



# Lewis & Clark Law School Career Services Handbook

Building the tools to complete your career journey.



# Interviewing

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# Interviewing

## Introduction

If you have an interview, you have....

- Some idea of what unique interests, aptitudes and experiences qualify you for a given type of legal employment.
- A résumé that reflects a clear picture of your accomplishments and how you can benefit the legal organization to which you are applying.
- Qualified for the position on paper.

The next step in your job search determines if you get the offer. Now, you are dealing with human relationships, relying on your skills of communication, judgment, intuition, and insight into people. The interview is a risk-taking situation and you may feel excitement and apprehension as you prepare for this stage of your job search. The risk is well worth taking since your ultimate reward will be not only a position, but also greater self-knowledge and better interviewing skills. Each interview has the potential to be a positive learning experience, no matter what the outcome.

Perhaps the most important thing to remember about an interview is that it is an exchange of information, a conversation, and not a cross-examination. You are in the interview to assess whether the employer will be suitable to your needs and desires, just as the interviewer is trying to make a similar judgment about you.

Remember, if an employer decides to interview you, a positive value judgment has already been made about your qualifications. It is up to you to show that you will be a good fit with the organization and that your strengths will prove to be assets. You must accentuate your strengths, your abilities, and all the positive aspects of your personality because the interviewer will only spend time interviewing candidates who are qualified, so the choice often comes down to the best fit. As one employer stated, “people hire people they like.”

## Preparation

Preparation is the foundation for a successful interview. Preparation includes not only knowing yourself, but also knowing as much as possible about the employer and interviewer(s). The stress of the interviewing process can be minimized with preparation. To help prepare, review the job interview checklist found at the end of this chapter.

## Know Yourself

You must be prepared to sell yourself during the interview. Review your notes from the self-assessment and self-research you completed. That will refresh your recollection of your skills, abilities, strengths, and interests.

Use your knowledge of yourself to develop self-confidence. Remind yourself of your personal strengths and achievements in both paid and volunteer work. If you have not had specific legal experience, think

about your interests, commitments, and the research and writing skills that you have demonstrated academically or through non-legal work experiences or volunteer work. You may wish to write out your key selling points for review immediately before the interview.

You can never be totally prepared for every question that an interviewer may ask you, but you can be far ahead of your competition if you prepare a loose structure in your mind of the points about yourself and your background that you want the interviewer to know. This is the basic material needed to answer the dreaded question: “Tell me about yourself.”

Review the list of possible questions employers may ask (located at the end of this chapter) and plan your answers. Practice answering questions aloud with a friend or family member: do you sound coherent or do you ramble on? Recognize that employers know you think about these questions and may come up with creative new ones. Know yourself and research the employer so you will be prepared.

Listen to the questions that are asked. If the question calls for a specific answer, give a specific answer. If the question is more general, take the opportunity to structure the answer in a way that stresses your strengths.

Always answer questions positively. Never say anything negative about anything or anyone. Do not belittle the significance of grades or law review. Do not apologize for your grades, your school, or your lack of experience. Do not indicate you are not willing to work hard or that you do not like research and writing.

### *Skeletons in Your Closet*

Be prepared to answer questions about the “skeletons in your closet.” Those include questions about your grades or class standing, the time gaps on your résumé, why you are changing careers, the failure to receive an offer from a summer job or your lack of legal experience, to name a few. There are no right or wrong answers; the key is to anticipate the question, think about how you will answer in a positive manner when asked, and to practice saying the answer. Adequate preparation will help you avoid becoming flustered when the question is asked.

While past failures and shortcomings need not be volunteered, do not try to cover them up or sidestep them. Should the interviewer ask about them, explain the circumstances rather than giving excuses or blaming others. You will create a better impression by being honest and candid.

The *Job Search Manual of the University of Cincinnati College of Law* offers the following suggestions on how to deal with negative aspects to your work history that might hurt your employment prospects. Here are several possible problem areas and suggestions about how to avoid an objection to your background:

- You are lacking specific skills: If you have done a task a few times, describe this experience as “exposure to” the skill; if you have never actually done the job but have learned about it through observation, say that you have “knowledge” of it.
- Your work history has gaps: This will automatically raise interviewer’s suspicions. Do not be on the defensive about it. The best explanations focus on the condition of the job market, time off for school, family responsibilities, etc. Emphasize the type of thing you were involved in doing to look

for a new position, that the time off was a positive step in your career growth, and that overall you have a stable employment record.

- Never lie, and do not knock your boss or employer. Instead, say something like this: “After I took the job I realized that it was wrong for me, but I stuck it out in hopes of making a success of it. My employer also realized that the situation was not working out, and I was asked to leave. From that experience I now have a better understanding of what positions I am interested in.”
- You are changing careers: Emphasize your transferable skills, and the aspects of your work that are most similar to the legal field. Also, stress your ability to learn and adapt quickly.
- You job-hopped: Describe why you were forced to change jobs by factors beyond your control, for example, family commitments. Assure interviewers that you are eager to make a long-term commitment to your next employer.

## Know the Employer and the Interviewer

### *The Basics*

Remember that you, too, are the interviewer. You should learn as much as you reasonably can about your prospective employer/interviewer(s) so you can have an informed conversation.

Resources for researching employers:

- Directories (hardcopy and online). Including, the National Association for Legal Career Professionals (NALP) Directory of Legal Employers ([www.nalpdirectory.com](http://www.nalpdirectory.com)), the Vault Guide to Top 100 Law Firms, and the other directories listed on “Career Links” page on the CPDC website & available in the CPDC Resource Library,
- Student Employment Evaluations, available in the Career Services Resource Library.
- Law firm websites. A website is the employer’s public personality and often gives a sense of how they’d like to be seen by clients and others, what the culture may be like, and what they value as an entity.
- Conversations with upper-division students, alumni and faculty, and current and past employees.

### *Beyond the Obvious*

Conduct a Lexis or Westlaw search of recent cases the employer or interviewer has been involved in; check for law review articles by the interviewer; check periodicals for articles about the employer; read annual reports of the employer, if a corporation. Use the many databases on Lexis and Westlaw. Again, the list of possible resources is limited only by your own initiative.

If the employer practices in, or if you have indicated a preference for, a particular area of the law, be sure that you are up to date with the latest developments in that area. Are there new developments or trends that affect the practice? Know the geographic area as well. What is the business climate or the community leaning on issues that might affect the employer?

Being prepared to ask a number of questions of the interviewer about the firm or agency demonstrates your interest and allows the interview to become a mutual exchange of ideas and information. Prepare good questions: the inability to ask a good question can kill an otherwise successful interview. Use the information collected from your research to create effective questions. Do not use all your questions at the beginning of the interview. Save some, so that at the close of the interview when you are asked if you have any questions you still have a few to ask. If all your prepared queries have been answered, reword a question to request additional information. Your questions should show that you have done your research about the employer and that you have some knowledge about their policies, philosophies, and work.

Review the lists of possible questions that you can ask and that you may be asked that are listed at the end of this chapter. Remember these are only examples; make them your own.

### Other Preparation Tips:

- Before the interview, review the application materials you sent to the employer and bring extra copies with you.
- Reread your writing sample and be prepared to answer questions about it or to discuss your position/arguments. Substantive questions about your arguments are fair game.
- Review your research, especially if you are interviewing with several employers because it is easy to confuse the firm with the new, growing immigration practice, and the firm with the old and established immigration practice.

### Dress

It is important that you dress appropriately for the interview. When in doubt, err on the conservative side. Men should wear a suit as opposed to a sports coat. Women should wear a suit with a knee-length or below skirt hem or a pantsuit, closed toe shoes, and minimal jewelry. Your interviewer may make a snap judgment about how you will fit in with their office and how clients will perceive you, other attorneys, and judges based on your dress. Practice walking, sitting, and being comfortable in your interview clothes, they are different from jeans! See the “Dress for Success” tips at the end of this chapter.

### Interview Protocol

You will be invited for an interview by mail, phone, or email, and you will schedule the interview with a secretary, recruiting administrator, or attorney. Reply to schedule or decline promptly. Take an active role in setting a convenient date and finding out what format is planned; for example, will you be interviewing with one attorney or several at the same time? Ask how long the interview is expected to last and for the names of the people who will be interviewing you. If you would like to meet certain attorneys or focus on certain areas of practice, make this clear. Not only will you learn more, you will come across as an assertive, involved participant in a mutual selection process.

The obvious bears repeating: Be on time. If running late, call ahead. Take extra copies of your résumé, writing sample, list of references, and transcript. Even if not previously requested by the employer, you will appear organized and prepared if you have your materials with you. Do not chew gum, eat, or drink

during the interview. Turn your cell phone off, not to vibrate or silent, but off. Relax and be yourself, try not to be rigid, use some hand gestures, avoid nervous habits, and establish and maintain eye contact. In order to maintain good eye contact and stay focused on the questions, do not take notes during the interview. Overall, your demeanor should help to communicate that you are enthusiastic about the position and the employer.

## The Interview

An interview has three parts: a greeting, a discussion/exchange of information, and a closing.

### Greeting

The greeting is crucial. First impressions are very important; a good first impression will set the tone for a good interview and a bad first impression will be almost impossible to overcome. Nonverbal communication is important. Professional dress, a firm handshake, good eye contact, and a smile will all add to a good first impression. Address the interviewer by his/her proper name (Mr./Ms. Smith) unless invited to use his/her first name. Do not forget about the impression you make before you meet the interviewer—receptionist and secretary opinions also matter greatly.

Be certain that you size up the interviewer as quickly as possible, preferably within the first two or three minutes. What type of personality does the recruiter have: conservative, relaxed, personable, or didactic? What “mood” is s/he in? Be alert for body language. When you feel that you have some knowledge of the individual with whom you are dealing, you will then be able to apply that knowledge and adapt to their personality.

### Discussion

The discussion section is your chance to sell yourself and to learn more about the employer. Do not wait for the “right” question to be asked – make sure you convey the information about yourself that will be relevant to this employer and will convince them that you are the right person for the job. Continue with good eye contact and avoid any nervous gestures or habits. Smile! Speak clearly and thoughtfully. Answer the questions asked and ask thoughtful questions of your own.

### Closing

The closing is also important – leave the interviewer with a good impression. Reiterate your interest in the position and the employer. Do not be afraid to ask for the job. Ask if there is any additional information you can provide. Ask when you might expect to hear something and whom you can contact with further questions. End with, once again, a firm handshake, eye contact and a smile.

## Types of Interviews

### *Prescreening Interviews*

Some employers conduct short preliminary or “prescreening” interviews to narrow the pool of possible candidates to a reasonable number who are then interviewed for a longer period of time and/or by more people. Screening interviews are difficult because they usually last only 20 to 30 minutes and it may be hard to sell yourself in that limited amount of time. Personality and a seemingly good match are often the keys to success.

Some employers conduct initial interviews by phone. For special considerations and tips on phone interviews, see the information at the end of this chapter.

### *Callback Interviews*

Many employers require more than one interview. If your first interview was through an on campus interview during the fall recruiting season, most firms follow up with a “callback” interview at their office. The second interview indicates that the firm remains interested in you as a candidate. At the callback, other members of the office will interview you.

A typical callback interview at a larger law firm will last a half-day. You will usually meet with the recruiting administrator or attorney who coordinated the process, and in serial fashion, with a number of associates and partners. Lunch or dinner may be included. Even though the tone may seem more informal at these meals, they are part of the selection process. Job offers have been lost due to unprofessional behavior at a meal.

Be prepared for very thorough interviews and for seeing many attorneys in one day. You should conduct additional research about the employer and each of the interviewers so you know more than you did during the initial interview and so you will be able to ask thoughtful questions. At this point, it is crucial that you are as familiar with the employer as possible and show a great deal of interest and knowledge. The unique challenge of a long in-office visit, where you meet with one attorney after another, is keeping your energy and enthusiasm high. Remind yourself that the fourth associate you meet has not heard your story three times, even if you are tired of retelling it! Asking the same questions of several attorneys is fine and will give you varying perspectives to compare.

### *How Many Interviewers?*

Most interviews will be one-on-one, one interviewer and one applicant. It is also common to see two interviewers at a time, in which case you want to be sure that you involve both interviewers in the process. Some employers use group or panel interviews; questions may be initiated freeform or on rotational basis by each member of the interviewing committee or only by some. In these interviews, it is important to remember that everyone is evaluating you, so make eye contact with and try to interact with all of the interviewers and direct some of your responses to each person.

## Unusual Interview Questions

As more and more is written about typical interview questions, employers are trying to come up with new and innovative questions. By knowing yourself and the employer, and through thorough preparation, you should be able to deal with any unexpected or unusual questions.

Situational and behavioral questions are becoming more common. You may also be asked some substantive questions, and hypothetical questions are common with some employers. This format makes it more difficult for you to establish rapport, let alone to direct the flow of the interview. Keep in mind that the questions are often designed to test your ability to think on your feet rather than to test for the “right answers.” Interviewers are not usually as interested in your answers as in how you arrived at them. If the question deals with substantive law, do not be afraid to demonstrate your knowledge in that area. Surprisingly, you may know more than they do. If you do not know anything about the area of law, explain the research process you would use.

# Discrimination in Hiring: Improper Questions

In the course of your interviewing career, you may encounter improper questions. You need to be aware of possible inappropriate or improper questions and be prepared to deal with these questions if they are asked. As a rule, only questions that are specifically related to the job are permissible.

Examples of potentially sensitive subjects include age, arrest record, birthplace, children, color, criminal record, ethnicity, family status or size, marital status, national origin, origin of name, race, religion, residence, and sexual preference.

Attorneys may be unaware of their insensitivity to women, minorities, handicapped students, older students, gays and lesbians, etc. While naiveté is no excuse, you should recognize that sometimes a question you hear as intrusive is intended only to get to know you better as a person. Are you still interested in the position? If so, you will want to select a tactful response that does not close the door with that organization, yet skillfully allows you to maintain your integrity. Keep in mind that, despite ongoing efforts of the law schools and the organized bar, some employers are not as sensitive as we would wish. After such an incident, you should let Career Services know and we can talk to the employer about appropriate interviewing.

Interview questions that do not relate directly to your qualifications for performing a job may be considered inappropriate or outright illegal, as are questions asked of one group but not of all candidates. You should see your Career Services advisor if you feel you have been discriminated against. In any case, you must exercise mature judgment in assessing interviewer's statements and questions in terms of discriminatory intent or practice.

When an incident occurs, you need to think quickly about how serious a matter it is and how you wish to handle it. Your options include:

1. Answer briefly and/or vaguely and change the subject;
2. Ask tactfully why the question was asked or how it relates to the demands of the position;
3. Choose not to answer and assert calmly that you do not see the question as relevant to your qualifications for the position; or
4. Try to figure out the question behind the question, which is often the best tactic. In other words, what is the interviewer's underlying concern? Direct your answer to that concern. For example, when an employer questions an applicant about his or her marital status or plans to have children, s/he is not interested in the candidate's personal life, but is probably attempting to learn how committed the applicant is to the job. An example of this is as follows:

Q: "Do you think you can juggle family responsibilities and carry a heavy case load too?"

A: "If I am hearing you correctly, you would like to know if I am capable of managing my time effectively. I have successfully managed to complete three years of law school, work both full and part-time jobs, and meet my family responsibilities while attending law school. I can put in the necessary time required to get the job done."

## When Panic Strikes

There will be many applications for every job and most employers choose to interview several candidates. Do not panic if you do not receive positive responses from these interviews. For those interviewing on campus, do not panic during the interviewing season if you are not receiving positive responses. Most employers interview a number of qualified candidates and some of the firms/agencies/organizations visiting campus, interview applicants from all over the country, which means that several hundred students may be interviewed for a few positions. Usually the students who are having success interviewing are the ones you hear about; you are not alone if you have received several rejection letters without one positive reply. If the interviewing process discourages you, make an appointment with Career Services. Perhaps there are tips on interviewing techniques that may increase your chances of success.

To avoid disappointment, do your research on an employer before applying. If an employer has a reputation for being grade conscious or if you can determine by reading the online attorney bios on the firm's website that law review tends to be important, consider those factors and determine how closely your qualifications match those the employer is likely seeking before you apply.

## Evaluation

Every interview should also be a learning experience. Evaluate how things went – what went well and what did not? Were you over or under dressed? Did you convey all of the points about yourself that you wanted to convey? Did you have good questions ready and did you ask the questions you wanted to ask? Make notes about the employer and your impressions following the interview – this will be a big help if you receive another interview.

## Expenses

Local firms generally do not reimburse local candidates for costs such as parking or bus fare. For interviews with an out-of-town employer, establish a clear understanding about what kinds of expenses and what amounts the employer will reimburse before the interview. Some of the larger law firms offer out-of-town candidates reimbursement for normal business expenses including round trip coach airfare, hotel, meals, and ground transportation. Government agencies, public interest organizations, judges, and smaller firms usually do not offer reimbursements. If you have an interview with an out of state federal or state appellate court judge, ask Career Services about travel funding.

## Thank You Letters

Do not forget the thank you letter, a must after every interview. See Chapter 3.

## Handling Offers

While circumstances vary in individual cases, some general comments about handling an offer may be helpful. In fairness to employers and other students, offers should be accepted or rejected as soon as possible. This does not mean that any employer should unduly pressure students. Specific rules that apply to the fall on campus interviews and NALP Employers are discussed in the NALP attachments.

The decision to accept or reject an offer or to choose one of several offers is admittedly difficult. Students should refer to all available sources of information about their prospective employer. On the

question of salary, Career Services has some data that may be helpful. At the same time, students are encouraged to remain flexible in their salary expectations. The experience that might be gained in a particular position, the opportunity for advancement, the locale, and the amount of responsibility all merit at least as much consideration as the starting salary.

Students should not accept offers unless they are sure that they will be prepared to fill the position. If you receive an offer, and you are not ready to immediately decide, indicate your interest and ask when the employer needs an answer. Once you make a decision, call your contact immediately with your answer and follow up with a confirmation letter. Once you have accepted an offer from an employer, you should notify any employers with whom you have pending applications. Let them know you have accepted a job and need to withdraw from their consideration. *Never* accept a job with a plan to renege if something better comes along.

## Final Tips

Remember, throughout the interview process, employers are trying to determine whether you would “fit in” their office and they are trying to gauge how you will appear to opposing attorneys, clients, judges, and juries. Be yourself; remember that it is relatively useless to be artificial during an interview because such a facade is quickly penetrated. If you have thoroughly researched the employer and identified the points you wish to make, you are then in the position to act in an honest and convincing manner which can only strengthen the impression you make upon the potential employer. If you do pretend to be someone other than yourself, you may find that you are hired into a situation that is quickly untenable. If, however, you are forthright and personable, you will be better prepared to answer the important question: “Is this the employer which will offer me the most in terms of satisfaction, growth, and goals?”

Remember these final tips:

- Be positive and appropriately enthusiastic.
- Keep in mind a loose structure of the points you want to make in the interview.
- Remind yourself you would be an asset to any firm or agency.
- Be yourself.
- Avoid a defensive attitude about yourself or your school.
- Sell yourself by mentioning your strong points and abilities.
- Greet the interviewer in a natural and cordial manner; return a firm handshake.
- Look the interviewer in the eye when you speak, but not to the point that it is unnatural.
- Determine the interviewer’s character and attitude as early in the interview as possible in order to adapt to and utilize the interviewer’s interests.
- Be professional in all ways; dress appropriately, be punctual, bring extra copies of your résumé and a copy of your references and transcript as well as samples of legal writing.
- Determine when the next communication will take place between you and the interviewer. If this information is not offered, ask.
- Send a thank you letter after every interview.

## Phone Interviews

Phone interviews can be deceptively tough. You cannot impress them with your nice interview suit. You cannot win them over with a confident smile. All they have to judge you by is the sound of your

voice. With a little bit of preparation and planning, however, you can make your phone interview a success.

### ***Prepare your mind and body***

- Prepare as you would for any other “live” interview. Anticipate which questions will be asked and practice answering them aloud.
- Make sure you do not speak too quickly (or too slowly or too quietly) and that you speak distinctly. You want your interviewer to understand your answer.
- Even though they cannot see you, do not wear your sloppy clothes – unbelievably, it will affect your performance!
- Make sure you have had a snack (so you will not be distracted by hunger) and that you have used the bathroom about ten minutes prior to the appointment.
- During the interview, smile! Interviewers will “hear” it over the phone.
- Do not tell jokes – because an interviewer cannot see your body language, you run the risk that it may offend someone or that a sarcastic comment will be misinterpreted.

### ***Prepare the environment***

- Eliminate all distractions. If you are at home, make sure pets are outside or in another room. Hire a babysitter to watch your children. Do not have your computer or the TV on.
- Sit in a comfortable chair but do not recline – again, it will come through in your voice and your attitude.
- Turn off call waiting or other features on your phone that could interrupt or distract you.
- Have a glass of water handy in case you get thirsty.
- Make sure you can see a clock – if the interviewer has previously stated the interview will last 30 minutes, this will help you keep track of the time.

### ***Prepare your materials***

- Make sure to have a copy of your résumé, transcript, and list of references in front of you during the interview.
- If the interview is the result of your response to a job posting, have a copy in front of you.
- Have your list of questions for the employer written down and ready to ask.
- Have a pad of paper available to jot notes during the interview.

At the conclusion of the interview, thank the interviewer for their time. Follow up with a thank you letter, just as you would for an in-person interview.

## Skype/Video Conferencing Interviews

Video conferenced interviews are something of a hybrid between a phone and in-person interview, with a few specific differences. As with a phone interview, you are more in control of your surroundings, but because the interviewer can see you, you'll need to pay more attention to preparing the surroundings. Make sure that the web-cam's view does not include anything distracting; if possible create a neutral back drop, like a blank wall or curtain. Try to make "eye contact" with the camera and not look away to check the clock or your notes, if possible.

You will also need to pay attention to any delay caused by the video conference set up; be aware that there may be awkward pauses at times, and try not to talk over the interviewer. Give your answers in a way that makes clear that you have finished your answer, to indicate that you're ready for the next question, perhaps by summing up what you've just said. Be sure to speak clearly and not too quickly.

Dress as you would for an in-person interview, and be sure that you are sitting up straight, keeping hand gestures to a minimum.

*Note: It would be an excellent idea to test out your screen presence and get used to the video conference concept by practicing ahead of time with a friend!*

## How to impress your interviewer (In 30 minutes or less)

Some people naturally stand out in a crowd. Sometimes that's good and sometimes not! When it comes to a legal job interview, you want and need to stand out in a "good" way: by impressing the interviewer with who you are and what you can offer that no one else can.

The underlying assumption is that you have done thorough research on the employer and on your interviewer. Being prepared is a vital part of presenting yourself and your skills in the best light possible. But to really stand out, there are several strategies you can use to impress your interviewer.

**Demonstrate Enthusiasm in the Employer, the Position, and in Yourself:** Enthusiasm is contagious, and you want the employer to be enthusiastic about you and what you have to offer the firm. Part of coming across as enthusiastic is to know the employer, know yourself, and be able connect what the employer does with what you have to offer. While every person does, in fact, have something special to offer, it is the inability to get this message across to the interviewer that sinks some applicants. Being low key and calm is okay, but being upbeat and excited about the employer, your law school experience, and the employment experience awaiting you is really impressive. Don't underestimate the power of an enthusiastic approach.

**Ask Good, Original, Leading Questions:** Time and again interviewers say that the "do you have any questions" section of the interview ends an otherwise good interview on a less than positive note. Why? Because the applicant is not prepared to ask interesting, leading questions. Ideally, you will have asked some questions during the "discussion" section of your interview. When an interview really becomes more of a discussion (with both the interviewer and applicant asking questions) it usually becomes less stressful. No matter how many questions you have asked, be prepared to ask questions at the end of the interview! Even if the interviewer

answered the questions you were planning to ask, dig deep and come up with some interesting questions. Even better, assure yourself that your questions won't be answered in advance by preparing questions that are not too common. Your research on the employer may lead you to great questions, as may research on the area of practice in which you are interested (maybe via an online search of the practice area).

Be Prepared to Answer the "Common" Questions: It is so easy to read through the list of commonly asked interview questions in the CPDC Handbook and say "I know how I will answer that question." But will you really be able to under the stress of an interview and will you be able to answer it succinctly and in the most positive light? To be on the safe side, practice answering out loud or run through the questions and your answers with a friend. Make sure you are prepared the next time an interviewer asks you to "tell me a little bit about yourself" or "why did you decide to go to law school." Your answer should be both sincere and place you in the most positive light possible.

Know How to Sell Yourself Quickly: Before you walk through the door for your interview, figure out how, if you had to, you could sell yourself to the employer in two minutes. Why? Because many interviewers make a decision about an applicant within the first two minutes of the interview. The decision is usually based on how well the applicant and the interviewer "click". The interviewer has a responsibility to their law firm or organization to recommend applicants who would fit into their office culture well and who they would want to interact with their clients. Clients want to see a confident attorney or law clerk; your ability to sell yourself in an interview is viewed as an indication of how you will come across to the client. If you have an interview, you can safely assume they are pleased with your credentials. Now you have to sell your personal attributes and your unique qualifications. Don't be overly obnoxious in selling yourself, but be proud of what you have accomplished and your special personality traits.

Know Your Interview "Weaknesses" and How to Manage Them: In an interview you should maintain good eye contact, control nervous habits, maintain an even and strong voice, have a firm handshake and answer the question asked. Identify any problems you may have in those areas. For example, some people let their voice trail off at the end of a sentence (as a transition or to signal the completion of an answer). This can be distracting to an interviewer and be seen as a sign that the applicant is not very confident in their answer. If you think you don't have any distracting habits or you don't know what they are, consider doing a mock interview or having yourself videotaped: it can be very revealing!

Be Considerate: Remember that your interviewer may have already conducted several interviews or had a day full of stress on client matters. Be observant. Stay enthusiastic even if the interviewer seems out of steam. Also, be aware of your time constraints. Don't, however, keep looking at your watch - just be conscious of how long you are talking.

Be Professional: Make *sure* your email, telephone, address and other contact information is current! But perhaps most important of all, *make sure it is professional*. Don't have an email address that reads something like [bunny3@hotmail.com](mailto:bunny3@hotmail.com). Make sure it reflects your name or is otherwise professional. Likewise, check your

outgoing cell phone and home phone messages. Make sure your voice is crisp and professional, and that you clearly state your full name. Don't have music or other noise in the background, and don't have children on the message.

While preparing for an interview, make sure to think about what you would be looking for if you were doing the interviewing. The interviewer has a great deal of responsibility--be sure that you are ready to convince them that you are the best candidate for the position.

## Interview Questions

Always be prepared to discuss in detail everything on your résumé: skills, interests, past work experience, or articles written.

### The Ten Tough Ones

#### **1. What is your class rank? Why aren't your grades higher?**

For everyone not in the top 25-30%, you will have to be prepared to answer this question, and the more exclusive the firm, the greater the possibility that those outside the top 1% will have to answer it. Be honest and straightforward; some of these responses may be true for you: Your goal was to have a balanced approach to law school (work, volunteer activities, family, etc.); you would have loved to have been first in the class, but did the best you could; your grades reflect only how well you do on timed written examinations and multiple-choice, not on how well you research and write (perhaps you got high marks on papers, if so, say so); your former employers, professors, etc. would say that you had strong research and writing skills.

#### **2. Why weren't you on law review?**

Perhaps you didn't grade on or did not choose to write on. Perhaps you felt you were more interested in gaining practical legal experience clerking in a law office than performing editing and cite-checking in a more academic environment. When offered those choices and given your limited time as a student, you took the "real world" route.

#### **3. What would your former supervisor say were your greatest weaknesses? What do you perceive your greatest weaknesses are?**

Firms look for certain qualities: initiative; independent, rational thinking; integrity; diligence; ability to complete tasks in a timely manner; punctuality; ambition. You may be able to say: "Well, my supervisor might say I take things a little seriously." (you are diligent); "I am sometimes overly enthusiastic and take on large projects (too many projects) that keep me working later than I wanted to in order to make a deadline." (ambition); "I am always at work before she is." (punctual). Resist the urge to play "true confessions" ("I smoke/drink too much." "I have a hard time meeting deadlines.") An employer is assessing your answer in light of the qualities they are seeking in a candidate.

#### **4. What are your greatest strengths?**

Many people have trouble with this because they feel like it's bragging. What firms are looking for here are qualities you have that would fit with what they are looking for: diligence, punctuality, timeliness, ambition, sense of humor, etc. Think about the type of work the employer does, and the type of qualities needed to excel in that position. Then, think about which of these strengths you possess and how you have demonstrated them in the past. State the strength, then provide an example of how you have demonstrated that strength: "Well, I believe that I have a strong work ethic, for example, I make it a point to always arrive early and make a list before I start my day, and check it at the end of the day to see what tasks I have not completed and arrange a list for the following day."

#### **5. Where do you see yourself in five years?**

Of course, the firm is looking for you to say you will be with them! But no one truly knows where they will be. Some good responses are to think seriously about the firm, your background, and some strong interests you have developed in law school, and then combine them in your answer. For example, if interviewing with a tax and business law firm, you can say: "I went to law school not really having a strong idea of the area I wanted to practice in, but after taking a tax and introductory business course, I became very interested in those areas, and focused some of my clerking experiences on them. I would hope that I could be practicing tax and business law as a senior associate or partner in a small firm just like this - for me, that would be ideal."

#### **6. What is it about your background that would make you fit with our firm?**

Often you will get this, or a variation of it, when someone is intrigued with you, or you have been referred by someone, but your background doesn't necessarily fit exactly with what the firm does. You must be prepared to talk about how your varied experiences have given you a depth of knowledge, transferable skills and relevant experience that you can bring to any employer.

#### **7. Why do you want to work here?**

It is astonishing how many interviewees overlook this question. Every employer wants to know details about why you want them in particular; this is especially important if you are interviewing in a particular department at a large agency or firm; you must be prepared to articulate why you want to work for the overall firm or agency, but most particularly, why you want to work for that department. Here is where you can draw upon your employer research, background, experiences, classes in law school and goals and put them all together in your answers.

#### **8. Why do you want to be a lawyer?**

This feels like a trick question, and isn't always asked, but what the interviewer wants to know here is, what is it about the profession that gives you passion or a sense of purpose? Make sure you tie your answer in to the goals of the employer: e.g., if it's a small plaintiffs' personal injury practice, perhaps you say that no other profession in the world has the ability to help people transform their lives, or to keep the system honest and working.

## **9. What is the toughest professional problem or issue you have faced, and how did you resolve it?**

Pure and simple, they want to see your problem solving skills, and how you got yourself out of a tough situation. You will be faced with them at work, it is just a matter of when. Be prepared to discuss a work-related situation that was difficult (even if it was just a cranky customer at the front counter), and how you worked to resolve it. The employer wants to see indications that you have the skills they are seeking.

## **10. What do you want to be paid?**

Large firms rarely, if ever, will ask you this question, because they have a tiered system for new hires for the most part, and the starting wage is usually posted on their website or in the NALP Directory ([www.nalpdirectory.com](http://www.nalpdirectory.com)). However, often you will be asked this, sometimes even in the first interview, by small and mid-size firms. See the Career Services website, electronic resources, or talk to your Career advisor for tips on negotiating salary.

## **Other Random Questions**

- Tell me about yourself. How would you describe yourself? Don't just repeat your résumé or offer an autobiography. What they're really asking here is, "What in your background makes you a good candidate for this job?"
- What are your long-range and short-range goals and objectives? Discuss the connection between your goals and the position you're interviewing for or type of law you are interested in.
- What made you decide to go to law school? Highlight a strength or talent; show your commitment to the legal profession, interest in employer's practice areas, etc.
- Why did you choose your law school? Answer with positive aspects of your experiences, not negative.
- Why should I hire you? Highlight significant past experiences and abilities that match what the employer is looking for.
- Which courses have you enjoyed most in law school? Least? Why?
- Where do you stand in your class? Be sure to answer before launching into an explanation of why it isn't higher.
- Do you know/have any idea about which area of practice you would like to specialize in?
- In what sort of environment are you most comfortable? Ideally, your favorite environment will be similar to the employer's with whom you are interviewing. Find this information out by conducting thorough research.
- What was the most difficult decision you had to make in life and why was it so difficult?
- I see from your résumé that you \_\_\_\_\_ (play baseball, speak French, are interested in real estate, etc.) This is not a statement where you answer yes or no; the question is inviting you to tell me more about your baseball team, French speaking abilities or interest in real estate.
- How has your legal education prepared you to work here? To be a lawyer?
- What qualities/qualifications do you have that will make you a successful lawyer?
- What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
- How do you determine or evaluate success?
- What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?

- Describe your most rewarding law school experience.
- What do you do when you are not in law school?
- Why do you want to work in this city/state? This is especially important if your résumé does not reflect any connection to the area.
- If you weren't practicing law/in law school, what else would you do (with your education)?
- Why are you changing careers?
- Would you explain Lewis and Clark's grading system? Fact sheets are available from the Registrar and in CPDC.
- Why did you choose that particular topic to write on for law review? Let's talk about it....
- What are you currently reading?
- Would you prefer to work on one case for an entire year or on 12 cases during the same period of time?
- What did you like best about your last job? What did you dislike most about it?
- How did you get along with your co-workers/secretary/boss in your last job? What three words would she or he use to describe you?
- What would you prefer doing full time: counseling clients, research, negotiation, litigation?
- What have you learned from participation on a journal or in a clinical program?
- Do you have any other outstanding job offers? If so, where?
- Tell me about your greatest law related accomplishment.
- What else do you think I should know about you? From your preparation beforehand, you should have an additional strength or accomplishment to highlight here. Don't say there isn't anything else - you're more interesting than that!
- Do you have any questions that I can answer? This usually signals that the interview is beginning to come to a close. Have several good prepared questions. Don't ask anything that you could have found out by reading information that is publicly available. Even inexperienced interviewers can spot a canned or "recommended" question a mile away! In some way, personalize your questions, and make them your own.

### **Some Situational Questions:**

- How would you handle a client who called upset about...?
- How would you handle a situation where a client wanted you to do something you were concerned was unethical?
- What would you do if you knew a witness was going to lie on the witness stand?
- Describe what course of action you would take if an opposing party served you with a subpoena to your own deposition, telling you that your responses to a discovery request broke the attorney-client privilege and inserted you into the lawsuit.
- Be prepared to discuss any hypothetical situation involving some substantive law either in the area of the firm's specialty or to which you profess superior or in-depth knowledge.

### **Some Strange, But True Questions:**

- If you were a color, what color would you be?
- If you were a book, what would your title be?

- Do you prefer cats or dogs and why?
- Which Justice of the Supreme Court/historical figure/comic character do you most identify with and why?

## The hypothetical question

In some interviews (e.g., with a Public Defender or District Attorney office) you can expect a hypothetical question that tests your knowledge of the law. One basic key is to avoid becoming flustered by the question. Remember that there is no right answer. The interviewer is testing your ability to think and reason on your feet. The following suggestions are offered by the NALP/BLSA Northwest Law Student Job Fair Interview Preparation Packet.

- Step 1: Don't rush. Don't jump to give your conclusion. Take a few seconds to think. You can restate the question to be sure you understand it.
- Step 2: Identify different modes of attack. The question is loaded (on purpose). There should be at least two good arguments supporting at least two different and conflicting conclusions. Don't ignore either side.
- Step 3: Don't hedge. We all know the question is loaded. We all know there are several good arguments.
- Step 4: Begin your response by identifying what you believe to be the different arguments. Give them in order of palpability. Then go back to the first argument and outline it. If there is time, outline the next argument, etc.
- Step 5: Don't get nailed. If there's a weak point in one of your arguments, so what? No lawyer is expected to make airtight arguments on an unfamiliar question extemporaneously! If challenged, be assertive. Say, "Yes, that is a weakness in that argument. Perhaps it could be strengthened with some research." Immediately go to your next argument.

The name of the "Hypothetical Question Game" is: "Think Like a Lawyer."

## Questions for the employer

Always make sure you check an employer's website before preparing questions! Obviously there are many more targeted questions, but these can give you a start.

### General Questions

- What qualities do you believe make a successful associate in your firm?
- What types of skills and accomplishments would you expect from me after one year?
- What type of supervision and responsibilities are given to new associates?
- Describe your training program.
- How soon would you anticipate that I will be doing (memoranda, briefs, interviewing clients, handling my own caseload, handling litigation)?
- How much client involvement will I have, and what will it involve?

- What kind of outside activities do the lawyers participate in? (county and state Bar, clubs, boards)? Would new members of your firm be invited to engage in community activities? To what extent?
  - What do you enjoy about your particular practice or area of the law? What do you find most challenging?
  - What do you personally feel the firm's strengths and weaknesses are?
  - How many associates have you hired in the past 10 years? Are they all still here? For those who left, why did they leave?
  - What is the firm's management style and structure?
  - How would you characterize the atmosphere of the firm?
  - What are the firm's expectations from new associates in terms of business development? Do you offer training?
  - Explain your training and evaluation program to me. How are the results of evaluations communicated to the employee? What role does the employee play?
  - What types of programs do you have for professional development of your employees?
  - What is the level of interaction between associates and partners? Describe it.
  - What areas of the firm are growing and how varied is the client base?
  - How much support staff, and what type do you have? How do you work with them?
  - How does the firm determine what type of work a new associate is to be assigned? How is the work of the new associate supervised?
  - Does the firm require its attorneys to specialize? When does the decision to specialize occur? Is the decision made by the new associate, the firm or both?
  - How soon does the new associate get direct client contact and substantial responsibilities?
  - What are the criteria for advancement? To what extent is the development of new clients a prerequisite to advancement?
  - What is the specialty of the interviewer? What type of work does he or she do in a normal day? How long has the interviewer been with the firm? Did the interviewer work for someone else before joining the firm? Was the interviewer a law clerk for the firm?
  - From my research, I see that you are involved in the (e.g. tax) area. Could you tell me how you got interested in this area and a little bit about what your practice is like?
  - What are the firm's expectations with respect to further growth?
  - What made you join the firm/agency?
  - What is the expectation for billable hours for new associates? Is that for hours actually billed, or for receivables? Are billed hours discounted? Explain to me how the billing expectation is arrived at.
  - How many years, on the average, does it take to become a partner?

Large Firms (These will vary greatly depending upon if you are interviewing with a partner or an associate at the level you are looking to enter into. Usually you can ask an associate more detailed questions on quality of life issues, etc.)

- What flexibility is there within this firm to allow transfer between one specialized department to another?
- What do new associates and laterals tell you their biggest challenges are? What do they like most about the firm?

- What opportunities for pro bono are there? What are some of the projects your attorneys are working on?
- Describe for me the programs the firm has in place for attorney professional development. Does the firm have a mentoring program and how are mentors/mentees matched?

### Corporate Law Departments

- What is the department reporting chain, and to whom does the chief legal officer report?
- When do promotions occur? How often?
- To what extent do the in-house attorneys perform non-legal work?
- To what extent (and in what areas) is outside counsel used? To what degree do in-house attorneys interface with retained counsel?
- Are your salaries competitive with law firms? (Not a first interview question)
- Describe how the attorneys work with their “clients” in the corporation.

### Government Agencies

- How does this agency interact with other related government agencies?
- Describe for me how you interact with your “clients.”
- What for you are the benefits and drawbacks of working for this agency?

### Public Interest Organizations

- What are your funding sources? Is the position one that requires yearly funding?
- What is the percentage of direct representation to impact cases?
- Describe your client population. How do they come to you? What resources do you have for outreach into the community?
- What types of support services are available, e.g., access to national clearinghouses, networks with similar groups, etc.

# Attachments

# Job Interview Checklist

*Adapted from “Steps to a Successful Job Interview”, by Elizabeth Dear-Bahi and Vera Sullivan.*

## Self-Evaluation

- Have I assessed my personal strengths and weaknesses?
- Have I defined my lifestyle and values?

## Establishing Career Goals

- What do I want to do?
- Where do I want to do it?
- What do I want from my working life (money, power, prestige, achievement, recognition)?
- What organizations interest me?
- Who has the hiring power in these organizations?
- What skills do I have, enjoy using and want to use in a job?
- What are my strengths and weaknesses in terms of work?
- Which skills do I want to develop?

## Image Management

- Have I prepared and printed a professional looking résumé?
- Have I written a tailored cover letter to accompany my résumé on matching paper?
- Have I planned my interview wardrobe?

## Developing and Using Research Skills, Prior to the Interview

- Have I researched the history, structure, and services of the organization I am interviewing?
- Have I decided why a given organization should want my talents?
- Are my qualifications and skills compatible with the prospective employer’s expectations?
- Have I read the employer’s website and literature: directory information, financial reports, promotional material, annual reports, articles in publications, etc.?
- Whom do I know who already works for the employer? Whom do I know who knows someone who works for the employer? (Contact them – call, ask questions about the employer, and find out inside information.) Who will be interviewing me? What does the program need? What can I give? Who is on the search committee? Can s/he put in a good word for me?

## Practicing Communication Skills:

- Have I determined the narrative/ theme I'd like to convey in my answers as well as my questions during this interview?
- Have I planned the questions I want to ask the interviewer and written them down for review immediately before the interview?
- Have I anticipated my responses to standard and difficult questions?
- Have I rehearsed how to handle both a structured and an unstructured interview?
- Do I know what to do with silences? Do I know how to handle stress that the interviewer may exert?
- Have I planned what to say at the beginning and the end of the interview?

## Interview Follow-Up:

- Have I evaluated my interview performance?
- Have I sent thank you letters to everyone who interviewed me?

# Dress for Success! What is Hot and What is Not

## *For Women*

### *Hot!*

- Conservative, quality, well-fitting suits (with pants or skirt) or dress with a jacket. Suggested Colors: Navy, Black, Dark Gray, Burgundy or Dark Plum. Style should be professional, tailored, and conservative.
- Professional-looking blouse or shell in a neutral, coordinating color(s).
- Quality, conservatively styled polished dress pumps. A medium, 1 – 1½-inch heel.
- Simple, conservative jewelry and accessories.
- If wearing a skirt, neutral colored nylons.
- Professional grooming: neatly styled hair (pulled back if long); conservative make-up; clean, neat fingernails with no, clear or neutral polish; brushed teeth with fresh breath; none or very light perfume application.
- A professional portfolio to carry into the interview, including extra copies of your résumé, writing sample, transcript, reference list, and cover letter.

### *Not!*

- Trendy/faddish clothing in bright colors or bold patterns. Ill-fitting clothing that is too baggy or too tight. Pants that drag on the ground. Skirts that are too short or too long. Rips, stains, or loose strings.
- Low-cut or too tight tops. Floppy sleeves or cuffs. Bold distracting patterns or prints.
- Shoes that are too high; too low; scuffed; too pointy; too flat; too trendy; too chunky; or otherwise do not fit with the style of your other attire.
- Dangling, heavy, or too much jewelry. Too many visible piercings.
- Tights or too dark or too light nylons.
- Hair in your eyes or hair that is poorly cleaned or groomed; ragged, or too long finger nails with distracting polish; body odor; smoker's breath; too much make-up; too much perfume.
- Big purses, backpacks, briefcases, unprofessional folders. Having no extra materials.

## *For Men*

### *Hot!*

- Professional, conservative, tailored suits. Single breasted. Suggested Colors: Navy, Dark/Charcoal Gray, Brown.
- White or light-colored long sleeved dress shirt.
- Conservative patterned tie, coordinating with shirt and suit.
- Dark dress socks that preferably match the color of the suit.
- Dark, polished shoe-laced dress shoes.

- Professional grooming: hair neatly cut; no facial hair, or neatly groomed facial hair; clean, cut fingernails; brushed teeth with fresh breath; no, or lightly applied, cologne.
- A professional portfolio to carry into the interview, including extra copies of your résumé, writing sample, transcript, reference list, and cover letter.

*Not!*

- Black suits
- Suits that are double-breasted, 4-button, or shiny.
- Dark colored dress shirts; casual, patterned shirts; short-sleeves; knit shirts or shirts with button down or unusual collars.
- Ties: bright; unusual, juvenile or distracting patterns; too wide or too skinny.
- White athletic or ankle socks; bright colored socks; bold patterned socks; no socks.
- Cowboy boots; loafers; slip on shoes; two-toned shoes; tennis shoes; hiking boots.
- Shaggy, poorly groomed or unclean hair; trendy or odd facial hair; ragged or dirty nails; bad breath or smoker's breath; body odor; too much cologne; piercings or earrings.
- Backpacks, briefcases, unprofessional folders. Having no extra materials.

## Dining Do's & Don'ts

*Adapted from "The Job Search Manual" of the University of Cincinnati College of Law.*

### What is the proper etiquette with your napkin?

- Put napkin on lap as soon as seated
- Unfold medium-sized lunch napkin entirely
- Fold large dinner napkin in half
- Use napkin to pat mouth before drinking
- Put napkin on chair if excusing yourself from the table for a few minutes
- Keep napkin on lap until leaving the table permanently

### What is the proper way to eat soup?

- Soup should be sipped from the side of the spoon
- It is appropriate to tip bowl away from you to get the last drop
- When finished, place soup spoon on service plate

### What is the proper etiquette with bread and rolls?

- Bread and butter plate will be one on the upper left of your place setting
- Use dinner knife for buttering if butter knife is not available. When finished, put across top of your plate with blade toward you
- Break off, butter and eat only bite-sized pieces at a time

### Two Easy Rules to Remember:

1. Solids on the left, liquids on the right.

2. If in doubt about which silverware to use, always work from the outside in.

## What Employers Like and Dislike

The following comments are commonly made by employers when asked about student's interviewing styles and include comments received from employers about specific interviews.

### Employers are most impressed by:

- Thorough preparation for the interview, including research on the employer.
- Apparent maturity.
- Interest in the job opportunity.
- Neat appearance.
- Pleasant personality.
- Good interviewing style in the sense that student sold himself/herself during the conversation.
- Positive attitude, enthusiasm for law/the position/the employer.
- Excellent communication skills.

### Employers are least impressed by:

- “Wimpy” handshakes.
- Lack of confidence, especially about academic standing.
- Poor eye contact.
- Generally negative attitudes.
- Passivity during the interview, which is generally interpreted as a lack of interest.
- Lack of communication skills – poor diction, grammar, vocal projection.
- Lateness and rudeness.
- A too-casual attitude toward dress and appearance.
- Lack of proper career planning: purposes, goals, and evidence of commitment to the profession ill defined or non-existent.
- Lack of knowledge of field or area of emphasis, not well qualified.
- Inability to express yourself clearly.
- Insufficient evidence of achievement or capacity to excite action in others.
- Not prepared for the interview, no research on legal employer.
- No real interest in the firm, corporation, or agency; merely shopping around.
- Narrow location or specialty interest – focuses job search on geographical or specialty areas where market is particularly tight.
- Little interest and enthusiasm, indifferent.
- Overbearing, over aggressive, conceited.
- Asks no or poor questions about the job.
- Unwilling to start at the bottom – expects too much too soon.
- Makes excuses, evasiveness, and hedges on unfavorable factors in record.
- Interested only in best dollar offer.