



Career Services Office Interview “Boot Camp”



To show your interest in this employer, be specific and show your knowledge. If you are attracted to their pro bono opportunities, say so. If they have a special litigation training camp you're interested in attending, let them know.

#### B. Remember that interviewing is a two-way street

Keep in mind that you and the potential employer are interviewing each other. The firm only makes the preliminary decisions whether to extend a callback and make an offer. You decide whether to accept the offer. Too many students get to the last step in the process (i.e., deciding between offers) and can't distinguish between firms. Ask questions, not just to make a good impression on your interviewer, but in order to elicit real information from your "candidate" that will help you decide whether you want to work there. Ask questions about the things that matter to you, even if you're afraid they may be 'sensitive' or 'if an issue that is important to you is too 'sensitive' for a lawyer at the firm to discuss, then you don't want to work there, and you'd do best to figure that out before you accept the offer.) If you can remember this, and believe it, it will help you enormously.

#### C. Be positive

Never badmouth anyone or anything at an interview. Your answers should always be "upbeat" in some way; this conveys that you are enthusiastic, psychologically healthy, and pleasant to be around. Most negatives can be presented in a positive way; for example, if you are asked what was your least favorite course in law school, after a brief statement of why you disliked the class, say what you would have liked to improve about it, the aspects of it that you appreciated; and how you managed to learn a great deal despite its shortcomings. When you practice answering interview questions, try eliminating all "no's:" "not's," "didn't's," "although," "buts," and "however's" from your speech. Rephrase your answers using positive speech forms. This will prepare you to speak about yourself in a positive light.

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favorable picture of their clients. You can do this on your own behalf, if you do not ~~use~~



Assess your strong points and have them at the ready. State them at the opportune moment, calmly and clearly, without bragging but without undue modesty. The interviewer wants to know what you have to offer and doesn't expect you to be demure about it.

Also, assess what you want from an employer generally, not specifically. Most law students are too uninformed to know exactly what they want, and interviewers know this. Nevertheless, do develop a pretty good picture of what kind of experience you're looking for, find out how to speak knowledgeably and ask good questions about it, and then tell the interviewer what you want and ask if they offer it.

#### B. Know your resume and your writing sample

Completely review your own background before the interview. Be ready to discuss everything on it intelligently and knowledgeably, as well as accounting for any period of time that it does not cover. If your writing sample was written a while ago, review it to refresh your memory about its contents. If your resume includes your thesis title, be sure you can have an intelligent discussion on the topic, even if you completed the research some time ago.

#### C. Research the employer

Research will help you anticipate interview questions and to prepare thoughtful, intelligent questions to ask the interviewer. The more you know about the prospective employer, the better able you are to highlight relevant skills and to demonstrate how your credentials ~~spoon~~ with the position for which you are applying. Lack of knowledge about the firm is a common reason to not give a callback or an offer to an applicant.

Coming to an interview prepared with knowledge about the firm indicates that as a lawyer you will come well prepared to meetings, court appearances, and the like. Your knowledge about the employer will also demonstrate that you are serious about your career goals, are selective about the jobs that interest you, and that you understand what it means to work in that particular organization. Research can help you avoid embarrassing faux pas, such as asking about a practice area or branch office the firm doesn't have. When you have prepared for an interview, you will be able to enter into it in a more focused frame of mind.

If you have researched the employer thoroughly, you can use your interview time to seek information that you were unable to find through other resources

A review of the firm or organization's web site prior to an interview is imperative. ~~the CSO~~ has much information and many links to research resources. Check out the National Association for Legal Career Professionals (NALP) form on the particular office of the firm at which you are interviewing. LinkedIn and Google will also prove useful. Many firms' branch offices have stats different from the headquarters, especially when it comes to practice areas and attorney demographics.



Classmates and alumni are also an invaluable resource. Talk to people who have worked at your target firm. They will usually give you the real lowdown on what it's like to work there. CSO can help you identify alumni working at your prospective employers.

#### D. Grades

You will probably be asked about them at some point in the course of interviewing. Keep the grades issue in perspective. Do not raise the question of grades yourself; interviewers wish to discuss grades will raise the question independently. If your grades aren't as strong as you would like them to be, don't make excuses. Being defensive about your grades can be fatal. Talk about your grades positively to convey to the interviewer that you are comfortable and confident in your law school studies and be sure to emphasize other aspects of your qualifications.

### 3. THE FIRST IMPRESSION AND BEYOND

The first few minutes of the interview are crucial; employers make up their mind about candidates very early.

#### A. Dress like a lawyer

A professional appearance shows respect, preparation, and that you can one day be a desirable representative for the employer in court, with clients, or at other public appearances. For an interview, this means clean shoes, hair (including facial hair, if applicable) that is neat, clean and nicely cut, and clean and clipped nails. Clothing should be understated, conservative (usually this means dark colors), pressed and brushed.

Perfume, aftershave lotion and cologne should be used sparingly if at all. If you are a smoker, do not smoke prior to an interview. Too much jewelry, particularly dangling earrings, is distracting. Avoid overdoing the makeup. Remember that employers will see you from the back as well as from the front; check your appearance from both perspectives.

#### B. What to bring

Bring extra copies of your resume, transcript and writing sample. The interviewer may come unprepared, or another employee may decide at the last minute to join the interview. Even if your interviewer has everything, it is a good way to show that you are prepared. Of course you would never knowingly let your cellphone ring during a job interview, but double-check to make sure you haven't inadvertently left it on.

#### C. Demeanor

Your demeanor should be dignified, friendly and confident. Remember, the interview starts the second you park your car. Shake hands (firmly, but not aggressively) with everyone to whom you are introduced. Make eye contact (but don't stare). Don't fidget, and keep your hands away





enthusiasm as the first time. If you use a similar answer or anecdote more than once, present it a bit differently each time; this will force you to concentrate and help avoid sounding "scripted."

Know your audience. Try to get a sense of each person who is interviewing you, and tailor your answers a bit to their personality. As a general rule, associates and younger partners in law firms are less interested in your qualifications than in your personality. Let them see you as a friendly, likable person rather than as a competitor. Older and ~~level~~ partners are likely to be more concerned with your grades, your ability to work hard, and your potential to one day bring in business for the firm. When you are interviewing with these lawyers you can take the opportunity to tell the firm how talented you ~~are~~ and how hard you like to work.

No matter how comfortable you feel, or how informal the person interviewing you may seem, never get too relaxed in your demeanor or your answers. Even young interviewers answer to the hiring committee. Your job is to communicate that you are professional as well as likeable. Never provide answers that reveal highly personal aspects of your private life.

If you have a late afternoon interview, try extra hard not to show your weariness, and keep in mind the interviewer has been interviewing students all day and may also be a little weary.

## 5. QUESTIONS TO BE PREPARED TO ANSWER

Anticipate questions about what your resume says and what it doesn't say. If there is something in your background you are particularly concerned about, write out answers in advance as part of your preparation. Take the time to think about your are profatMt you3 (d you l)-2 9 you4 Tc 0.002 Tw -



Tell me about yourself.

Describe yourself in one word.

What are your future career plans?

Why did you choose law?

What courses have you liked best? Least?

What qualifications do you have that make you feel you will be successful in your area of interest?

What have you learned from some of the jobs you have held?

What type of people do you feel you work with best?

What type of people would you have trouble working with?

What is your greatest personal asset? Your greatest weakness?

Do you like routine work?

What constitutes "security" in your mind?

What fields interest you other than the one you are in?

What do you really feel are things that help a person become successful?

What constitutes "success" in your mind?

What kinds of things give you the most satisfaction in your work?

What criteria are you using to evaluate the employer for which you hope to work?

What's the worst question you can think of to ask me?

What do you enjoy doing the most?

Why did you only get a "P" in \_\_\_\_?

How would you reconcile being assigned a case you were morally opposed to?

Why do you want to be a lawyer?

Why did you go to law school?

How do you like law school?





How are you doing in school?

What are your grades?

Why are you interested in this firm?

What can I tell you about this firm?



Try to prepare at least some inquiries that are specific to the firm, and which go beyond generic interview questions. Sometimes questions can be prefaced by statements that show something about you or your knowledge of the firm: "I know the firm does XYZ, does it also do ABC?" Always have a few extra questions in mind, in case the conversation lags. (Interviewers, especially those who are underprepared, will sometimes put the burden on the interviewee to ask questions about the job or the firm.) Questions also can allow the interviewer to relax by talking about something familiar.

The purpose of summer programs is to recruit future attorneys, so be sure to ask about what you might expect both as a summer and as a permanent associate. If an associate works for a firm as a 2L, you have a great opportunity to ask how the experiences compare.

Try to elicit information in ways that go behind standard answers. Instead of asking how much responsibility young associates are given (the stock response will be "ask the interviewer about a current project she is working on, and then ask how she assigns or is assigned work.

Don't be alarmed if you don't understand the interviewer's answer to a question. Often attorneys are not well calibrated to what a law student can be expected to know. So, for example, if an attorney responds to your inquiry about her practice with "I mostly work on submission of comment letters on the Basel 3 remuneration guidelines as well as the incentive compensation rules of the Dodd-Frank Act (Section 956)," ask an intelligent follow-up question, and move on from there.

Remember who your audience is: some questions are better for associates, while others should be directed to partners. Your questions should also differ according to where you are in the process: screening interviews aim at making it to the callback; at callbacks you can probe deeper, and once you have an offer, you have more leeway yet. Keep in mind that in responding to your questions, younger attorneys especially may feel conflicted between wanting to give frank answers about the firm to someone who is nearly a peer, and their job of promoting the firm as part of the recruiting process.

#### A. Questions to Ask the Associate Interviewer:

Associates can tell the difference between legitimate and "filler" questions, as they went through the interview process not long ago. They are your best source of information about what life might be like if you were to come to work at the firm.

Tell me about your most important cases or transactions.

This question can generate a useful dialog about what an associate is actually doing--not what the firm says lawyers do early in their career, or a recital of the firm's profile cases.

How are these cases and transactions staffed (partners /associates / seniority / reporting lines)?



Every firm will tell you its cases are staffed “leanly.” Hearing about how particular matters are staffed will help you understand whether this is true, and how much direct partner contact you are likely to get.

Follow up questions: at what point did you (or do you expect to) handle a deposition/oral argument/client call/transactional matter unsupervised?

How does the associate evaluation process work?

All firms have evaluation procedures of one kind or another. But you will want to know how often young lawyers are reviewed, how the evaluation is delivered, how active a role the associate has in the process, how it affects compensation, whether reviews are anonymous, etc. Pay attention to cues about how the process actually seems to be working for the associate.

What is the process for providing feedback to summers?

“Lots of useful feedback” is a standard claim; try to get specifics about how the firm uses attorneys to provide constructive criticism to summer associates.

Tell me about supervision, mentoring and training for associates.

All firms tout their professional development opportunities. Specific questions about how this interviewer experiences them will help you find out what the firm’s priorities are, and how organized the firm’s approach to development is. Ask about mentoring, advisor systems, writing programs, in firm and outside CLE programs. Ask about how much time associates are expected to devote to professional development. Does the firm have benchmarks for attainments of specific skills by associates at different levels? How does the firm support associates’ realization





Every partner must think of the firm's future, and this is more urgent now than ever. try to anticipate clients' needs, and ensure the capability to serve them. Questions could pertain both to practice areas (which ones the partner sees as being in demand in coming years) and to ways of serving clients (new technologies, billing schemes, etc.).



How is the firm governed?

Would you describe management as very centralized, or more dispersed?

How are associates involved in the decision-making process?

### C. Questions not to ask

Avoid questions to which you could have found answers to by reading the employer's NALP form, Chambers Guide, the firm web site elsewhere online. While you are not presumed to have memorized the firm's web site, a general familiarity with the firm, and greater acquaintance with any area in which you are interested, is expected.

Avoid questions that indicate too much interest in perks, compensation, part-time work or vacations in relation to challenges and hard work.

Expectations as to billable hours, while a legitimate concern, should be asked about diplomatically so as not to appear unwilling to work hard. Same with regard to questions about work/life balance.

While an interest in the training the firm offers is fine, remember that you benefit from training regardless of how long you stay at the firm, so too much focus on it might be interpreted as "what's in this for me?"

Especially if you have a background in public interest, a focus on a firm's pro bono work and policies might suggest that you aren't keen on working for the clients which provide the firm's revenues.

Questions about your prospects for becoming a partner are likely to be viewed as premature. When asked about your career goals for five, or ten years, demonstrate that you understand that a law firm is a business and you want to work hard to earn your place there and one day begin bringing in business. After several years as an associate, partner could be in your future. Anything that suggests you are thinking of your "exit strategy" sends a negative message.

Be careful with questions which may reflect negatively on the firm (e.g., regarding rumors of high attorney attrition, layoffs and the like). While your concern about such matters is legitimate, proceed with caution, and take answers with a grain of salt.

## 7. AFTER THE INTERVIEW

### A. Self-Evaluation



It is natural and beneficial for an interviewee to evaluate his/her performance as soon as he/she steps out of the interview room. Keep in mind that you may not be able to judge your performance accurately. Your memory may amplify particular aspects of the interview that the interviewer did not even notice; or, you may downplay certain aspects that actually stand out in the interviewer's mind. Many interviewees are too hard on themselves and agonize over a particular response to a question only to find out later that the interviewer had no recollection of it and would like them to come in for further interviews. If after several callback interviews, you are not extended a callback offer, arrange an appointment with the OSC. A pattern of performance may be detectable and easily rectified.

## B. Thank You Letters

Generally, thank you letters are always required after an interview. If you made a particular connection with an interviewer, a thank you letter is a good idea. If you made a particular connection with an interviewer, a thank you letter is a good idea. If you made a particular connection with an interviewer, a thank you letter is a good idea.