



UNIVERSITY OF
ARKANSAS

SCHOOL OF LAW

Office of Career Services

“Interviewing”

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INTERVIEWING

An interview is more accurately considered a conversation rather than an interrogation. In most instances the interviewer has already decided that you meet some basic set of criteria; the interview is about “fit.” The interviewer wants to assess whether you are confident (but not cocky), relaxed (but poised), and self-aware (but not self-absorbed). Interviewers will want to see whether you can keep the conversation going without constantly being prodded. As the interviewee, you want to establish a rapport with the interviewer, and leave that person with the impression that you have the qualities of an effective lawyer.

Your primary goal in the interview is to secure an offer. After you get the offer is the time to consider the relative merits of the position as compared to other options you might have. And the key to a good interview is preparation. While prep work can be difficult, it will enable you to project self-confidence, provide responsive answers, ask intelligent questions, and bring positive energy to the interview process. Preparation starts with self-assessment and employer research, and ends with practice.

A. Self-Assessment

Employers tend to be impressed with candidates who are able to demonstrate thoughtfulness in their approach to setting and realizing professional goals. Such self-awareness (not to be confused with self-absorption) reflects maturity and experience. Broadly speaking, there are several key areas that you should be able to address clearly and concisely:

- Your reasons for pursuing a career in the law.
- Your attributes and skills relevant to the practice of law.
- Your short- and long-term career goals and plans to achieve them.
- Your preferred work style and environment.
- Your location and lifestyle considerations.

Think about these topics. Recognize that nothing is set in stone, but do be prepared to discuss these areas with a potential employer. Use your resume as a tool in this process. What does it say about your interests, values and accomplishments? Think about how your experience reflects the factors associated with effective lawyering, such as practical judgment; research, writing and speaking skills; listening; problem solving; diligence; teamwork; and interpersonal skills.

B. Employer Research

Be sure to learn all you can about the employer with which you will be interviewing. If it is an agency or a public interest organization, know its mission, accomplishments, and current challenges. If it is a firm, know its areas of specialization, its attorneys, and its clients. If the

employer has a website, it is essential that you review it. If it is a large firm, be sure to review its listing in the NALP Directory of Legal Employers and in Martindale-Hubbell. You can also use Lexis/Westlaw to learn about the firm’s recent cases. Do a simple Google search to see if the employer has been in the news lately. Ask around to see if other law students have interviewed with or worked for the employer.

Knowing something about the employer will allow you to ask well informed questions of the interviewer. Such knowledge will allow you to be more relaxed and confident during the interview. But it also will allow you to better market yourself. For example, if a firm does a good deal of commercial litigation, your background in business and accounting is a plus. If a firm does international work, your cross cultural experience or language skills can be a plus. If a firm does appellate work, your research, writing and oral advocacy skills are crucial.

C. Practice: Questions You Should Be Prepared to Answer

As an initial matter, you should be prepared to discuss anything and everything on your resume. If you wrote an honors thesis, be prepared to provide a thirty-second summary, but also to discuss it in detail. If you volunteered with an organization, be prepared to articulate its mission and why you got involved. If you joined a legal fraternity, be sure you know why. If you transferred schools, have a good reason. Everything on your resume is a potential source of questions. If there are weak spots, try to avoid appearing apologetic, defensive or insecure; be prepared to discuss those areas briefly and openly.

Take the time to think through questions you might be asked. Talk through your answers “out loud” rather than scripting them. (“Knowing” what you will say and actually saying it are two different things!) Think about what the interviewer is try to evaluate – maturity, good judgment, work ethic, research and writing skills, the ability to get along with others, the ability to work independently, and common sense. Be assured that the interviewer is not looking for a “right” answer. Your ability to articulate your answer in a poised, mature and articulate fashion is more important than the substance of the answer itself.

While there is no way to anticipate all the questions you might be asked, many interviews focus on the following topics.

1. Law School

- Why did you decide to go to law school?
- Why did you choose the U of A?
- Are you enjoying law school?
- Who is your favorite professor? Why?
- Is law school what you expected?
- Have you been happy with your grades in law school?

- Are your grades a good indicator of your abilities as a lawyer?
- Given the current market, do you think law school was a wise choice?
- What do you think it takes to be a successful lawyer?

2. Career Path & Goals

- Why do you want to be a lawyer?
- What type of law are you interested in practicing?
- What qualities do you possess that will make you a good lawyer?
- What qualities are you looking for in a firm?
- How do you define success?
- What are your short/long term career goals?

3. Personal

- Tell me about yourself?
- How do you keep aware of current events?
- What do you do for fun?
- What is your greatest strength/weakness?
- How would your friends describe you?
- Do you prefer to work on a team or on your own?
- What is your idea of success?
- Why did you choose your undergraduate major?
- How do you handle stress?
- Is there anything not on your resume you want me to know?

4. Work Experience

- Tell me about your last job.
- What did you do during summers in college?
- What would your last supervisor tell me about you?
- Why have you switched from your previous field to law?
- What tasks are you strong/weak at doing?
- How did your past experience prepare you for law school?
- What factors are important to you in a job?

5. Job Specific

- Why are you interested in our firm (office, agency, etc.)?
- Where else are you applying?
- Why do you think you would fit with our firm?
- Why this city? Do you have ties here?

- Why should I hire you over your classmates?
- What are you looking for in an employer?
- If you get multiple offers, how will you choose?
- What can I tell you about my firm?

D. Practice: Questions You May Want To Ask

Interviewers want to know that you have a genuine interest in their firm. Asking specific questions that build on your initial research is an excellent way to demonstrate your interest, so take advantage of the opportunity to ask questions. But do not sit back until the end of the interview and wait for an invitation to ask questions. Inserting your questions throughout the interview helps to move the conversation forward, and makes the interviewer feel engaged. Key areas of inquiry include job responsibilities, substance of the work, style of supervision, training opportunities, work environment or firm culture, and career paths. Following are some questions you might wish to ask, and some you probably should avoid.

1. Recommended Questions

- What type of work does a summer clerk/associate typically receive?
- What qualities do you look for in an associate?
- Do you encourage *pro bono* activities?
- What is a typical day for an associate?
- Will I have the opportunity to work in multiple practice areas?
- What's the most interesting case you are working on?
- At what point do associates start to have client contact?
- What do you find most challenging about being a lawyer?
- How is practicing law different from what you expected?
- How are summer clerks/associates (or associates) evaluated?
- Could you tell me more about the _____ practice area?
- Do you have a time line for when you will be making hiring decisions?

2. Questions You May Wish To Avoid

- Any question answered on the firm's website.
- Any questions about compensation and benefits.
- Any question about parental leave, part-time tracks, and vacation time.
- Any questions about how many hours associates work.
- Any questions that might implicate client confidentiality.
- Any question with a negative tone (e.g., What don't you like about the firm?)

NOTE: Whatever happens in an interview, try to maintain your composure. If you ever feel that an interviewer has asked you discriminatory questions or made discriminatory remarks during an interview, please report them to Career Services immediately.

E. Other Considerations

1. What To Bring

Always bring extra copies of your resume and any other materials you have submitted to the employer, e.g., grade report/transcript, writing sample, or a list of references. These documents can be carried in a portfolio or slim attaché case. Try to avoid dragging along your backpack, messenger bag, tote bag or large purse. You may wish to bring along a pen and pad, though it is not customary to take notes during an interview.

While it is customary to carry a cell phone, make sure you turn it OFF before you enter the interview area. (Do not check messages or play “Angry Birds” while waiting in the reception area!) Do not bring along other electronic devices.

Do not bring along water bottles or other beverages. Most legal employers are accustomed to hosting clients and will have water available. Just politely ask.

For interviews on campus, backpacks, bottles and other paraphernalia can be left in the reception area. All of the interview rooms are furnished with water.

2. What to Wear

For legal job interviews, always err on the side of conservative dress. (The interviewer may be sizing you up in relation to his most conservative client/jury/judge.) Wear clothes that would be suitable in court. For both men and women, the optimal dress is a freshly pressed, solid dark suit (e.g., black, navy blue, grey) with a light shirt or blouse. Shoes should be polished and shined. If you wear a cologne or perfume, make sure it is *very* light. Keep jewelry to a minimum. If possible, cover tattoos and remove piercings.

Some rules of thumb for women:

- Skirt suits are considered more conservative than pant suits; both are well accepted.
- Do not wear a skirt that is too short or too tight.
- Do not expose cleavage.
- Jewelry should be conservative; lose the dangling earrings and bulky bracelets.
- Keep your make up subtle, and keep your hair off your face.
- Wear a dress watch rather than a sports watch.
- If you wear high heels, make sure you do not “wobble.”

Some rules of thumb for men:

- Wear an undershirt.
- Wear a long sleeve shirt under your jacket.
- Make sure the colors of your shoes, socks and pants are complementary.
- Make sure your hair is neatly trimmed.
- Keep facial hair neatly trimmed; stubble is not acceptable.
- Beware of gaudy or novelty ties.
- Wear a leather belt.

No employer has ever reported to Career Services that a candidate was over dressed or too conservatively dressed.

3. What Not to Do

- Do not show up late . . . or too early. Ten minutes early is the “sweet spot.”
- Do not be so formal that you come across as stiff or dull. Smile and show enthusiasm.
- Do not be negative; do not criticize classes, professors, classmates, employers, etc.
- Do not be intimidated. A random sample of partners of top firms shows most did not graduate with honors and were not on law review.
- Do not volunteer or dwell on weaknesses, or become defensive or apologetic.

4. What to Do

- Be yourself. Some nerves are expected, but try to relax.
- Greet the interviewer with a firm handshake, a smile and eye contact.
- Do not be thrown off by what happens in the interview. Sometimes an interviewer may step out or take a call; roll with it.
- Give short, thoughtful answers. The interviewer can follow up.
- Be responsive, but use your responses to accentuate your positives.

5. Interview Follow Up

- Thank-you notes remain a good idea, especially here in the South. If you know that decisions will be made in a short time frame, a well constructed e-mail may be your best bet. If the decision making may take some time, you can send a note via “snail mail.” If you are going to send a note, do it promptly.
- Follow-up calls may be appropriate under several circumstances. The interviewer may invite you contact them if you have not heard anything by a certain date or if you receive another offer. At the end of your interview, if time allows, it is appropriate to ask the interviewer when decisions might be made and whether you are free to follow up with them.

6. Sample Interviewer Comments

- “Excellent interview; very thoughtful questions.”
- “Enjoyable conversation but doesn’t seem to have much ambition.”
- “Very nice guy; average interview.”
- “Said very nice things about the firm. Overly familiar.”
- “Doesn’t know what practice area interested in.”
- “Another personable applicant – had a lot of questions (although she read them).”
- “Very laid back – can’t believe he didn’t call me ‘dude.’”
- “Not sure his skill set will be best used in an Arkansas practice.”
- “Has no clue what she wants to do. Seems to have gone to law school b/c didn’t know what else to do.”
- “Great, thoughtful answer to question about how he got to law school.”
- “Nice guy – don’t see him as a litigator.”
- “Quirky guy.”
- “Talked way too much. No oxygen left in the room.”
- “Asked about a practice area we don’t have. Unprepared.”
- “Articulate and personable. Definitely on the watch list.”
- “Seemed prickly. Very negative about law school experience.”

NOTE: You should always feel free to contact the Career Services Office if you have questions or concerns about the interview process, about something that happened in an interview, about following up with employers, about juggling multiple offers, etc.

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