

Interviewing: Making a Great Impression

An interview is an opportunity for you to demonstrate to a potential employer that you are a qualified candidate, who is enthusiastic about the position, possesses strong communication skills, and has the confidence to succeed in the work environment. The interview also provides you the opportunity to assess the employment opportunity and determine whether the position is right for you.

In order for an interview to be successful, you must convince the interviewer that your qualifications and personality are well-suited to the demands of the position and the organization.

It is critical to consider the following:

- ✿ Your skills, interests, values, and personality as they relate to the job at hand;
- ✿ Your career goals (short and long term); and
- ✿ The firm or agency's culture and practice areas.

Once you determine that you fit into the employer's culture and practice areas, you will be better prepared to answer the questions posed to you in an interview.

Remember to be enthusiastic and persuasive; show the interviewer that you are confident and motivated, and that you possess strong interpersonal skills.

Preparation

There are several steps you can take before your interview to prepare yourself to demonstrate a credible interest in the job and to bolster your confidence:

Perform Research to Determine Whether You are a Good Fit

Two common complaints made by interviewers are:

1. Interviewees have not researched the employer.
2. Interviewees cannot effectively communicate how they fit into the position.

To market yourself effectively, you need to do a thorough assessment of the organization and then determine how your experience and skills can complement and enhance that organization. Consider the following:

Firm/Agency information: Who are the clients? How many employees? What is the service? What is the general career path? What is the culture? What is unique about the firm/agency? What are the salary ranges? What is the agency's history?

Where to find firm/agency information:

- ✿ Organization's website
- ✿ Westlaw
- ✿ Lexis

- ✿ Career Development's directories and files
- ✿ Professional journals (e.g., *Lawyers Weekly*)
- ✿ Suffolk Law School Alumni Career Network
- ✿ Martindale Hubbell Law Directories or martindale.com
- ✿ Vault.com (see the Career Development Office website)
- ✿ NALP Directory (nalp.com or in the Career Development Office Library)
- ✿ Speak with contacts in the field
- ✿ Kirstein Library (Business Branch of Boston Public Library)
- ✿ Students who have worked for the employer

If you've done your homework on the employer, you will come across during your interview as knowledgeable. Spend some time on the employer's website. Read any materials the Career Development Office has on file. Talk to other students who have worked for the employer.

Research yourself and review your resume. *Once you have a good understanding of the organization and the role you would play, identify how your experiences, education, skills, and interests fit into this role.* Everything you entered on your resume, from your college activities, to a job that you had five years ago, is fair game for questions during an interview. Make sure that you are familiar with, and prepared to discuss, every item entered on your resume.

The following questions will help you identify the links between yourself and the employer:

- ✿ What direct experience do you bring to the position?
- ✿ What skills or interests have you developed that qualify you for the position?
- ✿ How does this position fit into your career development path?
- ✿ What personal qualities do you possess that will enable you to be successful in the position?
- ✿ What related courses have you taken?

Understanding how your experiences and interests match the qualifications for the position and the environment of the organization should prepare you for most interview questions.

Practice answering questions; schedule a mock interview: Review the sample interview questions listed at the end of this handout. Also, think of other questions you might be asked. Practice answering each question. Try presenting your answers out loud. Even if you know what you want to say, sometimes it can be hard to articulate a coherent response without practice. Schedule a mock interview with a counselor in the Career Development Office.

Prepare pertinent questions. Contrary to conventional wisdom, you needn't ask questions simply for the sake of showing interest. Ill-considered questions will hurt you. Don't ask questions that are hackneyed: "What do you like most and least about your job?" Or, "What is a typical day like?" Any questions you ask should be designed to impress the interviewer. Introduce your questions with what you know: "I know your firm has [such and such a practice area]. Would I have the opportunity to become involved in that?" You shouldn't ask for information available in the materials provided by the employer or posted by the employer on its website. If the answers to your questions were readily available to you before your interview,

your questions reveal that you haven't done your homework. Questions should do the opposite; they should reveal that you are well-prepared. (See page 6, #5 on the list of Suggested Questions For You To Ask.)

Look up the attorneys who will be interviewing you. Do you know the names of the attorneys who will be interviewing you? If so, look them up on the employer's website or using Martindale-Hubbell's Lawyer Locator. There might be something about their field of practice or professional background that interests you and that you can ask them about during your interview.

Map out your commute. Make sure you know how to get to the employer and how long it will take you to get there. Plan on giving yourself extra time just in case something unexpected happens. It is very important to arrive to your interview on time. Make sure you have the employer's phone number and a cell phone with you.

Make extra copies of resume, transcript, writing sample, and references. Take a couple of copies of your resume, as well as a copy of your transcript, a writing sample, and a list of references.

How to Dress for an Interview

Always dress conservatively. You do not want to give the interviewer a reason to discount you as a prime candidate based on your appearance. Men should wear a conservative suit and tie. Women should also wear a conservative suit (a skirted suit is the safest choice). Wear a minimum amount of makeup, jewelry, and perfume or cologne. Refer to the handout "Dressing for Success."

What to Take to an Interview

- ☼ Directions/Employer's phone number
- ☼ Copies of your resume
- ☼ Copies of your list of references
- ☼ Copies of your writing sample
- ☼ Copies of your law school transcript
- ☼ Nice portfolio or folder containing your application materials
- ☼ Paper/Pen/Business card (if you have one)
- ☼ Questions (not in written form - rely on your memory)
- ☼ Positive attitude and lots of energy!

IMPORTANT: Be sure to turn your cell phone off before entering the interviewer's office building.

The First Five Minutes

Here are some suggestions for putting your best foot forward right from the start:

- ☼ **Arrive on time.** Get to your interview not more than 5-10 minutes early. Avoid rushing in at the last moment. You want to be calm and composed at the start of your interview – not frazzled and stressed. However, do not arrive too early as this may make it uncomfortable for the employer.

- ☀ **Make eye contact; have a firm handshake.** Making direct eye contact and giving a firm (but not bone crushing) handshake projects a sense of confidence. You want to present yourself as a capable and confident candidate.
- ☀ **Be personable and easy to talk to.** Many job candidates adopt an interview persona: They become artificially inhibited and humorless. You need to preserve your natural spontaneity and ability to converse easily. Imagine how you talk to people you run across in relaxed situations without a lot riding on the conversations. If you're more natural in casual encounters, you need to work on being more comfortable in interviews. Practice in mock interviews. When you're as comfortable in your interviews as you are in conversations over the water cooler, you can expect to reap more than your share of job offers.

Types of Interview Questions

In an interview, use questions as a springboard to highlight your achievements and skills. Interviewers will often ask broad-based questions. It is your job to answer these questions with clear and concise statements of your accomplishments and specific examples of your achievements to support your statements. It is a good idea to prepare some of these questions in advance. Remember to tie your answers to the qualifications for the position.

Open-Ended Questions

Example: "Tell me about yourself?" or "Why should we hire you?"

When answering an open-ended question start with a broad statement like, "I am a solid candidate for a law clerk because I have strong writing and communication skills. After completing my first year, I was selected as a member of Transnational Law Review."

Technical Questions

Example: "I see from your resume that you have trial experience . . ."

With these questions, interviewers would like you to expand on specific skills which you possess that are indicated on your resume.

Career Goal Questions

Example: "How does the position fit with your future aspirations?"

Employers prefer candidates who are career minded to those who see the job merely as a stepping stone.

Situational/Hypothetical Questions

Example: "What would you do if your client was pushing you to bend the rules of the game and the client is well-liked by one of the senior partners in the firm?"

In these situations do not jump at the interviewer with a response. Give yourself time to process the question and come up with a logical answer. If you need to hear the hypothetical situation again, ask the interviewer to repeat the question.

Behavioral Questions

Examples: “Describe one project that you worked on at your last job that you are especially proud of.”

“Tell me about one of your work assignments. How did you begin, develop, and complete it?”

“What are you hoping to gain from working with an organization like ours?”

“What have you done that shows initiative and willingness to work?”

“Tell me about a situation when you worked on a team project.”

These questions are very popular with employers because they give the employer insight into how you would behave in certain situations and allows them to evaluate your abilities based on how you have handled prior real life experiences.

Sample Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Why did you decide to attend law school?
3. Why are you interested in working for our organization?
4. What areas of practice are you the most interested in? Why?
5. What do you see yourself doing five years from now?
6. Why did you choose Suffolk?
7. What type of environment are you most comfortable in? What is your work style?
8. What are your strengths? Weaknesses?
9. What have you learned about our organization from others with whom you have spoken?
Are there any remaining questions that I might clarify?
10. Do you think your grades are a good indication of your academic achievement?
11. Why should we hire you for this position?
12. Do you prefer to work with others or alone?
13. How do you go about making important decisions?
14. Could you go to court to represent a client in whose case you did not fully believe?
15. Describe a time when you demonstrated leadership skills.
16. Tell me something about yourself that is not on your resume.
17. Who has exercised the greatest influence on you and why?
18. What is your class rank?
19. Is your rank/GPA an accurate reflection of your ability?
20. Could you explain Suffolk’s grading system to me?
21. Do you like law school?
22. What did you like about your last job? What did you dislike?
24. Are you interviewing at the firm where you did summer work?
25. Why do you want to work for our firm/agency?
26. What area of law are you most interested in? Why?
27. What are your greatest accomplishments to date?
28. What kind of work environment are you most comfortable in?

29. What skills have you acquired during law school?
30. What was your role on the team? Was the team effective?
31. How do you work under pressure with deadlines?
32. Why do you want to be a lawyer?
33. Describe your ideal job following graduation.
34. If you were starting law school again, what would you do differently?
35. Which courses did you enjoy least and why?
36. Who else are you interviewing with from the city?
37. What percentage of your law school expenses did you earn?
38. Is there anything I should be aware of about you that we haven't already covered?
39. Is it an effort for you to be tolerant of persons with a background and interests different from yours?

Suggested Questions for You to Ask

1. What are the firm's goals for the future?
2. How is work distributed to the summer/first-year associates?
3. How would you describe the culture of the firm?
4. How are new attorneys/summer associates supervised?
5. What do you see as the growth areas of the firm/organization?
6. Could you tell me what drew you to this firm and what type of projects you have worked on?

Illegal Questions

It is illegal for interviewers to ask certain questions during a job interview. These include questions regarding age, race, marital and family status, religious beliefs, and sexual orientation. Most often, employers do not realize that they are asking illegal questions, so you should not assume there is an evil or ulterior motive. If you are asked a question that is discriminatory in nature, we do not recommend that you confront the interviewer on the spot. Rather, politely reword the question to try to get at what the interviewer is looking for or ask the interviewer to clarify what type of information he or she is looking for that is relevant to the position.

Illegal Question: Are you married? Do you plan to have a family?

Appropriate response: If you are concerned about my ability to commit to the position, let me assure you that I will be able to [work the necessary hours, overtime, travel, etc.] that is required of the position.

You also have the option of refusing to answer the question. Although you have the right not to answer, by doing so, you risk coming off as uncooperative or defensive. If you really want the job, consider whether answering the question is your preferred option.

If you are asked a discriminatory question, please notify the Career Development Office as soon as possible.

Answering Interview Questions

Be positive and enthusiastic. Your interviewer is deciding whether or not you are someone she would like to have as a colleague. She is also assessing how interested you are in working with her employer. Employers favor candidates who are positive, enthusiastic, and want to work with them.

Listen carefully to the interviewer's questions, respond directly and conversationally, and provide examples. When you are asked a question, be sure to listen to the entire question and then respond directly to the question asked. Be engaging. Good interviews are good conversations. Don't continually give yes or no answers. On the other hand, make sure your responses are concise (i.e., avoid long, rambling stories) and directly answer the question asked. Whenever possible, respond to questions by referencing specific, relevant accomplishments and experiences. Don't worry if these accomplishments and experiences are already listed on your resume. Your interviewer has not memorized your resume and may not be aware that you have had a relevant experience unless you mention it.

Give concise, direct answers to difficult questions and finish your response on a positive note. Don't be defensive. If you are asked a difficult question, for example, about a low grade in a course or a prior clerkship that did not result in a permanent offer, do not be evasive. Also, do not give an overly long and complicated explanation. Instead, answer the question directly. Explain the positive steps you've taken to improve the area.

Be careful of body language. Sit up straight, make eye contact, and don't fidget. You want to appear confident and composed.

Order something easy to eat if you have a lunch interview. It is hard to focus on the interviewer's questions and remain relaxed if you are trying to avoid dropping spaghetti sauce on your suit.

How to Close an Interview and Follow-up

Reiterate your interest in the position and explain why you believe you are a "good fit." Remember to cite specific reasons, including your experience and intangible qualities. If the employer does not specify its hiring timetable, you may inquire about it. Ask for the interviewer's business card and follow up with a thank you letter.

Post Interview Etiquette: You should continue to act professionally during any contact you have with the employer. Be courteous and respond promptly to any phone calls or requests.

Treat emails the same as other correspondence. Make sure that any emails you send to the employer are professional. Be sure to proofread your emails. Employers have reported to us that some candidates have treated email correspondence too casually. For example, emails have been sent using all lower case letters with no punctuation.

Thank you letters. Many students send letters to their interviewers thanking them for taking the time to meet with them. If you send a thank you letter, keep it short and

simple, and make sure there are no typos. A poorly written thank you note can hurt your chances of getting the job.

The Telephone Interview

Employers use telephone interviews as a way of identifying and recruiting candidates for employment and are often used to screen candidates in order to narrow the pool of applicants who will be invited for in-person interviews. They are also used as a way to minimize the expenses involved in interviewing out-of-town candidates.

While you are actively job searching, it is important to be prepared for a phone interview on a moment's notice. You never know when a recruiter or a networking contact might call and ask whether you have a few minutes to talk.

Prepare for a phone interview just as you would for a regular interview. Compile a list of your strengths and weaknesses, as well as a list of answers to typical interview questions.

- Dress for the interview. Some even suggest dressing just as you would in a face-to-face interview as it will improve your confidence and poise.
- Keep your resume in clear view, on top of your desk, or tape it to the wall near the phone, so it is at your fingertips when you need to answer questions.
- Have a short list of your accomplishments available to review.
- Have a pen and paper handy for note taking.
- Take the call in a place where you will not be interrupted.
- Clear the room - evict the kids and the pets. Turn off the stereo and the TV. Close the door.
- Avoid using a cell phone for the call. If you must use the cell phone, make sure you are some place where you have good cell reception — the last thing you want is a "dropped call" during an important interview; make sure your cell phone is fully charged.
- Print the word "SMILE" on a sticky or piece of paper and set it in front of you next to your resume — it will remind you to smile and a smile comes through in your voice; smiling will project a positive image to the listener and will change the tone of your voice.
- Do not smoke, chew gum, eat, or drink.
- Do keep a glass of water handy, in case you need to wet your mouth.
- Speak slowly and enunciate clearly. It may help to open your mouth a bit wider while you are speaking.
- Stand up. It gets your blood flowing, improves your posture, and improves your response time. Some people also feel like they think better on their feet.
- Use the person's title (Mr. or Ms. and their last name). Only use a first name if they ask you to do so.
- Do not interrupt the interviewer.

- If there are multiple interviewers, try to keep track of who is asking the question. When one interviewer asks you a question, clarify who asked the question so you can direct your response to that person.
- Practice with a friend — it is hard to know how your voice comes across on the phone. Are you a low-talker? Do you talk too fast? Is it easy to understand you?
- Have questions prepared for the interviewer(s).
- Take your time — it is perfectly acceptable to take a moment or two to collect your thoughts.
- Give short answers.
- Remember your goal is to set up a face-to-face interview. After you thank the interviewer, ask whether it would be possible to meet in person.
- Follow up with a thank you letter.