

SECTION III

Interviewing Tips

QUICK INTERVIEWING TIPS

Do's:

Prepare a focused response to “so tell me about yourself.”

Research the organization and the interviewer before the interview.

Anticipate possible questions and formulate your best answers.

Prepare novel, relevant questions to ask the interviewer.

Make sure the questions you ask the interviewer could not be answered through research.

Dress conservatively and professionally.

Be on time.

Be friendly to everyone, including support staff and attorneys with whom you are not interviewing.

Convey enthusiasm for the position.

Use specific examples in discussing your qualities (e.g., projects you spearheaded to address specific problems).

Focus on your best attributes.

Send a thank-you note within 48 hours of the interview.

If time has elapsed since the anticipated response, follow-up with a note or a phone call to reaffirm your interest.

Don'ts:

Sell yourself short.

Lose your cool during a "stress interview”.

Use slang or casual language.

Order alcohol during an interview luncheon.

Wear trendy or rumpled clothing.

Convey your political views, unless you are certain they would be welcome by the employer or you could not work for the employer without revealing them.

Address interviewer by a first name before being invited to do so.

Act unprofessionally, even if the interviewer does.

INTERVIEWING

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

PREPARATION

The first thing you should know is that the key to successful interviewing is **PREPARATION**. As with oral argument, an exam, or any other task you complete in law school or in your career, preparation can be the most critical component of a good performance. By the same token, lack of preparation can ruin your chances of getting hired.

There are four activities you should perform to prepare for your interview: 1) research the firm or organization and your interviewer, 2) practice answers to the questions you anticipate, 3) have questions prepared to ask the interviewer, and 4) participate in a mock interview.

1) Research. Researching is a vital component of the interview preparation process. The more you know about the employer, the more likely you are to impress the interviewer. Basic, yet important information to gather includes:

- the number of attorneys working for the employer;
- if the employer is a judge, the area of law in which the judge specialized before joining the bench;
- the number of alumni from your law school who work for the employer;
- the employer's chief areas of practice;
- the employer's representative clients;
- if the employer represents the public interest/public sector, the organization's mission and issues facing the clients it serves.

All of this information will help you decide which questions to ask the interviewer, and how you should tailor responses to their questions.

RESOURCES

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

A few on-line resources are worthy of specific mention. These include:

NALP DIRECTORY

www.nalpdirectory.com

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

MARTINDALE-HUBBELL

www.martindale.com

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

SYMPPLICITY

<https://law-widener-csm.symplicity.com/students/>

Symplicity is the Career Development Office's on-line job bank and recruitment software. If you are an enrolled student, your Symplicity User Name is your Campus Cruiser e-mail address. The job bank, updated daily, includes a variety of legal and law-related jobs for law students and graduates submitted by employers who have contacted the Career Development Office.

WORD OF MOUTH

Another great source of information about an employer is word-of-mouth. Career Development counselors are a terrific source for insider information. Friends who have interviewed with your targeted employer may also be good resources. Firm Associates and/or staff attorneys can be an immense source of first-hand information and can clue you in on what the employer seeks in their candidates.

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW

Many of you have experienced an interview that includes the usual questions: “Tell me about yourself. What is your greatest strength? What is your greatest weakness?” Today, a different form of questioning is popular--Behavioral Interviewing. The goal of the behavioral interview is to predict future performance, often using hypothetical questions to determine how you might behave under certain circumstances.

Often, these questions encourage you to tell a detailed story about a specific incident that will give the interviewer a chance to assess your experience, skills and professionalism. Typical behavioral interview questions include: “Tell me about a time when you had a problem with a fellow co-worker, and how you resolved it,” or “What did you do upon determining you would be unable to complete a project on time?” and “Describe a recent challenge you have overcome?”

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

ANTICIPATE QUESTIONS, FORMULATE ANSWERS.

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

“Why did you apply for this position?” The interviewer is trying to determine whether you researched the firm and performed due diligence in learning about its background and areas of practice. Applicants who come prepared and have taken the initiative to learn about the organization are more likely to do the same when hired.

“Do you have any questions for me?” Applicants should prepare for this question, and it is a red flag if the applicant has not done so. The absence of questions may lead the interviewer to believe that you are ambivalent about or only generally interested in his firm.

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

As with a moot court argument, an essential part of preparing for your interview includes anticipating questions and formulating your best possible answers. Be careful, though, not to appear “rehearsed.” The following are some common questions you should anticipate, and suggestions for formulating your answers:

Tell me about yourself. The response to this classic opening interview line should be a persuasive, focused “infomercial” about yourself, which should be no

longer than 60 seconds. **KEEP YOUR RESPONSE RELEVANT TO THE EMPLOYER!** As you decide how to answer this question in an interview, remember that this is one of the best opportunities you will encounter to sell yourself. Keep your answer brief, and focus on a few key attributes. Illustrate these qualities with evidence from your past and current professional experience. Remember, the answer to this question can set a positive tone for the rest of the interview so it is recommended that you spend some time developing your response.

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

Where do you want to be in five years? It takes a typical employer 3 years or more to recoup training expenses and to begin to make a profit from an employee. Naturally, employers are interested in employees who intend to be stable in their career and employer choices. Although your answer to this question will depend on your honest intentions and other factors, this is a particularly important area in which you should be sensitive to the interviewer's concerns and business priorities.

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

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

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

Why did you go to law school? Focus on the contributions you intend to make and the skills you enjoy using that resonate with the legal profession. Then, follow-up with activities you have participated in, or classes you have taken that helped pave your way (i.e. debate team, mock trial, volunteer work, externships, etc.). Do not say, “I have always wanted to be a lawyer” without explaining why.

Here are common questions you should anticipate:

In which areas of law would you like to practice?

Current events questions (make sure to keep up with news around the world, in the legal community, and in the particular area of practice at issue).

Explain xxx on your resume (this could be anything, so make certain you are familiar with your entire resume).

Substantive legal/ethical questions (especially with public defender and prosecutor positions).

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

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

As a student, your best bet is to prepare with as much research as possible, seek advice beforehand and gauge the interviewer as the interview progresses.

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

- 1) Personal ones about the interviewer: Why did the interviewer choose the firm? Does the interviewer find practice here different from _____ (previous experience)?
- 2) Questions about the firm or organization or a particular area of practice: certain cases you know about, how the firm is affected by new legislation, growth areas for firm, opportunities for community involvement (such involvement inevitably leads to rainmaking), etc.

3) Questions about the position for which you are interviewing: What does the firm/organization look for in a successful candidate? How will a person in the position for which you are applying be evaluated? How will they be supervised? To whom would you report? What types of training would you receive? When is the decision being made (and may you call if you have not heard by then)?

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

MOCK INTERVIEWS

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

SHOW TIME

WHAT TO WEAR: The watch-word is conservative. Be as neat and polished as possible.

Quick tips for women:

- Keep your hair away from your face.
- No short skirts or low-cut or sheer blouses; wear low to medium pumps.

Quick tips for men:

- Conservative typically means no earrings, piercings, or flashy jewelry.
- Men should wear a conservative striped or subdued pattern necktie.

For both men and women:

- Darker colors, such as grey or navy blue suits are always safe; depending on the season, women have more leeway to wear different colors than men.
- Shoes should be in good repair and nicely polished.
- Due to smell sensitivities and/or potential allergies, avoid wearing perfume or aftershave.
- Dress in a way that hides tattoos.
- No visible body/face piercings.

MAKING A GOOD IMPRESSION

If you have properly prepared prior to the interview, and are **ON-TIME**, you should do fine. Make sure to bring extra copies of your documents: a resume, a writing sample, a transcript, a reference list, and anything else you think the interviewer may need.

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

Keep in mind that during the interview, you need to project your best possible persona. You want to emphasize your best qualities to the interviewer: *she is expecting this*. As Kimm Walton notes, you would not buy a car if the salesperson said, "The car is okay, but it does not get great mileage." Like other consumers, the interviewer is expecting only the positive, and any deviation from that may be interpreted as a warning sign. Therefore, although you must be honest, it is expected that you will emphasize your best qualities.

There comes a time in the interview process when you should relax a little, tone down the sales pitch, and be yourself. This is particularly true during a second interview. At this point, the employer wants to make certain your personality is a good fit. If you're not sure whether to keep selling or relax, take your cue from the interviewer and his/her line of questioning.

STRESS INTERVIEWS

Two other things are worth mentioning here. First, sometimes the interviewer(s) will be adversarial or obnoxious. This could be for several reasons, from the interviewer's unfortunate personality to testing how you react under stressful situations. Whatever the cause, **REMAIN CALM**. The "stress interview" is a tactic used by employers who expect their employees to experience a lot of pressure, such as in the courtroom. They want to *make sure that you can remain level-headed under fire*. You may confront this situation in district attorney or public defender interviews, and it is not uncommon to receive hypothetical questions. As long as you remain calm, and do not take the line of questioning personally, you can focus on answering their questions. If you think you might encounter this dynamic, it is a good idea to schedule a mock interview with your career counselor to practice responding under similar pressure.

INAPPROPRIATE/ILLEGAL QUESTIONS

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

CONCLUSION OF THE INTERVIEW

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

THANK YOU LETTERS

As a demonstration of professional courtesy, you should send a short thank-you letter to an interviewer(s) with whom you have met. The letter should be sent within 24- 48 hours of your meeting. If you interviewed with multiple individuals, it is sufficient to send one letter to the person chiefly responsible for bringing you in. The letter gives you the opportunity to reiterate your interest in the organization. It also brings your application to the top of the pile in terms of refreshing their recollection of you and your candidacy. The thank you letter should be brief and professional. It should be typed and follow the same business format as the cover letter.

Note: Some employers have remarked that handwritten thank you notes are a nice gesture. However, writing a handwritten note can be risky if you have less than perfect handwriting. In addition, unlike a typewritten note, you will not have the benefit of an electronic spelling/grammar check. Therefore, proceed with caution and in a timely fashion when sending handwritten thank you notes!

Sample Thank You Letter:

Ashley McCormick
4643 Cedar Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19104

September 5, 20xx

Richard C. Angino, Esquire
Angino & Rovner
1500 Market Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

Dear Mr. Angino:

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me yesterday to discuss the possibility of my joining your firm as a summer law clerk. I enjoyed talking with you and meeting your partners and associates. I was particularly impressed with your firm's vast bankruptcy practice and dedication to pro bono work. I am very interested in this opportunity and look forward to hearing from you.

Very truly yours,

Ashley McCormick

Collective Thank you letter following Callback Interview

Your Name
Contact information

Date

Barbara Smith, Esq.
Smith & Reed
101 South Street
Wilmington, DE 19803

Dear Ms. Smith:

Thank you so much for an informative and enjoyable visit to the offices of Smith & Reed this past Tuesday, November 13th. I appreciated the opportunity to meet with members of the firm and to tour your offices. Our discussion of women in the courtroom was enlightening and I am grateful for your candor and willingness to share your perspective. Please extend my thanks to your colleagues Bill Smith, Patty Norway and Jack Chartres for taking the time from their busy schedules to meet with me. I particularly appreciated having the chance to speak at length with Mr. Smith and Ms. Norway regarding the extensive litigation training program at the firm.

I remain very interested in pursuing an associate position with Smith & Reed. Should you require any additional information to assist you as you consider my candidacy, please do not hesitate to contact me at 302-443-2233. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Very truly yours,

Tamara Shaeffer

ANTICIPATING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

General Interview Questions

Tell me about yourself.

What are your greatest strengths/weaknesses?

Why should we hire you?

Why do you want to work for us?

Where do you see yourself five years from now?

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

Why did you choose to attend Delaware Law School?

Why did you go to school in Wilmington if you want to work in (geographic location)?

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

What other firms are you interviewing with/applying to?

How do you like law school?

What is the biggest mistake you ever made?

What was your greatest achievement/disappointment?

What would you do if you won the lottery?

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

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

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

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

What courses have you enjoyed the most/least?

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

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

How is your previous experience relevant to our practice?

Have you received offers from any other firms?

Why did you decide to interview with us?

What distinguishes you from other candidates?

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

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

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

What work related contributions have you found most satisfying?

What persuaded you to decide to become a lawyer?

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

How would you describe your ideal job situation?

How would you describe yourself?

What is the most significant item on your resume?

How do you determine success?

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

What is unique about you?

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

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

Tell me what in particular about our firm interests you.

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

Judicial Clerkship Questions

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

What are your views on ANY topic? (This may be news, politics, or personal.)
What is your most/least favorite Supreme Court decision? How and why would you have decided the case differently?
If I ask you to write up a decision in a particular way and you disagree with the outcome, what will you do?

Government, Legal Services & Public Interest Groups

What interest do you have in service to the public generally?
How committed are you to service for the poor, and what past experiences do you have to evidence this commitment?
What do you see as the basic rewards for working for legal services, government, or public interest law?
How does your resume or background demonstrate your commitment to public service?

Corporations/Organizations

What do you know about our company?
How do you feel about having only one client?
Unlike private law firms, partnership is not an opportunity here. How do you feel about that?
Why do you want to work for a corporation as opposed to a law firm?
What advantages do you see working with a corporation as opposed to a law firm?
What disadvantages?

Questions for YOU to Ask

For a firm.

Did you participate in the summer program before joining the firm?
(If the interviewer says “yes.”) How is your practice similar to/different from your summer experience?
What do you like most about working for the firm?
What do you see as the firm’s greatest challenges?
What are the firm’s strategic plans for the next five/ten years?
Do you involve new associates in marketing? If so, how and what training is provided?
Tell me about the feedback that I will get on the work I do for the firm over the summer.
Does the firm rotate summer clerks among different practice areas?
Tell me about pro bono opportunities with the firm.

For a judicial clerkship.

What are a law clerk’s main responsibilities?
What is a typical day like for a law clerk?
How frequently will I need to work into the night or on weekends?
What is the division of labor/cases, including different tasks?

Does the Judge issue opinions from the bench, or does he/she prefer written opinions?
How do opinions get written? Who writes the first draft? How many drafts are usually needed?

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

How closely does the Judge work with the clerks?

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

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

How much contact do clerks have with lawyers?

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

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

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

For a public interest or government position.

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

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

What are the biggest challenges of public service work?

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

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

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