

THE LAW STUDENT'S INTERVIEW CHEAT SHEET

REAL-WORLD INTERVIEW ADVICE FROM LAW FIRM ATTORNEYS AND RECRUITING MANAGERS

PRE-INTERVIEW PREPARATION

"Self-awareness is critical. You need to show that you have really evaluated yourself, your skills, and your interests. For example, if you are interested in litigation, be able to explain why you are interested in it and WHY you think you would be good at it. Give specific reasons!"

"Have questions for every interviewer, even if it means asking the same questions multiple times. Interviewers always comment negatively on candidates who do not have any questions. To interviewers a candidate with no questions is not interested in them or the firm."

"The most impressive interviewees are those who can clearly articulate why they are interested in our firm, with specific reasons that are based on research."

"Know our bios. If you can't take the time to research us, that's a sign of a bigger problem."

"I am always impressed with students who can explain why they went to law school and, more importantly, where they see themselves in five years. I'm not really that concerned about the actual answer, but it's important to me that a student takes his/her career seriously enough that he/she has given this some thought."

"Do not discount the importance of writing samples. Those that review them take them seriously. Make sure you are providing your best possible work and triple-check for typos and Bluebooking."

"Read a book on interviewing before your interviews."

"Take advantage of your law school career services office. They are experts and can really help you make sure you are preparing the right way."

FIRST IMPRESSIONS/ETIQUETTE

"Don't come in empty handed - carry a professional-looking portfolio containing an easily accessible pen and notepad."

"Project energy and enthusiasm. If these are lacking, you won't get an offer."

"Turn off your cell phone. Get a haircut. For men, wear a dark suit, a white/blue shirt and red/blue tie. Take off that strange looking high school ring. No one will appreciate your unique fashion sense. Don't give people something weird to remember you by two months later when they're trying to remember who you are and whether you deserve an offer."

"Do not look at your watch during the interview."

"A firm handshake, winning smile, and good eye contact are important. It is your first chance to show confidence. I have written people off immediately after their limp hand shake."

"Do not speak negatively about attorneys, professors, career services personnel, other firms or anyone else in the legal community."

"Be extra polite and courteous to support staff such as secretaries, front desk receptionist, etc. They often have the ear of decision makers and will not hesitate to provide informal feedback on you, especially if you are not respectful."

THE INTERVIEW ITSELF

"Start a conversation with your interviewer before they have a chance to ask a question. Facilitate a conversation and not an interrogation or deposition."

"You must sell yourself and make a good case for why you possess the intellect and interest to be a successful attorney. Discussions about our 'training programs' and what our 'typical day is like' will not leave a very strong impression on me. I want to know why you think you will be a great attorney."

"Be able to explain your connection to and interest in practicing in [your city of interest]."

"Don't ask about benefits, vacation, part-time, flex scheduling, billable hour minimums, perks, maternity/paternity policy, free lunches, summer associate events, pro bono, computers, scheduling time for your honeymoon, taking a year off after law school to go hiking, etc. in your first interview."

"Remember that the easiest topic to ask someone (interviewer) is about him/herself - people naturally like to proselytize about their own accomplishments. Ask why we joined this firm, why we like it, etc."

"You will be asked to talk about your prior experiences, so be prepared to discuss each and every detail of your resume."

"Some of us are not good interviewers and we get nervous as well. If necessary, it never hurts to take the lead and help carry the interview with somebody that is not doing a very good job."

"Please don't tell me you're interested in practicing 'international law' because there's really no such a thing."

"The more laughter during an interview and the more we like you personally, the more we will overlook your weaknesses and play up your strengths. It happens all the time."

"The more the questions relate to the interviewer's personal experiences—as opposed to administrative-type issues—the better."

"If you are interviewing in two cities, don't try to cover it up if asked. Just have a good reason for your interest in [our city] and our firm."

"Don't focus too much on our firm's training programs. For some reason, it annoys me and seems too self-serving. Research it on our website instead."

"Realize that you may be responsible for carrying on an interesting conversation with perhaps a half-dozen strangers at lunch. Have some emergency topics in your mind if you need to 'tap-dance'."

"If you really don't know the answer to a question just say, 'I really don't know the answer.'"

"Ask: 'What are the common characteristics of attorneys who succeed at this firm?'"

"Do not ask only questions that shed the firm in a negative light. You can ask questions about things that you are concerned about, for example a merger or practice group leaving a firm, but balance those questions with questions about things you feel are positive aspects of the firm, like high rankings on a survey or something the firm has under 'news' on their website (firms typically only post good news)."

"Don't say something like 'I'm trying to decide between a 1000+ lawyer firm and a 12 person boutique.' It really makes you sound like you have no idea what you want."

"Do not tell an attorney in the [office in which you are interviewing] how interested you are in, for example, the labor & employment group, when every attorney practicing in that group is located in an office in another state."

"Do not feel you need to over explain things you perceive as weaknesses about yourself."

"Assume that everything you say to each interviewer will be discussed and compared by each of the interviewers when you're gone, and scrutinized for inconsistencies."

"If an interviewer initiates a debate on a legal issue, don't go nuts and argue like you would with a law school professor. Remain calm and composed, but focus on making logical sense."

"The more you focus on how your skills and experience can help make our lives easier, the better."

POST-INTERVIEW

"I recommend to students that they not call repeatedly when someone is not answering. We have caller ID. A message or email is much more effective without stalking the person you are trying to reach."

"When we give you our business card and say 'call with any questions', only take us up on it if you have a REALLY good question. If you're not sure what a REALLY good question is, ask your career services office."

"Don't get too hung up on thank-you notes. If you want to write one, email is fine. Just make sure there are no typos and you don't write the same thing to each person."

"If you are anxious about a possible offer, don't call to 'check in' unless you have a good reason for doing so, such as another pressing offer."

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