

THE



OF INTERVIEWING



**Prepared by the Career Services Office
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Introduction

The employment interview is the most critical part of the recruitment process and, more than any other phase of recruiting, has a tendency to generate anxiety in all people concerned. Interviews are conversations between two or more people. They are a dialogue, not just a question and answer session. A good interviewer wants to get to know you, how you think, how you react, and something about your character, intelligence and judgment. This means that questions are asked not only to elicit facts and information but also to size you up. To maximize your chances for a successful interview, you should know something about the organization you are interviewing with and the person who is conducting the interview. You must be well groomed, professionally dressed, and prepared to answer a variety of questions. Always be on time.

There are two cardinal rules to remember when interviewing: **Be Yourself and Be Prepared.**

BE YOURSELF: This means that you need to understand yourself. You need to go through a process of self-evaluation and exploration of your goals. This is an on-going process and should be done, at the very minimum, once a year. You need to be aware of your weaknesses and turn them into strengths. Most important, you need to be able to effectively communicate to the employer who you are and what is important to you. Remember, if you try to be what you are not in an interview, you are being unfair to yourself and the employer. You could also end up in a job that is not right for you because you were not true to yourself.

BE PREPARED: This is a key element of successful interviewing. You need to know all the details of the interview (who you're talking to, date, time, and place). You also need to research the employer and find out as much as you can about the firm or organization. The more knowledge you have about the nature of work that the firm or organization conducts, the more likely you will be able to convey to the employer your desire to work there.

Self-Assessment

It is very important to think realistically about your particular needs in terms of type and nature of practice, lifestyle requirements, pressure thresholds, geographic preferences, desire for control of your own work, need for independence and other related matters. Only after you have gone through this process can you truly be yourself in an interview. (See [Attachment A: Self-Assessment Evaluation](#).)

Preparation

Preparation is the key element in successful interviewing. This is true for several reasons. First, your preparation will put you more at ease in the interview. It is very hard to relax before an interview when you are worried about sticking your foot in your mouth because you know so little about the employer. Knowledge will give you confidence. Second, selling yourself to the employer is accomplished much more effectively when you know what the employer wants to buy. If you can explain cogently to the employer why there is a proper fit between your background and interests and the available position, you are well on your way to receiving an offer.

Finally, thorough preparation will give you an edge over other candidates. Few people really take the time to prepare for an interview. Put yourself in the employer's position. It is refreshing to talk to someone who has done his or her homework. Later, this same preparation will also help you make an informed decision before accepting a position.

For on-campus interviews, the Career Services Office (CSO) usually knows in advance who the interviewer(s) will be. When interviewing off-campus, ask the organizer who you will be meeting with and how long the interview(s) will last. Be sure to get the name of the interviewer right; it shows respect for that person.

Research Information on the Employer

Prior to an interview one should gather as much information about the employer as possible. Read documents such as firm resumes, company reports, position descriptions, company literature, firm evaluations, NALP forms, *Martindale-Hubbell* descriptions, and geographic information. Many of these documents can be found in the Career Services Office. It is imperative that you read everything you can about the types of practice that interest you and about potential employers. *Martindale-Hubbell*, especially, will give you information not only about the law firm and its employees, but also about the type of people the organization regularly hires.

If you are well-informed, you won't ask superficial questions, and you will have a sense of confidence during the interview. If there are other people who can give you information about a firm or employer, talk to them. Students who have worked there, faculty members, placement personnel, alumni, and friends—all will have background knowledge or opinions that should be evaluated in light of their personal experience and feelings about that employer. In cases where students want to obtain information about the job market or establish contacts in cities outside the Portland area, the Alumni and Development Director is an excellent source of information. He or she can give you names of alumni to contact in a variety of locations for informational interviewing purposes. (See [Attachment E](#) for Sample Informational Interview Questions.)

Confidence is Key

CONFIDENCE IS THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR IN A GOOD INTERVIEW. If you don't have confidence in yourself, the interviewer certainly won't. Presentation, selling yourself with confidence, is crucial. Your resume gets you the interview, but it's the interview that gets you the job. Some interviewers say you can't undo a bad first impression, that the first five minutes of an interview are the most important. Be confident from the start.

What Employers are Looking For

In order to successfully market your strengths to a potential employer, you must know what this person wants from you. The most common mistake people make when interviewing is to assume that merely responding with factual information and a pleasant demeanor will be sufficient to impress the employer. Not so. Employers are looking for certain attributes, and it is your job to use your experience and accomplishments to project these intangibles. What are these attributes? The next few pages will provide you with information regarding universal and specific qualities employers look for as well as qualities that impress employers when conducting an interview.

A survey by the College Placement Council yielded the following most commonly mentioned specific qualities:

1. **Ability to Communicate.** Employers want people who are articulate and are good listeners.
2. **Intelligence.** Intelligence is not measured only by your class standing. There is no doubt that employers like high grades, but intelligence is a much broader concept than what is quantified in a grade point average.
3. **Self-Confidence.** Employers want people who believe in themselves.
4. **Willingness to Accept Responsibility.** Employers want people who aren't afraid of tackling hard jobs and who accept blame as well as credit for the job done.
5. **Initiative.** Employers want go-getters. They want people who don't wait to be told what to do: people who can see a problem and take the initiative to solve it independently.
6. **Leadership.** Leadership comes in all shapes and forms, and you don't necessarily have to be able to lead lemmings to jump off cliffs to possess leadership qualities.
7. **Energy.** Employers like people who want to make money the old-fashioned way—by earning it. They want people who approach hard work with enthusiasm.
8. **Imagination.** Employers need innovative, creative people.

9. **Flexibility.** Employers are looking for adaptable people. They need people who can "go with the flow" and accept change.
10. **Interpersonal Skills.** Employers seek people who get along well with others and promote an *esprit de corps* among their colleagues. No one wants to hire someone with whom it is difficult to get along.
11. **Self-Knowledge.** Here's that word again. Employers want people who know their abilities and their goals.
12. **Ability to Handle Conflict.** Employers want people who don't require rubber rooms when the pressure builds at work. They want people who can handle stress in a healthy way.
13. **Goal Achievement.** Employers want people who are goal-oriented. They want people who are always striving to better themselves.
14. **Competitiveness.** Competition breeds winners. Employers like winners. There is a difference, however, between healthy competition (those who like to win) and unhealthy competition (those who like to crush the other person).
15. **Vocational Skills.** Employers need people who have the skills to get the job done.
16. **Direction.** This is closely related to self-knowledge and goal achievement—where are you going in life and why? Do you have a sense of focus about yourself and your career?

Interview Qualities

The following is a list of characteristics that employers are looking for in you. It is important to keep these qualities in mind when preparing for and when participating in an interview. You may learn more about qualities valued by specific types of employers by conducting informational interviews. These interviews are conversations with people who do what you hope to do in the future. They are not job interviews; they are fact-gathering missions. Consider doing a few of these for each type of position or organization. (See [Attachment E: Sample Informational Interview Questions](#).)

General Demeanor

- Show proper professional appearance.
- Display appropriate grooming and behavior.
- Exhibit good self-concept.
- Maintain normal voice level, eye-contact, and mannerisms.
- Present information in an organized and logical manner.
- Respond directly to questions.

- Demonstrate verbal skills.
- Appear comfortable and relaxed.

Attitude & Character

- Discuss thought-out career goals.
- Show an understanding of strengths and weaknesses.
- Demonstrate problem-solving skills.
- Have a sense of moral purpose.
- Exemplify type of attitude and character appropriate for employer.
- Maintain varied interests.

Educational & Employment Experience

- Demonstrate development of abilities and skills.
- Specify relevance of background to career goals.
- Exhibit goal-directed behavior.
- Present good organizational skills.
- Show continuity of purpose.
- Exhibit potential for professional excellence.
- Demonstrate leadership qualities.

Interest in Employer

- Specify interest in type and size of organization.
- Show interest in location and, if possible, show ties to area.
- Demonstrate familiarity with employer and location.
- Provide specific reasons for choosing to interview.
- Describe own goals and experience in a way that relates them to the employer and the position available.

Detail Gathering

Make sure that you have all the information about the interview, and that it is correct. You need to know the following:

- Name of Interviewer(s)
- Name of Hiring Partner
- Street Address
- Suite/Room Number
- Time
- Materials Needed (Writing Samples, Transcripts, etc.)

Always Bring Several Copies of Your Resume & References!!

If the interview is on-campus, the room will be posted on a bulletin board outside the Career Services Office the morning of the interview. Always double check room numbers as they may change! If you are not sure where the room is, find out ahead of time. If the interview is off-campus, make sure you scout the location so you will not be late—tardiness truly shows poor organizational skills. Find out whether or not you need to bring writing samples, transcripts, or special application forms, and be prepared. Always carry extra copies of your resume, a typed list of references, a notebook or folder holding those documents (folio type is nice) and a pen.

Physical Preparation

Dressing appropriately for an interview is very important. Always lean towards the conservative in dress. Lawyers are generally somewhat conservative, and you will be expected to conform to their sense of proper style. Make sure you are impeccably groomed. Do not wear overly strong cologne or perfume or too much jewelry. Keep makeup low-key, and keep an eye on things like nails and shoes. Men should wear a suit. Women can wear either a suit or a conservative dress, with nylons and heels. Above all, you want to feel comfortable with what you are wearing. You want your appearance to add to your confidence rather than be something you are worrying about during the interview. If in doubt about what to wear, ask a lawyer or a member of the Career Services Office. By all means, get a good night's sleep and eat breakfast before the interview. Also, remember to have breath mints with you. Smokers need to refrain from smoking at least one hour before the interview. (Be aware that nonsmokers are sensitive to the smell of smoke on clothing. Refrain from wearing clothes that have been in smoky locations.)

Question & Answer Preparation

REMEMBER THAT A GOOD INTERVIEW IS A DIALOGUE. You are interviewing the interviewer, in a sense, because you want to learn as much as you can about that interviewer's organization. Some of the people interviewing you are not going to be good at interviewing. It is important for you to assess that interviewer's skill early in the interview. If the interviewer is good, allow him or her to lead. Answer questions in a conversational style as opposed to short yes-no answers.

LISTEN. Don't just be ready to jump in with a prepared answer. Listening carefully is a valuable skill. If you don't understand a question you're asked, don't be afraid to ask a clarifying question yourself.

NEVER LIE. You can and should offer as favorable an interpretation of your credentials and experience as possible. Although you do not have to bare your soul in answering

every question, you must always be honest. **DO NOT** be negative or make excuses about your past.

If your interviewer is not particularly skilled, be ready to take the lead yourself. Sometimes asking the interviewer about his or her own work is a way to get a poor interviewer involved in a conversation. You can also try volunteering information about your summer experience, or why you came to law school after six years in banking, or how you and your Moot Court partner fared in a competition, or why you are doing your Independent Writing Project on your particular topic. Remember, you want to be able to decide if you actually want to work for a particular employer. ([Attachment B: Questions to Ask to Help Find that Correct Fit.](#))

It is good to ask questions, but don't ask questions that a quick look in *Martindale-Hubbell* could have already answered for you. Your questions should focus on the job description, the "life of a summer employee" or the "life of a first-year employee." Some examples of the questions you could ask, as long as they have not already been answered by the interviewer, are included in [Attachment C: Sample Questions to Ask Employers.](#)

It is perfectly appropriate to ask when the employer expects to make decisions about a second interview. If you are asked, "Do you have any questions?" **DO NOT SAY, "NO."** Always be prepared to ask a question.

You may be asked questions that are difficult to answer. If your grades are not as good as you (or the employer) would like, you may be asked some blunt questions about why you haven't done better. You should be prepared to answer these questions in a manner that is not defensive and in a manner that turns a potential negative into a positive. Ask the CSO director for suggestions, if you need them. You should be aware that inappropriate questions are sometimes asked: questions about your husband's or wife's career and family plans are illegal. You should be aware that these questions could be asked so that you are ready to handle them the way you want to. If you feel illegal questions have been asked, you should notify the Career Services Office immediately. There is a booklet called *A Fair Share: Lawful and Effective Interviewing* available in the CSO.

Occasionally, you may be asked a question which sounds discriminatory. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has stated:

"Except in those infrequent instances where religion or national origin is a bona fide occupational qualification reasonably necessary for the performance of a particular job, an applicant's race, religion and the like are totally irrelevant to his or her ability or qualifications as a prospective employee, and no useful purpose is served by eliciting such information . . . "

Because the people with whom you will interview usually have no training in interviewing, most of the time an inappropriate question is not being asked to discriminate against you; rather, it addresses a concern regarding your dedication and/or abilities. Thus, you must decide how you will respond to such questions. Calling attention

to the illegality of the question will probably offend or scare the interviewer—neither of which are likely to contribute to a job offer for you. One way to handle the matter is to address the interviewer's underlying concern and make positive self-statements without directly answering the question.

For example, if a woman is asked how she plans to care for her children once she begins to work, she might respond: "You seem to be concerned about my ability and commitment to devote time to the law." She might then go on to explain that she has had a very successful day-care arrangement throughout law school and that her husband shares equally in the responsibility for child care. She might express the fact that her seven years of preparation to be a lawyer are proof of her commitment.

It is extremely important that you prepare for the types of questions you will face in an interview. This will allow you to offer solid and well-stated responses rather than off-the-top-of-your-head responses. Questions such as "Tell me about yourself," "What are your weaknesses?" "Do you think your law school grades are indicative of your abilities as a lawyer?" and "What do you really want out of life?" test your self-knowledge and direction. Although they are intentionally open-ended, you can use these questions to subtly sell your skills and talents. By preparing for these types of questions ahead of time, you can impress the interviewer with your knowledge of his/her organization and cogently explain why you would be a good addition to the organization. ([Attachment D: Sample Interview Questions](#))

Some topics, unless brought up by the interviewer, are better left for a second interview. Detailed discussions about salary, how raises are given, when and on what they are based, number of billable hours expected, what happens if you don't bill that many, what does becoming a partner mean (in terms of your responsibilities and earnings), who makes decisions about salaries and what kind of formulas are used, all fall into this category. It is appropriate to ask these kinds of questions in the second interview. In fact, don't be afraid to ask about money at that time. If you do not ever ask about money, the firm may wonder why you don't care about your earnings.

At most law firms, you will meet four to six people, one at a time, during a second interview. You will usually meet with each person in his or her office. At some firms, second interviews are held in conference rooms with partners and associates coming and going. This setting offers you an opportunity to see how different people in a firm interact with each other. Do not hesitate to ask the same question of different people; it will be interesting to see what kinds of answers you get.

Closing Thoughts

Always be attentive and enthusiastic. If you don't communicate interest, along with competence and self-confidence, an employer will probably not be interested in you. Be articulate. Practice answers to some typical questions, but do not practice so much that

your answer sounds rehearsed and stale. Practice so that you are comfortable talking about certain issues you will be asked about over and over again. Being prepared for a question such as "Tell me about yourself," or, "What are you most proud of?" can make the difference between pausing and stumbling or sounding thoughtful and articulate — a big difference in the impression you make.

Always have an extra copy of your resume with you; interviewers sometimes do forget to bring students' resumes with them. If you are interviewing at an employer's office, bring several extra copies; you may be meeting with several people. Also, bring a writing sample, transcript, and a list of references with you; for those few times you may be asked for either, you will look efficient and prepared.

Interviewing can be an interesting fact-gathering experience or an anxiety-filled process. Do what you can to make good use of your time while selling yourself to your future employer.

GOOD LUCK!