arrive 5-15 minutes in advance so you have an opportunity to relax and focus your thoughts before you are required to speak. There is almost no excuse for being late that will shake the poor initial impression that being late will make on the interviewer.

- ✓ **Do** relax.

Prepare thoroughly and then enter the interview in a relaxed state.

- ✓ **Do** pay special attention to grooming.

Men: Make sure your hair is neatly trimmed and combed. Also, make sure your face is clean-shaven, except for a well-trimmed beard or mustache.

Women: Err on the conservative side when deciding about make-up, hairstyle and fingernail polish.

✓ **Do** dress appropriately.

During an interview, the goal is to present yourself as polished and professional.

Men: In most cases, a well-cut black, navy, or charcoal business suit, with a dress shirt and a tie is appropriate.

Women: Choose a conservative skirt or pant suit in black, navy or charcoal. If you choose a skirt suit, practice sitting in various chairs to make sure that your skirt maintains a conservative length.

✓ **Do** pay attention to footwear.

Men: Stick with well-shined black or brown lace shoes or dress loafers (and socks).

Women: Opt for conservative pumps. Avoid casual sandals or open-toed shoes, even in the summer.

✓ **Do** be polite and courteous to the employer's receptionist or secretary. Never be arrogant or speak down to a secretary or receptionist. The impression you make on a receptionist or secretary will often be shared with your interviewers.

Don't's

× **Don't** smoke just prior to your interview.

The smell of smoke may linger on your clothing and this can be a turn off for an interviewer.

× **Don't** go overboard with fragrance.

If you choose to wear fragrance, a clean and refreshing **mild** scent is recommended.

× **Don't** speak negatively about a former employer or law school professor.

It always makes you look bad.

× **Don't** dominate the interview.

Instead, strike a balance between providing thorough information so that the interviewer may evaluate you, and having a pleasant two-sided conversation.

× **Don't** interrupt the interviewer.

× **Don't** bring up personal issues or crises.

× **Don't** bring up salary.

× **Don't** be late.

Sample Questions Asked by Employers

The questions that follow are a sampling of questions that you may be asked in an interview. Most interviews, however, do not follow a Q&A structure. If the interviewer seem to be conducting a conversation or talking about the firm, do not be thrown off by this. This is just the interviewer's style. Also, do not be surprised if the interviewer does not ask many questions about you, but instead asks if you want to know anything about the organization or the position. Follow the interviewer's lead, but make sure that you demonstrate to the interviewer why you are a good fit for that particular organization and/or position.

General Questions

1. Tell me about yourself. What else can you tell me?
2. What persuaded you to study law?
3. What areas of the law are of particular interest to you?
4. What law school courses interest you the most?
5. What qualities do you possess that lead you to believe you will make a good lawyer?
6. What is the most significant item on your resume?
7. Why did you choose Rutgers University School of Law - Camden?
8. Where do you plan to be five years after graduation? ten years?
9. With whom have you discussed your career plans?
10. How much significance do you think we should attach to your relatively high (low) GPA?
11. Could you give us any excuse for your failure to stand at the top of your class?
12. Have you given any thought as to how you might pursue continuing legal education after you have been admitted to the bar?
13. Do you approve or disapprove of the [case name] decision?
15. What do you consider to be your greatest strengths? weaknesses?
16. Why are you on Law Journal? Why aren't you on Law Journal?

Law Firm Questions

Large and medium-size law firms

1. Is there anything in particular about our firm that interested you?
2. Are there any other reasons that led you to choose us?
3. Have you talked with anyone about us?
4. What do you think of our firm resume?
5. What part of our practice would be of special interest to you?
6. Is there any particular part of your experience which you think might help you to fit with our firm?
7. Do you think you have the qualities that would enable you to become a partner?
8. How many hours a week would you be prepared to devote to the work of the firm?
9. Would you have an interest in doing pro bono work at the same time? How many hours per week, month or year? Would you be prepared to insist upon it?
10. What would your references tell me about your legal abilities and commitment to the profession?
11. At what other firms have you interviewed?

12. If we made you an offer, how soon would you be prepared to give us an answer?

Small law firms

1. Do you have any ties to this community?
2. What familiarity do you have with the way a small firm operates?
3. Are you committed to work with a small firm and stay with it?
4. Do you know enough about us to believe it would be a satisfactory place for you to work? Why?
5. If we hired you, what salary would you expect at the start?
6. How soon would you hope to be a partner?
7. Do you consider yourself an easy person to get along with? Explain.
8. Do you think you will at first need a lot of supervision and general help?
9. How much responsibility will you be prepared to assume right from the start? Explain.

Government and Public Interest Questions

Government employers

1. Why are you interested in this government agency?
2. How much do you know about us?
3. Would you be prepared to make a career in government?
4. What experience have you had which you think might equip you for this job?
5. Do you have a career plan?
6. What are your feelings about government employees generally and the effectiveness of the bureaucracy?
7. What training have you had in administrative law?
8. How much courtroom experience have you had?

Legal services and public interest groups

1. How committed are you to working with this population?
2. Do you have a general interest in service to the public?
3. Which of the following interest you: domestic relations cases, rights of consumers, landlord/tenant problems, claim collections, civil rights, antidiscrimination actions, rights to municipal services, welfare problems, housing?
4. What experiences have you had in any of the above areas?
5. Are you interested in environmental problems? What experience have you had in this area?
6. Would you be prepared to accept employment away from your present residence?
7. How important to you is the matter of compensation?
8. What do you see as the rewards of working in this area of the law?
9. What are your plans for your legal career?

Judicial Clerkship Questions

1. Explain your interest in trying to secure a clerkship.
2. What is your specific interest in seeking such a job with me?
3. Do you think a one-year term is long enough to make a job worthwhile?

4. What are the particular aspects of a clerkship that you would value?
5. How far do you feel you have progressed in developing your writing skills?
6. How valuable do you consider Law Journal experience in preparing you for a judicial clerkship? Explain.
7. Have you looked into, and if so what have you found out about, the reputation of the judges to whom you are applying for a clerkship?
8. While at law school, have you noted particular judges whose opinions you particularly admired, because of style, substance or ideology?
9. How important to you are the political views of the judge?
12. Do you think a judge is under any obligation to help a law clerk find a job at the end of the term?

How to Handle Discriminatory Questions

Questions regarding your age, sex, marital status, religion, race (i.e., anything that is not a bona fide occupational qualification necessary to perform the job) are discriminatory and therefore impermissible. Because the employer's knowledge of such information may lead to discriminatory hiring practices, you are not required to divulge this type of information.

Examples of discriminatory questions are:

1. Are you married?
2. Do you have children? How old?
3. What does your spouse do?
4. Do you anticipate additions to your family, and if so, how soon? Who will care for children?
5. To what extent will family responsibilities interfere with you performing a normal work week?
6. In emergency situations, would your job or your family take precedence?
7. Does the fact that you and your spouse work create tensions in your family?
8. If one of you had to give up work who would do so?
9. If the work of either of you required a transfer to another city, how would you work it out?

Although most employers refrain from asking these questions, you may at times be confronted with them. Here are three possible ways of responding to such inquiries:

1. The most recommended response is to address the employer's underlying concern without directly answering the question. For example, if you are asked about plans for marriage or children, the employer is usually concerned about your anticipated length of stay in the area, your ability to travel or your ability to be at work on a regular basis. Although you do not need to answer the question directly, you should affirm your understanding of the employer's concern, and assure him or her that your personal life is arranged in such a way that it will not interfere with your job.

2. A more direct, although less comfortable approach is to state to the employer your concern that the issue in question has no apparent bearing on your qualifications for the job. You may ask for clarification of the reasons he or she has for requesting the information. This

method may cause the potential employer some discomfort and could affect the outcome of the interview. This direct method would only be recommended for very forward or offensive comments.

3. Based on your own personal preferences, you may choose to answer these types of questions, but you must realize the possible negative consequences of your actions. Think carefully! Even if you determine this is the appropriate approach in a particular situation, only reveal the information that you are comfortable discussing with this employer or interviewer.

Questions to ask the Interviewer

An interview is an opportunity for an employer to get to know and evaluate you to see if you would be a good “fit” with them. However, it is also your opportunity to get to know and evaluate the employer, through the interviewer, and determine for yourself whether they are a good “fit” for you. Asking questions of the interviewer, or “interviewing the interviewer,” helps you learn things that can assist you in making your decision, helps establish a rapport with the interviewer, demonstrates your interest in the employer, and shows that you are prepared. The following is primarily designed to help law students interviewing for summer associate or law clerk positions with firms, or for positions beginning after graduation including clerkships, and for recent graduates interviewing for junior associate positions. Certainly you may want to ask some of these questions in a more conversational manner appropriate to your interview, and we do not suggest that you should ask them exactly as written here. This list is not intended to be exhaustive of the types of questions you can or should ask. You are strongly encouraged to utilize additional resources to prepare for your interview. A highly recommended resource is *Guerilla Tactics for Getting the Legal Job of Your Dreams*, by Kimm A. Walton, published by Harcourt Brace (1999); specifically, take a look at Chapter 7.

Do’s & Don’t’s for “interviewing the interviewer”

Do’s

- ✓ **Do** always have questions to ask the interviewer.
- ✓ **Do** ask questions as often as possible, throughout the interview, not just at the end when you will probably be asked if you have any questions.
- ✓ **Do** try to ask questions that will help you develop rapport and have a conversation with the interviewer, not just a Q&A session.
- ✓ **Do** ask questions that will show you have done your research on the firm.
- ✓ **Do** ask questions that are related to the actual job and work you would be doing.

Don’t’s

- ✗ **Don’t** ask questions about things you can find on the employer’s web site or other research sources (NALP Directory of Legal Employers, Martindale-Hubbell, etc.)
- ✗ **Don’t** ask “selfish” or “what’s-in-it-for-me?” questions about things like salary, benefits, hours, or partnership track, unless the interviewer brings them up first (this may not necessarily apply once you are an experienced attorney and being considered for a more senior position.)

- ✗ **Don't** ask questions about things that have already been covered in the interview.
- ✗ **Don't** just say "no" when the recruiter (almost invariably) asks at the end of the interview whether you have any more questions. Even if you have no more questions, a better response would be: "You answered all the questions I had during our conversation, and I really enjoyed talking with you and appreciated your insights. If I think of additional questions, may I contact you?"

Sample Questions to ask the interviewer

Questions about what your job would be like

1. What would a typical day or week be for me?
2. How are assignments and department rotations selected (unless you should be able to figure this out from your research)?
3. What criteria are used to measure performance?
4. Who will evaluate me?
5. What kind of work will I do?
6. I am very interested in (practice area). Would I have an opportunity to work on an assignment in that area?
7. If I am assigned to a particular department, will I also receive assignments from other departments?
8. Does the firm allow summer associates to work on pro bono cases for public interest organizations during the summer (most firms will include this information in their NALP profile and/or on their website)?
9. Are summer associates assigned a mentor or supervising attorney for the summer?

Questions designed to evoke a response from the interviewing attorney

1. What do you like about your job?
2. What do you like about working here?
3. What do you like about being a lawyer?
4. What do you find most challenging about being a lawyer?
5. What is a typical day like for you?

Questions that show you have researched the firm

1. I read that your firm was involved in the (such-and-such case). Does your firm do a lot of that type of work?
2. (So-and-so) told me that he did (this-and-that) when he clerked here. That is what I really want to do. Will I be able to do something like that?
3. Generally, ask follow-up questions seeking additional information on something you read or heard about relating to the firm that interests you.