INTERVIEW
Helpful Hints for Successful Interviewing

Career Strategy and Professional Development
Mentoring Center
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INTRODUCTION

For many students, the interview process can be a daunting one—full of anxiety, nervousness, and ambiguity. However, there are strategies and steps you can take to help ensure that the process goes smoothly for you.

This booklet is a compilation of ideas and exercises which provide a source of information for preparing for interviews of various types. Since the information is put together from a variety of sources, some of the material may be redundant and some of the advice is fairly universal.

You may also want to visit our web page below to gain access to our Online Career Library where you’ll find additional career resources:

Whichever tool you peruse, use what you like and what works for you, but always remember to be professional and be yourself. GOOD LUCK!!
YOU NEVER GET A SECOND CHANCE TO
MAKE A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION

APPEARANCE

For Women:
• Classic suits or pantsuits – notched collar or collarless – black, navy or charcoal. Solids are preferable to patterns.
• Sophisticated, updated blouses in complementary colors – no low necklines
• Hemlines should be knee level – no miniskirts
• Hosiery is a must – have an extra pair available in case of a run
• Closed toe pumps with moderate to low heels
• Lighten makeup and neutralize nail polish – if you do wear a color, don't be garish and always match nails and lip color
• Hair should be neatly styled or pulled back if longer than shoulder length
• Jewelry should be minimal, don't wear anything that dangles or jingles

For Men:
• Neutral colored suits – black, navy or charcoal
• Conservative ties with subtle patterns
• White long-sleeved shirt (professionally laundered) is still the business norm
• Lace-up shoes in black are always a good choice
• Hair, mustache and/or sideburns must be neatly trimmed – beards are risky and goatees are a bad choice
• Appropriate jewelry includes a conservative watch and/or ring

If a student is on financial aid and doesn’t have appropriate clothing for interviews, check with the Director of Financial Aid, Joseph Lindsay, regarding the possibility of loan assistance to purchase a suit.

What to Bring:

Although you may not be asked, bring:
• A copy of your resume
• An unofficial transcript
• A writing sample
• A list of references
PROFESSIONALISM and COURTESY

As the title of this section reveals, you never get a second chance to make a good first impression. This is your chance to show an employer that you have what they need. The interview also provides an opportunity for you to see if an employer can offer what you want out of a professional career opportunity.

• Google your route to the interview and be sure to have cash for parking.
• Be on time for the interview.
• Do not smoke, chew gum, or eat candy while waiting.
• Greet the interviewer by name and with a smile.
• Shake the interviewer’s hand firmly, but not too firmly. Practice with a friend.
• If the interview scheduled immediately before yours is taking longer than expected, sit and wait patiently until the interviewer comes out to get you. The interviewer is well aware of your interview time.
• Listen carefully to what the interviewer has to say. Remember to listen. Communication is a two-way street. If you are talking too much, you will probably miss cues concerning what the interviewer feels is important.
• If you have a tendency to be shy, be sure you are not answering questions with only a “yes” or “no” answer. When you qualify your “yes” or “no” answer, the employer will learn more about you and see more of your personality.
• Be courteous and tactful.
• Match the interviewer’s tone. Ex: Don’t be high energy and fidget if the interviewer is calm and deliberate.
• Interviews are formal environments. Do not use colloquial language. Be sure to show the interviewer the proper degree of deference.
• Interviewers are making an assessment as to whether they can put you in front of a client.

POSITIVE BODY LANGUAGE

The initial rapport you establish with the interviewer is essential. Besides your appearance, your physical responses and body language are keys for success.

• EYE CONTACT – In American society, courteousness is shown by looking into someone’s eyes. This tells the other person that you are listening to what the other person has to say. It also says that you are confident in yourself and your opinions. If you have a habit of looking away while listening, it may convey a lack of interest and short attention span. Don’t assume you have good eye contact.
• FACIAL EXPERSSIONS – A true and genuine smile tells others you are a happy person and delighted to be interviewing.
• POSTURE – Posture sends the signal of your confidence and power potential. Stand tall, walk tall and most all, sit tall. When you are seated, make sure you sit at the front edge of the chair, slightly leaning forward, intent on the subject at hand.
• GESTURES – They should be limited during the interview. Make sure they are sincere and meaningful.
• SPACE – Recognize the boundaries of your personal space and that of others.
NEGATIVE BODY LANGUAGE

Avoid these signs of nervousness and tension in an interview or while speaking to a potential employer.

- Frequently touching your mouth
- Faking a cough to think about the answer to a question
- Gnawing on your lip
- Tight or forced smiles
- Swinging your foot or leg
- Folding or crossing your arms
- Slouching
- Avoiding eye contact
- Picking at invisible bits of lint
- Playing with your watch, pen or jewelry
- Playing with your hair

NOTE: As with all life’s experiences, the interview is a situation that has risk. You are extending yourself into a situation that may lead to rejection. You may come away from the interview feeling disappointed in your performance or in the employer. You may feel good about the job and the meeting you had with the employer only to find out that a classmate got the position that you coveted. These are called learning experiences. From each interview that didn’t turn out the way you’d hoped, there is something to be gained. You have no learned what should have been done in the interview, how a question should be answered, what type of legal opportunity you wish to pursue, etc. Approach each interview with a positive attitude knowing that you will be learning something about yourself in the process. Don’t forget to send a follow up thank you letter to the interviewer.
A GUIDE TO INTERVIEWING

Congratulations – you got an interview with a great employer! Now you have to get ready for the actual event. Remember, interviewing is stressful for everyone. The more you learn about the process and the employer, the easier it will become – and the more effective you will be in your interviews.

PURPOSE OF THE INTERVIEW

The basic point of an interview is to let the employer get a feel for what you are like, and vice versa. An interview is a two-way street. People want to work with folks they like, and an interview is the best way for employers to figure out if you’ll be nice to work with. It also gives you the opportunity to ask questions about the employer and figure out if you would like to work there. Finally, the interview gives you a chance to sell yourself – so make the most of it.

COMPONENTS OF AN INTERVIEW

Like a letter, an interview generally has three parts – a greeting, a discussion/exchange of information, and a closing:

**Greeting:** First impressions count! The greeting sets the tone for the entire interview, so be confident. Be on time and dress professionally. Smile, look the interviewer in the eye, introduce yourself, and offer a firm handshake. Present a relaxed and positive appearance. Be prepared to engage in some small talk about the weather, your professors, current events, etc. before moving on to the rest of the interview. Just follow the interviewer’s lead and allow a natural rapport to develop.

**Discussion:** At some point, the interviewer will move from the small talk to the “meat” of the interview. You and the employer will engage in an exchange of information about your background, goals, and experiences and how they mesh with the needs of the employer and position for which you are interviewing. This is your chance to sell yourself, demonstrate your enthusiasm for the job, and ask questions. Continue to maintain good eye contact and a professional and thoughtful demeanor. Avoid nervous gestures or habits. Speak clearly and thoughtfully; answering the questions asked and making your desired points about your qualifications for the job. Remember, an interview is in part a sales presentation – convince the employer you are the best for the job! However, be sure to keep answers to the point, so that you make the most valuable use of the short time available for the interview.

**Closing:** Leave the interviewer with a good impression. Reiterate your interest in the position and the employer. Ask if there is any additional information you can provide, and what the employer’s time frame is for making a decision. Find out who to call if you have any further questions. Smile, shake hands, and end on a positive note. You might want to use a parting line such as “I’ve really enjoyed meeting with you. Your practice sounds wonderful and I’d like to be a part of it.” You get the idea!
INTERVIEW PREPARATION

The secret to a good interview is preparation! This cannot be emphasized enough. Your preparation should include three parts: researching the employer and interviewer, coming up with your own “sales pitch”, and practicing answers to common questions you will be asked and the questions you want to ask. Preparation will pay off, and a lack of preparation will be deadly.

Researching the Employer and Interviewer: Knowing as much as possible about the employer and the interviewer will make you feel more confident and will impress the interviewer. It will also save you from making unfortunate comments such as “I don’t want to practice criminal law” when interviewing with a firm that specializes in that area. Being prepared will also demonstrate your enthusiasm for the position. Finally, your research may tell you whether or not you really want to work for this employer.

How do you conduct all this research? There are many resources, including Martindale – Hubbell, Lewis and Westlaw Career Search databases, trade publications, such as the National Law Journal and Legal Times, Career Services employer files, and the Internet, where many firms have their own web page. Using these resources you can learn what areas a firm practices in, how many lawyers they have, where their offices are located, and all sorts of other useful information. For government agencies also check with Career Services for additional guidance. In addition, you may consider contacting alums who work at the firm or agency, or students who have worked there. For Judicial Clerkship interviews use Lexis and Westlaw to research the judge’s opinions. Try to become as familiar as possible with the employer by checking all resources.

If you know who you will be interviewing with, also research that person. Martindale – Hubbell lists an attorney’s birthplace, undergraduate and law schools, areas of practice, and professional affiliations. If you both went to the same undergraduate school, that will be an instant bond. Another tactic that is always impressive is to do a Westlaw or Lexis search for recent cases on which the particular attorney appeared. Then when you come to the interview, mention his or her most recent case and ask a question or two about it. This definitely shows your interest and enthusiasm!

Know Your Application Materials: Reread your resume and writing sample and be prepared to answer questions about them. If you have a publication listed on your resume, be prepared to summarize its thesis succinctly. Refresh your memory about your prior work and scholastic experiences. The underlying question in the interviewer’s mind is, “Why should we hire you?” List three or four things you most want an employer to know about you and make sure to bring these qualities up during your interview. These qualities may include writing, research, problem solving, leadership, oral advocacy, attention to detail and dedication/enthusiasm to name a few.

Know Your Online Image: Prospective employers may conduct Internet research to learn more about you than what you’ve shared through your application materials. It is important for you to maintain a professional online image. Do you have a profile on LinkedIn, Facebook or MySpace? Do you have a personal website or blog? Does the content project a professional image? Be aware not only of the content you author, but the links to other content from your site; it is certainly possible that a prospective employer will follow the links provided. If you share your thought and opinions on other sites, are you comfortable with employers reading your views? Google yourself – are you concerned with what you see? If it is content you posted, look into taking it down. Consider restricting access to your online content whenever possible.
Practicing Your “Sales” Pitch: The interview is your time to shine. If you have given some thought in advance to your strengths and why they make you perfect for the job, things will go much more smoothly. Similarly, if you have thought about you will answer the typical “tough” interview questions you will make a much better impression.

Kimm Walton, author of Guerilla Tactics for Getting the Legal Job of Your Dreams, recommends making up an infomercial about yourself. This would be a short statement that says the most important things you want employers to know about you. It will include those points you want to be sure you make – for example, highlighting your writing skills by noting your high grade in legal research and writing, or emphasizing your oral advocacy abilities by mentioning your participation on a moot court or mock trial team. Then, when employers ask “What are your strengths” or “Why should we hire you” you will have an answer ready.

To come up with your infomercial, Kimm suggests the following steps. First, think about your background and pick out those accomplishments you are most proud of. Then, identify three to five job-related strengths those accomplishments show you have, such as the ability to work under pressure or excellent writing and research skills, or working well as part of a team. Next, memorize an infomercial that cites your job-related skills and uses your accomplishments for support. For example, you might say “I work well under pressure. At my last job, I was able to step in for a co-worker who left our company and finish the year-end bookkeeping in one week.” Of course, everyone’s infomercial will be different, but this gives you the idea. Finally, you will tailor your infomercial to the particular employer with whom you are interviewing. Certain parts of your background will be of greater interest to some employers than others. Use what you have learned about the employer through your research to emphasize qualities the employer values.

You will probably not use all of your infomercial in every interview. But having prepared the infomercial will ensure that you are ready to answer those tough interview questions like “Tell me about yourself.” You can then just highlight a few of the job-related skills and supporting examples that make up your infomercial, choosing those that are most relevant to the employer.

Most importantly, be professional and be yourself. You want what you say to be honest and comfortable; you do not want to sound artificial or canned. When you are selling yourself, you are simply bringing out your own best qualities in the interview. There is no need to try to be something you’re not.

Practicing Answers to Questions: There are many questions that you will hear over and over in interviews. Think about how you will respond to these questions and rehearse your answers. Make your answers positive and honest. Also, be familiar with your resume and writing sample. Be prepared to answer any questions about anything you have done in the past. Consider the following when answering the questions above:

- **Why did you go to law school?**
  Your answer should reflect motivation, drive, ambition and commitment, not aimless drifting into more school after your undergraduate degree.

- **What areas of law are of interest to you?**
  Your answer should reflect thoughts about your future, open-mindedness about multiple area, whether you are a good match for the firm, etc.

- **What are you looking for in a firm and what are your career goals?**
  Your answer should reflect thoughtfulness, sense of making a contribution, goal orientation, rather than merely job security.
If you have any tricky areas to deal with, such as low grades, be prepared to answer questions in a positive manner without being defensive. Any tough questions interviewers ask are designed to assure the employer that you can do the job and see how you react under pressure. The way in which you answer is much more important than what you say. The key is to stay positive. For some great ways to answer typical “tough” questions, see Chapter 7 of *Guerilla Tactics* (available in Career Services). For example, in answering questions, consider the responses below:

- **Why are your grades low?**
  Give a short answer: “I was sick, I had family responsibilities” and then end on a positive note. Follow up with a statement like: “I have done particularly well in ____ class,” or discuss a job experience where you excelled. You can also say “I don’t think my GPA is representative of my abilities because ____.”
- If your grades have improved over the course of your law school career, point out that improvement.
- Consider whether you had to make an adjustment to the law school exam taking technique. For example, if your undergraduate degree was in a science, you would have had to make adjustments in how you prepared for and took law school exams.

You should also prepare some questions **you** will ask the interviewer. Intelligent questions help you learn about the employer, create personal rapport with the interviewer, and show off what you know about the employer through your research. You can ask various categories of questions, such as:

**Personalized questions for the interviewer:**
- *How did you choose this job?* or *What kinds of cases are you working on?*

**Questions that show what you know about the employer:**
- *I read that you represent XYZ Company. Are they a typical client?*

**Questions about what your job experience would be like:**
- *What would a typical day be like?*
- *What kind of feedback will I get?*

**General firm questions:**
- *What are the firm’s plans for the next five years?*
- *What are the firm’s objectives or plans for client growth?*
- *How is the firm governed?*
- *How does the firm determine what type of work a new associate (or summer associate) is to be assigned?*

**Ask about opportunities for exposure to multiple practice areas/specialization:**
- *Does the firm require attorneys to specialize? When does the decision to specialize occur?*

**Ask about training/supervision opportunities:**
- *Are there formal in-firm training programs? Are new associates encouraged to attend outside seminars?*
Ask about their Summer Program

- **What kind of work do you expect summer associates to do?** Do they do mostly do research and memo writing or do they draft pleadings?
- **How is work assigned?** Is there an effort to provide for a variety of assignments?
- **Are there opportunities for out-of-office experiences such as attending hearings, trials, or depositions?**
- **Is there a formal feedback mechanism or is it dependent upon the style of the assigning attorney?**
- **Do you have an end-of-summer evaluation system that solicits the opinions of your summer associates respecting their experiences?** If yes, what are the areas of praise and areas of criticism?
- **Do you make associate offers to first year students?**
- **Do you require first-year summer associates to return the second summer in order to be considered for an associate offer?** If so, for how long?

Ask about Associate Issues:

- **What types of cases are assigned to associates?** How is the work assigned?
- **Are there sections or practice groups?** Is a rotation required?
- **How are lawyers selected to work in a particular group?**
- **How are associates evaluated?** What factors are considered and who makes the decision?
- **Are there mandatory or targeted annual hours for associates?**
- **What associate training programs are available?**
- **How large is the entering associate class?**
- **What is the partnership track?**
- **What percentage of recent associate classes has been asked to become partners?**
- **How many associates have left before partner consideration?**
- **Does your firm have partnership tiers?**
- **What is the associate compensation system beyond first-year salaries?** Bonus? Salaries to second, third, fourth etc. year levels?

Avoid questions about salaries and benefits, questions with a negative tone, and any questions you could have answered yourself through simple research. And most critically, avoid having no questions at all! This conveys the impression that you aren’t really interested in the job. The following **should not** be asked or until an offer is made:

- Avoid questions about compensation or benefits.
- Avoid questions about general information that is available in firm brochures or NALP forms. *How many lawyers do you have?*
- Avoid questions about the billable hour requirements of the firm. Instead ask questions aimed at determining what an attorney’s day or week is like.

If you do all of this preparation, you will be confident and poised for your interview and give the best possible impression.
TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Interviews take on many different forms depending on the style and experience of the interviewer. Be prepared for anything. In addition to the traditional one-on-one interview, you may also have interviews with more than one person at the same time. The interviews may follow one of these formats:

**Directed Interviews** – Very structured. Interviewer may just go down a list of questions.

**Non-directed Interviews** – Less structured with few pre-determined questions. Approach will be more discussion-oriented and involve more give-and-take.

**Subject Oriented Interviews** – Centered on the applicant and their qualifications, as opposed to the position and its requirements. Make sure to let the employer know how you will perform the job.

**Behavioral Interviews** – Behavioral interviewing is based upon the premise that the best predictor of future behavior and performance is past behavior and performance in a similar situation. Behavioral interview questions are designed to solicit this information. Refer to Addendum A, “Building Interview Skills; What to Tell Students About the Behavioral Interview.”

**Descriptive Interviews** – Focuses on the organization and the position and less on the applicant. Emphasize how your skills have prepared you to do the job.

**Stress Interview** – Interviewer may act argumentative, curt, or impatient. Remain calm and patient. The interview will usually move on after the interviewer has gauged how you react under stress.

**Loosely Structured Interview** – Interview lacks structure or direction. Interviewer may spend much of the time dissecting your interests or other seemingly unrelated information. Go with the flow, but also for opportunities to sell yourself.

**Call-Back Interviews** – Call-back interviews are generally a half or full day at the firm. This is a general idea as to what to expect during a call-back interview:

- Call-back interviews are usually scheduled for a series of 30 minute interviews.
- Expect some penetrating, substantive questions as well as social interaction.
- Try to access the atmosphere in the firm and look for clues regarding associate moral.
- Participate in the atmosphere in the firm and look for clues regarding associate morale.
- Participate in the atmosphere, banter.
- Find out beforehand whether you will be asked to lunch or dinner. Be selective in what you order. It’s difficult to talk if you have to do lots of chewing, and you want to avoid “messy” foods.
- Do not order alcohol at lunch.
- First and foremost – be professional and be yourself.

Refer to Addendum B for an employer’s perspective on callbacks, “Callback Interviews from the Other Side of the Desk: A Law Firm Recruiter’s Perspective.”
WHAT DO YOU DO AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Always send a thank you letter to the interviewer after the interview. It can be either a typed letter or a handwritten note if you have professional looking correspondence cards and good handwriting. Thank them for their time, refer to something you discussed during the interview, and reiterate your interest in the job. Be sure to spell the interviewer’s name correctly. Career Services tries to collect business cards from all on-campus interviewers.

At the end of your interview, ask the employer when they plan on contacting students for a second interviews or offers, and ask whether you can contact them if you haven’t heard back by that time. A few days after that deadline, call if you haven’t heard anything. Just be polite and say something like “I am calling to follow up on an interview I had two weeks ago with Jan Doe.” Lawyers are very busy people, and often respond as quickly as you would wish. Do not take this personally!
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED BY EMPLOYERS

As you continue to interview, you will notice that certain questions occur frequently. The following is a list of questions, or variations of questions you will in one form or another be asked. Drafting truthful and positive replies to each of these questions will help you prepare you for your interviews.

• Tell me something about yourself? How would you describe yourself?

• What do you know about our firm? Why do you want to work for us?

• Why should I hire you? What qualities do you have that would make you a successful lawyer?

• What are your grades? Do you think your grades are a good indication of your achievement? What is your class rank?

• Why did you decide to go to law school in general/this school in particular? How has your law school education prepared you to work here? To be a successful lawyer?

• What are your long-term and short-term goals and objectives? When and why did you establish these goals and how are you preparing yourself to achieve them? What do you see yourself doing in five years?

• I see from your resume that you…(fill in each item on your resume).

• What are your weaknesses? What are your strengths?

• How would you solve this problem? (This is your hypothetical question.)

• What have you learned from your experience at the legal clinic/prosecutor’s/public defender’s office, etc.?

• What did you like best about your last job? What did you like best about your last job? What did you dislike the most about it?

• In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our firm/agency/company?

• In what areas of practice are you interested in?

• What was the most difficult decision you had to make and why was it so difficult?

• What was your most stressful experience in law school? Describe your most rewarding law school experience. Tell me an anecdote about you and the law.

• Discuss a problem you solved creatively.

• What kind of experience do you have in (research, writing, real estate law, etc.)?

• What things do you do best?

• Are you willing to travel or relocate?

• Which is more important to you, the money or the type of job? What motivates you?

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

• Do you have any questions? What else do you think I should know about you?

• What salary do you hope to receive?

• What law school class/professor did you like best/least?
QUESTIONS TO ASK INTERVIEWERS

It is not only appropriate but expected that a candidate will ask pertinent, well thought-out questions of the interviewer. Questions should be genuine and appropriately tailored to the specific employer. The following sample questions are to serve as a stimulus in formulating questions.

• What type of work would I be doing in the beginning?
• What type of supervision and responsibilities are given to a summer clerk? A new associate?
• What is the firm’s management style and structure?
• Is there a formal mentor/mentee relationship?
• Can you tell me more about your system of attorney/summer clerk training and supervision?
• Will I systematically or informally be rotated through different departments?
• What criteria will be used to gauge my progress and performance?
• What is the time period before I could expect to have a caseload and be going to court? What is the average caseload?
• Ideally, what are you looking for in an associate?
• What is the expectation of billable hours?
• Do any one or two clients constitute the major percentage of your firm’s commissions?
• From my research, I see that you are involved in the (e.g. personal injury area). Could you tell me how you got interested in this area and a little bit about what your practice is like?
• When will I know of your decision?
• What made you join the firm/company/agency? What do you like most/least about your job?
• What kind of exposure to your practice area would a summer/permanent associate have?
• How many new associates does the firm anticipate hiring? How many associates has the firm hired in recent years? How many of those associates are still with the firm?
STRATEGIES FOR ANSWERING THE DIRTY DOZEN QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about yourself.
This is not an invitation to ramble on. Qualify the question first. Ask something like, “What area of my background would be most relevant to you?” That enables the interviewer to help you with the appropriate focus, you can avoid discussing irrelevancies. Never answer this question without qualifying whether the interviewer wishes to hear about your business or personal life.

2. What is your greatest strength/weakness?
**Strength:** Isolate high points from your background and build in a couple of key value profiles from different categories. You will want to demonstrate pride, reliability, and the ability to stick with a difficult task yet change course rapidly when required. You can rearrange the previous answer here. Your answer in part might be “I believe in planning and proper management of my time. And yet I can still work under pressure.”

**Weakness:** This is a direct invitation to put your head in a noose. Decline that invitation. If there is a minor part of the job at hand where you lack knowledge but that you pick it up quickly, use that. For instance, “I haven’t worked with this type of spreadsheet program before, but given my experience with six other types, I don’t think it should take me more than a couple of days to pick it up.” Here you remove the emphasis from weakness and put it onto a developmental program that is easily overcome. Be careful, however; this very effective ploy must be used with discretion.

Another good option is to give a generalized answer that takes advantage of value keys. Design the answer so that your weakness is ultimately a positive characteristic. For example, “I enjoy my work and always give each project my best shot. So when sometimes I don’t feel others are pulling their weight, I find it a little frustrating. I am aware of weakness, and in those situations I try to overcome it with a positive attitude that I hope will catch on.”

Also consider the technique of putting it in the past. Here you take a weakness from way back when and show how you overcame it. It answers the question but ends on a positive note. An illustration: “When I first got into this field, I always had problems with my paperwork – you know, leaving an adequate paper trail. And to be honest, I let it slip once or twice. My manager sat me down and explained the potential troubles such behavior could cause. I really took it to heart and I think you will find my paper trails some of the best around today. You only have to tell me something once.” With that kind of answer, you also get the added bonus of showing that you accept and act on criticism.

Congratulations! You have just turned a bear of a question into an opportunity to sell yourself with your professional profile. In deciding on the particular answer you will give, remember the interviewer isn’t really concerned about your general weaknesses – none of us are saints outside of the interview. He or she is simply concerned about any red flags that might signal your inability to perform the job or be manageable in the performance of your duties.

3. Why did you leave your old job?
This is a common trick question. You should have an acceptable reason for leaving every job you have had, but if you don’t, pick one of the six acceptable reasons from the employment industry formula, the acronym for which is CLAMPS.
Challenge: You weren’t able to grow professionally in that position.
Location: The commute was unreasonably long.
Advancement: There was nowhere for you to go. You had the talent, but there were too many people ahead of you.
Money: You were underpaid for your skills and contributions. (Be careful how you answer this.)
Pride or Prestige: You wanted to be with a better company.
Security: The company was not stable. For example: “My last company was a family-owned affair. I had gone as far as I was able. It just seemed timed for me to join a more prestigious company and accept greater challenges.”

4. Why did you leave your old job?
To answer this question, you must have researched the company and built a dossier. Reply with the company’s attributes as you see them. (You must have done your homework on the company.) Cap your answer with reference to your belief that the company can provide you with a stable and happy work environment – the company has that reputation – and that such an atmosphere would encourage your best work.

“I’m not looking for just another paycheck. I enjoy my work and am proud of my profession. Your company produces a superior product/provides a superior service. I share the values that make this possible, which should enable me to fit in and complement the team.”

5. Why did you like your old job?
Always answer positively. Keep your real feelings to yourself, if they’re negative. There is a strong belief among the management fraternity that people who complain about past employers will cause problems for new ones. Your answer is, “very good” or “excellent.” Then smile and wait for the next question.

6. What kind of salary are you looking for?
You are being asked to name a figure here. Give the wrong answer and you can get eliminated. It is always a temptation to ask for the moon, knowing you can come down later, but there are better approaches. It is wise to confirm your understanding of the job and its importance before you start throwing numbers around, because you will have to live with the consequences. You need the best possible offer without pricing yourself out of the market, so it’s time to dance with one of the following responses: “Well let’s see if I understand the responsibilities fully...” You then proceed to itemize exactly what you will be doing on a daily basis and the parameters of your responsibilities and authority. Once that is done, you will seek agreement: “Is this the job as I see it or have I missed anything?”

Remember to describe the job in its most flattering and challenging light, paying special attention to the way you see it fitting into the overall picture and contributing to the success of the department, workgroup, and company. You can then finish your response with a question of your own: “What figure did you have in mind for someone with my track record?” or “What range has been authorized for this position?” Your answer will include, in part, something along the lines of “I believe my skills and experience will warrant a starting salary between ______ and ______.”

You could also ask “What would be the salary range for someone with my experience and skills?” or “I naturally want to make as much as my background and skills will allow. If I am right for the job, and I think credentials demonstrate that I am, I am sure you will make me a fair offer. What figure did you have in mind?”

Another good response is “I would expect a salary appropriate to my experience and ability to do the job successfully. What range do you have in mind?”
Such questions will get the interviewer to reveal the salary range and concentrate his or her attention on the challenges of the job and your ability to accept and work with those challenges.

When you are given a range, you can adjust your money requirements appropriately, latching on to the upper part of the range. For example, if the range is $30,000 – $35,000 a year, you can come back with a range of $34,000 – $37,000.

Consequently, your response will include: “That certainly means we have something to talk about. While your range is $30,000 – $35,000, I am looking for a minimum of $34,000 with an ideal of $37,000. Tell me what flexibility there is at the top of your salary range?” You need to know how to put yourself in the strongest negotiating position; this is the perfect time and opportunity to gain the information and the advantage.

All this fencing is aimed at getting the interviewer to show his or her hand first. Ask for too much and it’s “Oh dear, I’m afraid you’re over-qualified” – to which you can reply, “So overpay me.” (Actually that works when you can carry it off with an ingratiating smile.) If your request is too low, you are likely to be ruled out as lacking the appropriate experience.

When you have tried to get the interviewer to name a range and failed, you must come up with specific dollars and cents. At this point, the key is to understand that all jobs have salary ranges attached to them. Consequently, the last thing you will ever do is come back with a specific dollar figure – that traps you. Instead, you will mention your own range, which will not be from your minimum to your maximum but rather from your midpoint to your maximum. Remember, you can always negotiate down, but you can rarely negotiate up.

7. What do you know about our company/firm?

You can’t answer this question unless you have interest to research the company/firm thoroughly. If you don’t have the interest, you should expect someone who has made the effort to get the job.

8. Why should we hire you?

Your answer will be short and to the point. It will highlight areas from your background that relate to current needs and problems. Recap your interviewer’s description of the job, meeting it point by point with your skills. Finish your answer with: “I have the qualifications you need (itemize them), I’m a team player, I take direction, and I have the desire to be a complete success.”

9. What did you think of your old boss?

Be short, sweet, and then shut up. People who complain about their employers are recognized to be the same people who cause the most disruption in a department. This questions means the interviewer has no desire to hire trouble. “I liked her as a person, respected her professionally, and appreciated her guidance.”

10. What are your long-range goals?

The safest answer contains a desire to be regarded as a true professional and team player. As far as promotion, that depends on finding a manager with whom you can grow. Of course, you will ask what opportunities exist within the company before being any more specific: “From my research and what you have told me about the growth here, it seems operations is where the heavy emphasis is going to be. It seems that’s where you need the effort and where I could contribute toward the company’s goal.” Or “I have always felt that first-hand knowledge and experience open up opportunities that one might never have considered, so while at this point in
time I plan to be a part of operations, it is reasonable to expect that other exciting opportunities will crop up in the meantime.”

11. Do you like to work overtime?
You’ll want to stress that you pride yourself on your ability to manage your time and that you believe one should usually be able to get the job done within an eight hour day schedule. However, you will do whatever it takes to meet a deadline.

12. You seem over-qualified (or under-qualified).
Ask what they mean in order to better understand the objection. Then state your reasons for wanting to work there (with enthusiasm) and show how you will be a valuable employee. For under-qualified, stress the personality characteristics you have that will make you a valuable employee and meet the job requirements point-by-point with the qualifications you do have.

Taken from Knock 'Em Dead, Martin Yate
STICKY ISSUES

You need to be prepared to answer what we call the "sticky issues" questions. These types of questions generally fall into several areas: academic record, current unemployment, time gap, lack of relevant experience, discrimination, salary, and long-term goals. The following questions are a sample of what you might expect to be asked in an interview:

What kind of salary do you expect?

Discrimination question (female): Are you planning to continue working after you have your family? What does your husband do?

What do you do when you have an offer from your second choice position and you need to buy time until you hear from your first choice position?

What is your ability to bring clients into the firm?

What are your geographic ties to the area?

Why are you still in the job market?

Why are you interested in working for our firm/agency/organization?

Why haven’t you done better in law school? (Considering that you had such a strong undergraduate record, if that’s applicable.)

What kind of time are you prepared to put into this job?

Did you get an offer from the firm/agency/organization you worked for last summer? If not, why not?

What are your long-term career objectives?

Why did you choose law as a career?

What qualifications do you have that make you think you will be successful in law?

How has your law school experience prepared you for the actual practice of law?

What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?

Why did you select Arizona State University School of Law?

In which part-time and/or summer jobs have you been the most interested? Why?

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

What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?
PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT/MATURITY

Tell me about yourself.

What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?

How do you think a friend or professor would describe you?

How do you determine or evaluate success?

What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?

How do you work under pressure?

What motivates you to put forth your greatest efforts?

JOB MATCH

In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our firm/agency/company?

Why did you seek a position with our firm/agency/company?

What criteria are you using to evaluate the firm/agency/company for which you hope to work?

Describe the ideal job.

JOB MOTIVATION/SATISFACTION

What are your long-range and short-range goals and objectives? How have you prepared yourself to achieve them?

What are the most important rewards you expect from your business career?

Why did you choose law as a career?

What qualifications do you think you have that will make you successful in law?

Describe the ideal relationship that should exist between an associate and a partner (or supervisor/supervisee).

Why are you still in the job market?

How do you feel about overtime?

How would you feel about having the responsibility for bringing in clients?

What are your salary expectations?
EXPERIENCE

What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?

Give me an example of a project or area or which you had primary responsibility.

In what kind of a work environment are you most comfortable?

Which part-time and/or summer jobs have you enjoyed the most?

What have you gained from moot court/clinical/journal/writing experience?

Tell me about your volunteer experience.

How did you obtain each of your jobs?

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

EDUCATION

Describe your most rewarding law school experience.

What do you think of Arizona State University College of Law?

What courses did you like best/least? Why?

What courses have you taken this year?

Tell me about your undergraduate experiences.

How has your law school experience prepared you for the actual practice of law?

What do you do in your free time?

Do you think your grades are a good indication of your academic achievement?
Interview Summary

**Interviewers:**
Name ___________________________________________________________
Name __________________________________________________________________
Title __________________________________________________________________
Organization __________________________________________________________
Division/Department ____________________________________________________
Address ________________________________________________________________

**Groundwork:**
Type of organization, size, etc. ____________________________________________
Interviewer background, personal interests, etc. _____________________________

**Appointment:**
Date _______________________ Time ____________________ Length _____________
Location __________________ Type: Networking/Screening/In-Office/Call-Back/Other
How I got this interview __________________________________________________
S/he said (advice, needs, problems, plans, special interests, criticisms, etc.) ________
Reactions to what I said __________________________________________________
Anything else I should remember about this interview ________________________

**Critique:**
What did I do well? _____________________________________________________
What did I leave out and/or confuse? ______________________________________
What should I do differently next time? _____________________________________

**Thank-you Letter:**
Date Sent: _____________________________________________________________

**Next Step:**
Employer Interviewing Checklist
Self-Assessment Scale

This checklist is a common guide that employers might use while interviewing a candidate. Rate yourself on the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>(low)</th>
<th>Rate Yourself:</th>
<th>(high)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Preparation</strong> (Research, writing, advocacy, analytical skills)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work Experience</strong> (Research, writing, advocacy, analytical skills)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interview Preparation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Candidate’s Knowledge of Him/Herself</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can articulate motivation to attend law school, become an attorney, interest in the law</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has clear, realistic career goals and interests in this specific opportunity.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has anticipated questions and prepared well-organized responses (no rambling/summarizes/absence of “full disclosure” problem).</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge of Opportunity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has thoroughly researched organization and interviewer.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has good questions to ask the interviewer.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quality of the Interaction between Candidate and Interviewer</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ability to Develop Rapport</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good, firm handshake.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good, appropriate eye contact.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendliness, interest in the interviewer, warmth</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness to interviewer (sensitive to cues of boredom).</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibits appropriate deference to interviewer (does not interrupt)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ability to Create Friendly Dialogue/Conversation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate and interviewer discover their common interests/experiences.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate delivers answers in a spontaneous, enthusiastic way.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate asks questions throughout the interview rather than only at the conclusion.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate responds to information offered by the interviewer.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Candidate Exhibits Positive Traits</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional/&quot;Executive Presence&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poise (absence of nervous mannerisms)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive attitude</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-confidence (is not apologetic, handles weakness non-defensively)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertiveness (brings up topics not covered by interviewer but important for consideration).</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty (&quot;team player&quot;, says good things about ASU).</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maturity (absence of making excuses/blaming others).</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sincerity/integrity/honesty</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership qualities/organizational/managerial</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LAWYERING SKILLS & VALUES
AND
JOB SEARCH DEVELOPMENT EXERCISES

The following materials have been designed to assist you in defining and focusing your job search.
The ABA taskforce report on the legal profession (the "MacCrate report") outlines fundamental lawyering skills. Before preparing your resume and cover letter, review this list and make sure you are highlighting some of these skills.

**Fundamental Lawyering Skills**

**Problem Solving**
- Identifying and diagnosing problems
- Generating alternative solutions and strategies
- Developing a plan of action
- Implementing the plan
- Keeping the planning process open to new information and new ideas

**Legal Analysis and Reasoning**
- Identifying and formulating legal issues
- Formulating relevant legal theories
- Elaborating legal theory
- Evaluating legal theory
- Criticizing and synthesizing legal argumentation

**Legal Research**
- Knowledge of the nature of legal rules and institutions
- Knowledge of and ability to use the most fundamental tools of legal research
- Understanding the process of devising and implementing a coherent and effective research design

**Factual Investigation**
- Determining the need for factual investigation
- Planning a factual investigation
- Implementing the investigative strategy
- Memorializing and organizing information in an accessible form
- Deciding whether and when to conclude the process of fact-gathering
- Evaluating the information that has been gathered

**Communication**
- Assessing the perspective of the recipient of the information
- Using effective methods of communication

**Counseling**
- Establishing a counseling relationship that respects the nature and bounds of a lawyer’s role
- Gathering information relevant to the decision to be made
- Analyzing the decision to be made
- Counseling the client about the decision to be made
- Ascertaining and implementing the client’s decision

**Negotiating**
- Preparing for negotiation
- Conducting the negotiation session
• Counseling the client about the terms obtained from the other side in the negotiation and implementing the client’s decision

Litigation and Alternative Dispute Resolution Procedures
• Litigation at the trial-court level
• Litigation at the appellate-court level
• Advocacy in administrative and executive forums
• Proceedings in other dispute-resolution forums

Organization and Management of Legal Work
• Formulating goals and principles for effective practice management
• Developing systems and procedures that ensure that time, effort and resources are allocated efficiently
• Developing systems and procedures to ensure that work is performed and completed at the appropriate time
• Developing systems and procedures for effectively working with other people
• Developing systems and procedures for effectively administering a law office

Recognizing and Resolving Ethical Dilemmas
• Understanding the nature and sources of ethical standards
• Knowing the means by which ethical standards are enforced
• Following the processes for recognizing and resolving ethical dilemmas

**General Characteristics for Important Lawyering**

• Energy
• Initiative
• Motivation
• Follow-through
• Ability to juggle multiple tasks and prioritize
• Ability to pick up new information quickly
• Ability to deal with time pressures and tight deadlines
• Ability to work well in a team
• Creativity
SKILLS IDENTIFICATION

It is difficult for an individual to identify his or her skills. We are conditioned to focus on our weaknesses rather than our strengths. For law students and new law graduates, this is particularly true. You are keenly aware of each grade that could have been higher and each response in class that could have been sharper. Consequently, you overlook the many fine abilities that you bring to the practice of law.

Purpose
The main purpose of this exercise is to help you identify the many strengths that you bring to the practice of law. During an interview, it is important to share with a prospective employer what you can contribute to his or her practice. It is also critical to validate the skills you say you have by indicating how you have successfully used these skills.

Directions
The following is a list of twenty-four skills that you may be able to bring to the practice of law. Circle five skills that you feel are your strongest assets. Now underline five skills that you believe to be your secondary abilities. Beginning with your strongest assets, in the space beside each, briefly write at least two or three experiences where you have used these skills.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ability</th>
<th>WHERE I HAVE USED THE ABILITY (include personal, educational, volunteer or work experience)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Special Training (expertise gained through courses)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Oral Advocacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Flexibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Interpersonal</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Negotiating</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Special Skills (i.e. languages or computers)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Contacts (ability to attract clients)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Academic Success</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Proven record of success in work</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Investigating</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Course work in substantive area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability</td>
<td>WHERE I HAVE USED THE ABILITY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Previous experience in substantive area</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Community Involvement</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Ability to work under pressure</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. Learn new things easily</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. High energy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Organizational</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>19. Efficient</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Complete assignments quickly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Apply creative solutions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Tenacious/plugger</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Problem solving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Hard working</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TIPS ON FOLLOW-THANK YOU LETTERS

This is one of the most important yet one of the least used tools in a job search. It is used to establish goodwill, to express appreciation and/or to strengthen your candidacy. The basic rule of thumb is that everyone who helps you, in any way, needs to receive a thank-you letter. When used to follow upon employment interviews, thank-you letters should be addressed to the same person you sent an application to as well as to your interviewers. Also, be sure to send thank-you letters to your contacts who granted you informational interviews and to people who served as your references. Make your letters warm and personal and use them as an opportunity to re-emphasize your strongest qualifications; reiterate your interest in a position; provide supplemental information not previously given; draw attention to the good match between your qualifications and the job requirements; and/or express your sincere appreciation.

- Every interview, whether informational or a job interview, should be followed immediately (within 24 hours) by a personal letter. It is a common courtesy to thank someone who gives you time and attention.

- It reminds the potential employer of you, your skills, and your enthusiasm. The employer may need to be reminded for two reasons: 1) It is very difficult for an interviewer to remember each candidate in detail after speaking with the pool of 15 to 20 (or more) individuals in a day, and 2) If this is an office visit, you may be forgotten in the vast array of activities he or she attended to that day.

- The letter is an opportunity to again present pertinent or helpful information about yourself that you may have omitted from oversight, lack of time, etc.

- It can be used to correct any misunderstandings or other unfortunate circumstances which occurred during your interview.

- Your letter can tactfully remind an employer of any promises made to you such as a second interview, interviews with others in the organization, future interest in assisting you, etc.

- It may serve to further a networking contact or professional relationship between the two of you which may help you later in your job campaign, or even after you are employed. And, since success in the working world is often predicated on people contacts, you may find yourself assisting the other person at some point in the near future.
1234 Any Street  
Phoenix, Arizona 85000

October 29th, 2010

Ms. Carol Young  
Piper, Hamilton & Young  
3535 K Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20056

Dear Ms. Young:

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me last Friday, October 2th. I enjoyed meeting with you to discuss the summer associate program at your firm. Please extend my appreciation to Harold Piper and Mary Smith, with whom I also met that day, and to Carl Jones for talking to me during the on-campus interview with your firm.

I am enthusiastic about the possibility of a summer position with Piper, Hamilton & Young because of my strong interest in international law. I enjoyed discussing international trade issues with you and was interested to learn about your work with several Japanese companies. I believe that I possess the research and writing skills that you are seeking in a summer associate and feel that I would be an asset to your program.

If I can provide you with any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me. I look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Sincerely,

Jordan A. Student
Addendum A

Building Interview Skills:
What to Tell Students about
the Behavioral Interview
Building Interview Skills: What to Tell Students about the Behavioral Interview

by Patricia White

Career services staff are always on the lookout for ways to help students improve their interview skills. Your students will have a distinct advantage when interviewing if you familiarize them with the purpose of — and how to prepare for — the “behavioral interview.” This interviewing technique has been used effectively in the business world by such diverse companies as Wachovia, Accenture, Tweeter Home Entertainment, and Teradyne for some time, and a number of law firm interviewers are now recognizing the benefits of behavioral interviewing.

What is a behavioral interview and why do employers use this method?

Behavioral interviewing is based upon the premise that the best predictor of future behavior and performance is past behavior and performance in a similar situation. Given the extremely high cost of recruiting, hiring, training, and mentoring new associates, law firms want to do all they can to ensure that their new hires will be stable, productive, successful lawyers. The behavioral interview technique utilizes a questioning style quite different from the standard, “Tell me about yourself,” or “What are your three greatest strengths?”

Behavioral interview questions often begin with phrases such as, “Tell me about a time…” or “describe a situation when….” These types of questions can be quite daunting for the student who is unfamiliar with the style and who doesn’t understand the interviewer’s purpose in asking such questions. Ida Abbott, in her book Lawyers’ Professional Development, writes that “law firms are taking a more strategic approach to hiring by establishing hiring criteria” beyond the achievements reflected in résumés. Abbott says that these “criteria target the characteristics of lawyers needed to build and sustain the firm, and they make the recruiting process more precise and effective.” To maximize the value of behavioral interviews, those who use them have identified the characteristics and behaviors of their most successful associates and have designed questions to elicit whether the candidates being interviewed have exhibited those traits and actions in their previous work experience.

An example of a characteristic firms value is “motivation.” As Carolyn Wehman points out in her October 2003 NALP Bulletin article, “Using Behavioral Interviewing to Target Talent,” once criteria are defined, it is helpful for employers to develop specific descriptions of how those criteria are demonstrated. A description of how a motivated lawyer behaves might include, “takes initiative, seeks additional responsibility, responds to criticism, organizes time and work.”

With this definition of motivation, an interviewer will be looking for descriptions of specific past performance that demonstrate that the student has behaved in the desired way in the past. Thus a student may be asked, “Tell me about a time when you went beyond the call of duty and performed beyond what was expected,” or “How do you motivate yourself to do a task that you really don’t want to do?”

Students must be prepared to discuss specific examples of behavior that demonstrate the qualities they claim to have. They cannot fall back on their laundry lists of admirable traits such as being “hard working,” “dedicated,” or “detail-oriented.”
Help them prepare

Many career counselors organize their career planning advice around a series of steps that begin with self-assessment and researching employers. We often meet with student resistance to the concept of self-assessment, but never is it more important that a student has completed this exercise than in the behavioral interview situation. Because of the probing nature of behavioral interview questions, it is especially important that students engage in significant introspection so that they understand such things as:

- Why they have made the life decisions they have made (this reflects their values, talents, and motivation); and
- How to provide specific examples of behavior that demonstrates they have the proficiencies and traits an employer seeks. (This is where a student’s research skills come into play.)

If a student is responding to a specific job description or an OCI posting, it may be easy to determine what characteristics are sought. Many firms clearly state the qualities they value on their website or NALP listing. However, even when a student cannot access this type of information for a particular employer, they can prepare by considering those characteristics that employers commonly value and seek out in their employees; then, through their self-assessment, students can identify the behaviors that show they have demonstrated those traits.

Four characteristics/behaviors that legal employers find desirable

Some key competencies and patterns of behavior that law firms recognize as important to lawyers’ success are decision-making and problem-solving skills, motivation, communication and interpersonal skills, and planning and organization. Here are some sample questions that interviewers often use to elicit descriptions of these behaviors:

- Decision making and problem solving. Give an example of a time when you had to be quick in coming to a decision. Tell me about a difficult decision you had to make within the last year. Give me an example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem. Give me an example of a time when you used your fact-finding skills to solve a problem. Tell me about a time when you anticipated potential problems and developed preventive measures. Tell me about a time when you failed to spot an obvious solution to a problem.

- Motivation. Describe a time when you set your sights too high (or too low). What have you done that demonstrates initiative? How did your former supervisor get your best performance from you? What type of work environment do you need to function most productively? Tell me about a time when you failed to meet your expectations.

- Communication and interpersonal skills. Tell me about a time when you had to persuade a coworker or colleague to accomplish a task or to see your point of view. Describe an unpopular decision you have made and how you dealt with the result. Tell me about a time you had to deal with an individual you did not like, or who did not like you. Tell me about a time when you had to work with a person who did things very differently from you.

- Planning and organization. Tell me about a time when you had too many things to do and had to prioritize your tasks. What method do you use to schedule your time? Give me an example of how you handle interruptions to your schedule. Everyone has had an experience when they just could not complete a project on time — when has this happened to you? How do you determine what is critical and what is not? Tell me about a time when you created a plan to accomplish a long-range project or goal.

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Tools students can use to prepare

Two tools will assist your students in preparing for behavioral interviews: their résumé and a three-step process for organizing their answers. Using their résumé as a guide, students should thoughtfully consider the projects, tasks, and interactions represented by their previous employment. It may have been some time since they thought about a particular job, and their résumé will help refresh memories about specific job performances. Students should try to identify particularly challenging and difficult, as well as especially rewarding, experiences. They can use the sample questions listed above to practice describing work-related experiences that demonstrate the behaviors being sought.

Students need a method of organizing their answers so that their responses do not become rambling and unfocused. A common format career planning experts suggest is the STAR method. When using this technique the interviewee should:

- Briefly describe the **Situation** or **Task**;
- Explain the **Action** that he or she took; and
- Describe the **Results** of the action.

Using this organizational strategy will help students keep their answers concise and specific.

Student FAQs

Some students will feel intimidated by the prospect of encountering the behavioral interview style because they either have had no pre-law school work experience or they consider their work experiences irrelevant. In these cases, students can call upon academic experiences (organizing assignments, prioritizing tasks, working in a study group or other collaborative project). Reflecting upon their non-law related work experiences, volunteer activities, competitive sports involvement, and other areas of interest can yield examples of behaviors that can be used to answer these interview questions as well.

Behavioral interview questions are sometimes framed in the negative, such as, “Tell me about a time when your work was criticized.” Here the information sought is a description of the candidate’s faults as well as how he or she handles criticism. A student would be wise to respond with a description of a poor idea rather than a poor work product, which might unnecessarily focus negative attention on performance. Discussing a poor idea also offers a better opportunity to describe what was gained from the experience, which is the goal anytime questions about negative experiences are asked. In this example a student could discuss an employer’s criticism of his or her idea about how to approach a research problem, what he or she gained or learned from that criticism, and how he or she then proceeded. The outcome or **Result** of the **Situation** then becomes positive.

Even with the most thorough self-assessment, research, and preparation, students will be asked questions they feel they don’t know how to answer. First of all, students should understand that it is perfectly acceptable to ask for clarification of a question by saying, “I’m not sure what kind of information you’d like me to provide here. Can you be more specific?” Students should also feel free to thoughtfully reflect upon a question before answering. Rather than feeling compelled to answer immediately, students should maintain control of their responses by saying something like, “Do you mind if I take a moment to think about that?” And, if nothing comes to mind, an acceptable answer is, “Although I’ve never actually missed a deadline, I’ve come close and have had to reprioritize my tasks.”

“Do I have to tell them everything?” Students should keep in mind that a job interview is not “True Confessions.” Although career services professionals counsel students to be scrupulously truthful in their application materials, that does not mean that they must volunteer negative information unless they are directly asked the question. As Martha Neil notes in her article “Asked (Sort Of) and Answered” in the September 2004 issue of the ABA Journal, candidates should keep their answers simple and not offer

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information that reflects poorly on them. When a truthful answer to a direct question requires a negative response, students should be prepared to provide the honest answer, together with a brief explanation for the deficiency and their plan for improvement.

“What if it doesn’t seem like a behavioral interview but just an effort to make conversation?” Sometimes questions that don’t seem to fall into the pattern of behavioral interview questions are aimed at uncovering behaviors that are important to the employer. A question like “What kinds of activities do you enjoy when you’re not studying or working?” may be designed to elicit whether a student is a team player or a loner, highly competitive or unmotivated, civic-minded or self-centered. Students need to think about what may be behind a question being asked.

Conclusion

Understanding and preparing for behavioral interviews give students one more way to hone their interviewing skills. Regardless of whether they encounter this technique, the self-assessment, employer research, and thoughtful reflection upon their work experiences and other activities will prepare students to excel in the interview room.

Patricia White, Esq., is a former Associate Director of Career Services at Franklin Pierce Law Center in Concord, NH. She now resides in Sarasota, FL.

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Addendum B

Callback Interviews from the Other Side of the Desk:
A Law Firm Recruiter’s Perspective
Callback Interviews from the Other Side of the Desk: A Law Firm Recruiter’s Perspective

By Laura Friedman, Esq.

Welcome to the next stage of the interviewing process – the callback interview. Whether this is your first visit to a firm or your 21st, these interviews probably are your first serious look at life as a lawyer inside a large, private firm. At this stage in the recruiting process, candidates and firms use interviews for the same purpose – to test and determine chemistry, suitability and general fit.

Generally, callback interviews consist of a series of four to six interview sessions. Each interview is at least 20 minutes in length and is often with one or more (teams or panel-style) interviewers. The interviews within each callback interview will be structure and conducted in a fashion similar to your first interview with the firm. Usually, however, the questions asked at this level are a bit more probing in general – about you and also your career goals. Firms want to feel as though they come to know you by the end of your callback interview. Firms also want to feel as though they have “sold you” on joining their firm. As a result, firms tend to use about one-third of the callback interview to “sell the firm”. They want to share their personal experiences with the firm.

At many firms, your first meeting will be with the firm’s recruiting director. Following that interview, you will be escorted to your next interviewer’s office for the second interview in the series, and so on, etc. Some firms also will schedule an out-of-office lunch, coffee break, walking tour of the downtown courthouses, etc. after a full day of interviews. This “diversion” is meant to be a less formal way for you and your interviewer(s) to get to know one another a little better. Enjoy this less formal, not informal, time for what it is – another interview in your callback interview series. Too often, candidates fall victim to the associate who leans across the lunch table and says, “Hey…I am just a first-year associate, go ahead, ask me anything.” Don’t be fooled by this veiled intimacy. Some firms use out-of-the-office setting to assess your judgment, discretion and social and marketing skills. In addition to the more significant questions asked of you during your callback interview, the questions that you ask at this stage are quite important. Try to formulate a few good questions that you can “take on the road” and ask during all of your callback interviews. Having an arsenal of questions to ask of all your interviewers will help you compare specific experiences within a firm and also general experiences from firm to firm.

Callbacks usually end with an office tour and then a debriefing by the hiring attorney, the summer associate chair, or the recruiting director. The debriefing period should answer some of your general questions about the firm’s hiring process, when the hiring committee meets and when you should expect to her back again from the firm (i.e. an offer).

It is important to be well-prepared for your callback interviews. Your research about the firm and its attorneys should be more in-depth than it was at the initial interview stage. Know a little about the firm in general, its recent growth and the growing practice areas, the summer program, prior UB associates and, if possible, you should find out with whom you will be interviewing. You can usually obtain a list of the lawyers with whom you will be meeting, in advance, from the recruiting director. It is especially important for you to do your homework in this area for two reasons: 1. the lawyers love it; and 2. it is often the case that the firm has “matched you up” with interviewers with whom you have common interests, work experiences, academic institutions and/or education, hobbies, etc. This “matching up” can be quite helpful to a candidate and to his or her success in the callback interview process.
After each callback interview, it is important to write down your initial impressions and thoughts about the firm (once you are out of the office). If you do not take time to reflect at the conclusion of each callback interview, it will be very difficult for you to remember your exact thoughts later. Your notes about each interview day will also help you focus on what it is that’s important to you in your job search and ultimately in your legal career.

In the end, when it is finally time to make a decision, you must remember that interviewing with and choosing a firm is not an exact science. It is perfectly acceptable to make your summer or first-year associate decision based upon your “it just feels right” reaction. Indeed, this may be among your last few opportunities to accept a decision that has been clearly under-lawyered!
Addendum C

Interviewing Skills Workshops
Presented to Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law Students

Lynne Traverse, Bryan Cave, LLP
Ryley, Carlock & Applewhite
Squire Sanders
Lynne Traverse, Bryan Cave LLP

Conducting a Job Search:
Presenting Yourself Professionally on Paper and in Person
Law school career services offices harp on it; law firms moan about it; students are confused by it. There is no doubt that standards of professional etiquette are important but seemingly mysterious factors when it comes to applying for a job in the legal market. It seems incredible, but candidates can actually lose job opportunities over their table manners! We on the law firm side see many candidates who would benefit from “coaching,” but either we don’t have the opportunity or we don’t dare! If, in fact, a job is lost at any stage of the recruiting process over a lack of professional presentation, chances are the candidate will never know.

WHERE TO START

Professional presentation should begin long before the resume and cover letters are written. With all the research tools available to everyone today, there is simply no excuse for incorrectly addressing basic facts about an employer. Firm name, address, contact person, (all correctly spelled) and office locations are all available from a multitude of sources, beginning with the law school career services office. Firm web sites are now commonly accessible, plus the National Association for Law Placement (NALP), Martindale Hubbell and many other information sites list correct information for most legal employers. Other valuable information available from these resources (especially the NALP form) include office sizes, practice areas, billable hour requirements, base salaries, number of summer associates hired in each location and historic offer rate percentages, hiring criteria, and a narrative that, in the best case, will give an indication of the firm’s personality.

Common examples of errors made through lack of research include misspelled names, “old” information regarding address or contact person, focus on practice areas not offered, and correspondence sent to the wrong office. There is no substitute for good, solid preparation time, and prioritizing the job search at the same level as an important exam. Of course there is one common error that research will not correct - forgetting to sign the letter!

COVER LETTERS

After you have made certain that all your addressee information is correct, and you are correctly targeting firms whose practice areas coincide with your interests, there are things to consider that will help make your correspondence distinctly more professional.
Although it might take a little extra time to slightly personalize your letters for each employer, you will avoid common mistakes by making that effort. Use professional stationery. The muted mottled mustard may look great at the stationers, but if you have any doubts, make sure you see what the page looks like with printing on it. Obviously, the passion pink and luscious lavender should be left for other types of correspondence. Elaborate, formal presentation tools such as binding and folders are expensive and typically end up in the trash to conserve file space at the receiving end.

Keep it simple. State who you are, what you are looking for, and some indication of why you are interested in the firm and the geographical area where the firm is located. This is especially important if your resume does not suggest a geographical tie. If you are planning to be in the area, let them know. When interview decisions are made, it could make all the difference for a firm to be aware that you will be easily available and that you are serious enough to commit to a trip to their city.

Be careful about touting a specific practice area for yourself (intellectual property, for example) when sending a generic letter. It is possible that one or several of the firms you are writing to do not offer that specialty or that there are only one or two attorneys in the practice. Your letter then looks canned and projects a lack of research effort. Once again, signing the letter is highly recommended!

A WORD ABOUT E-MAIL

Two simple rules about e-mail, applicable from the time of your application through the term of your employment with any employer.

1. Casual or inappropriate language is never acceptable, and

2. Nothing is confidential when sent electronically.

We now live in a realm of electronic correspondence. E-mail resume submissions are acceptable at virtually every firm. However in addition to the two cautions mentioned above, note that you should be as professional as you would be in any “hard copy” correspondence, and assume (because of the ease of forwarding) that everyone, up to the managing partner, might see it.

RESUMES

Your career services office will give you wonderful advice about the formatting of your resume. In fact this might be a good time to mention that your career services office staff are professionals, whose job it is to help you look good. Utilize them whenever you can.

They will tell you (as will I) that you should do everything you can to keep your resume to one page. Publication lists (if appropriate), references pages or other similar items are best left for an attachment if necessary. If, on the other hand, you feel your resume is “skimpy” do not be tempted to list “filler” items, such as “Who’s Who in American Colleges” - attorneys dislike this practice. If your grades are not at the top of the class, don’t be tempted only to list specific grades that might be your best - a red flag that there are problem areas elsewhere in your transcript. If you want to point out specific grades, also list the cumulative average so it does not appear that you are hiding anything.
Be extremely careful with personal interest items, which can come back to haunt you in an interview situation. Most interviewers talk first about the things they see on the resume. Do not list a one-day activity that happened so long ago you will have to struggle to describe it or use terms or acronyms that might not be common knowledge. Always be prepared to talk about what is on your resume!

WRITING SAMPLES

The most common problems we see in writing samples are seemingly the most obvious. A writing sample you submit should have the same level of quality as a document you would give to a client of the firm. It should demonstrate your capability for legal analysis, be easy to read, short (12 pages or less), and most important, be your best work, and completely error free. Ask several friends to proofread it for you and do not depend on “spell check.” Redact any confidential information.

PERSONAL PRESENTATION IN ACTION

You’ve prepared and mailed all your carefully crafted letters, resumes and writing samples, now what?

PRE-INTERVIEW

Is it appropriate to follow up a letter with a phone call? Yes - wait a discreet length of time (say 10 days to 2 weeks) and place a friendly call. Without applying pressure, inquire whether your materials were received. Chances just might be that your resume is sitting on the Recruiting Manager’s desk and your professional demeanor will be the factor that pushes her over the top to give you an interview. By the way, if this call ends up with a rejection, use it to your benefit. Most of us like to be asked for advice, and you may chance upon someone who knows of an opportunity elsewhere or who might suggest an approach you have not previously considered. Make the most of every contact you have with every firm, and assume you will talk to them again at some point during your career. The legal community is small and has a long memory.

Be mindful of your home voice-mail greeting. During a job search is not a great time to have a cute 3-year-old or the latest hip-hop recording announcing your mail box. Additionally, make sure any room mates you have are aware that you may be receiving calls from prospective employers, not only for potential demeanor problems, but to drive home the importance of taking and delivering accurate messages to you. Finally, be accessible. Sending out 200 resumes and then leaving for a two-week trek in Nepal is not conducive to your job search!

THE INTERVIEW

You have made it to the most important stage of your personal presentation - the interview. The key to keeping yourself on the path to an offer is to be prepared for anything that might keep you from appearing at your best. Get directions to the firm, including parking instructions. Ask for a list of interviewers (you might have to wait until the night before, but every Recruiting Manager should respond willingly to this request) then RESEARCH. Even lawyers at small firms will have some information on themselves available on the web. Try the State Bar in addition to your other resources. Make sure you know about the firm - home office location, local practice areas, managing and hiring partner information - all to allow you to ask good and informed questions. Know your resume and be prepared to speak articulately about anything that appears there, especially publications of any kind (including undergraduate).
Be on time. If you must be early, not more than 20 minutes early (there is a Starbucks within blocks of every law office in the country) and certainly not late. Bring extra copies of your resume, transcript and writing sample - you never know when the copy machine might have eaten your originals - and the Recruiting Manager will bless you.

Dress professionally. Err on the side of business attire, even though the firm’s policy may be 100% business casual. You should check with the Recruiting Manager about dress before every interview day, but it will be worth dressing at the “high end” for your comfort level generally and especially when you just happen to meet with the litigation partner dressed in a suit to go to court. Invest in an extremely nice “business casual” outfit for those firms that insist you should dress that way. You will eventually use it - a lot - during your employment, so the cost will be worthwhile.

Generally, things to be aware of (and practice!) include: give a good, firm handshake (not the “vice,” not the “fish”); be aware of your body language - don’t be stiff, but lounging in the chair isn’t great either; be aware of your eye contact - a huge issue with interviewers; maintain your brain contact, think, and listen to your interviewer; and finally, do not, under any circumstances, succumb to the temptation to use slang, jargon or inappropriate language.

Remember that an interview is a conversation that includes give and take. Holding up your end of the conversation is extremely important. Interviewers who enjoy the simple act of conversing with you will be more inclined to give you a positive evaluation. Something to keep in mind is that an interviewing lawyer is (among other things) commonly weighing whether or not he or she would be comfortable introducing you to their clients. Conversing well, having strong questions, being knowledgeable about the firm and having the ability to discuss your resume thoroughly and without hesitation, are all keys to a successful interview.

Meals are typically included as part of a law firm interview day. Don’t panic! If you are unsure about what is appropriate to order, pass on ordering until you see what the others do. It’s a good idea anyway, but if “pasta management” is a problem for you - don’t order pasta! Eating utensils can be confusing. The rule is to use utensils from the outside in. In other words, the first course (salad/soup) fork or spoon will be the farthest from the plate. Napkins in lap, not tucked into shirt or blouse. Ties … well, follow the lead of others at the table. Don’t tuck if you can help it! Although it is a treat to be taken out, and tempting to order the most expensive items, be conservative. You should not be paying that much attention to the food anyway - you are still in an interview situation! Needless to say, alcohol during an interview lunch is never a great idea.

It is common during the busy recruiting season that you will see a classmate and/or lawyers from another firm you know from previous interviews seated in the same restaurant. Do not be tempted to excuse yourself from the table and spend 10 minutes chatting on the other side of the room. Your actions may well have an impact on your friend’s job opportunities as well as your own. A friendly nod or discreet wave are enough for the moment and any catching up or comparing notes can and should be left for another time.

A word about nerves. Professional performers such as speakers, singers, and actors will tell you that a certain amount of nerves is a positive thing. The extra little boost of adrenaline generated by “stage fright” can actually sharpen your focus. And be positive. Your resume may get you the interview, but your attitude, energy and demeanor will get you the job.
POST INTERVIEW

Remember to send thank you notes. And yes, e-mails are fine. Although difficult at times, try to individualize your messages. Remember that those notes all end up in the same file (yours) and if they are boiler-plate, it might matter. On the other hand, individualized notes stand out from the pack, and can really impress. Hand-written or typed notes on plain, professional note cards or stationery are best.

REJECTIONS

Turn a rejection into a learning opportunity by asking for feedback or coaching. If you are uncomfortable asking the firm, request someone in your career services office to inquire on your behalf. Recognize that it may not be about you. Many times law firms are looking for very specific skills or personalities. Consider that firm may even be doing you a favor if they correctly perceive you are not the right “fit” for their culture. Remember that most legal communities are very small. The way you handle yourself when rejected can actually lead to more opportunity.

WHEN YOU GET THE JOB

The value of professional personal presentation does not end once you land the job. You can never go wrong by keeping the following simple rules in mind:

Take the “high road” in every aspect of your life;

Quickly admit mistakes and accept criticism with grace and appreciation - these are your best opportunities to learn;

Be a supportive and contributing member of the team;

Do not criticize your co-workers or colleagues at other firms;

Tell the truth at all times. Remember that your integrity is at the source of your professionalism and can only reap benefits throughout your career.

Lynne Traverse is the Recruiting and Professional Development Manager of the Phoenix Office for the international law firm of Bryan Cave LLP. Her responsibilities in that position include managing all aspects of the recruiting programs in the Firm’s Phoenix office, as well as multiple firm wide responsibilities. Ms. Traverse has 25 years of experience in attorney recruitment which has included every level of attorney hiring from summer associate programs through partner acquisitions and firm mergers. In addition, she has created and implemented associate training programs; advised pro bono committees; administered regional marketing and business development efforts; and been a frequent speaker at various law schools on the topic of professional presentation skills. She was active in the Los Angeles Area Legal Recruitment Administrators (LAALRA) from 1984-2005, the Phoenix city group since 1998 (NALP Liaison) and the Orange County Area Legal Recruiting Administrators (OCALRA) from 2003-2006. Ms. Traverse has also been active in the National Association for Law Placement (NALP) since 1984, and has served as Vice Chair and Chair of the Attorney Development and Evaluation Committee, participated in the building of the NALP Leadership
Institute as a member of the Leadership Institute Task Force, served as Vice Chair of the Employment Diversity Committee, and was a member of the NALP Timing Guidelines Task Force. She chaired the Recruitment Practices Committee for two years (2004-2006) and currently serves as a member of the Part V Timing Guidelines Task force. In 2005, she was one of two first recipients of the NALP President’s Award.
Ryley, Carlock & Applewhite

Interviewing Skills Workshop
INTERVIEWING SKILLS WORKSHOP

I. Introduction & Interview Process
   A. Introduction
   B. Interview Process
   C. Resumes & Cover Letters

II. Preparation
   A. Know the firm
      1. Read firm resume
      2. Ask your classmates
      3. Research
   B. Know what you want
      1. Self-Assessment
      2. Know your resume
   C. Preparing for the Interview
      1. Develop strong answers
      2. Develop strong questions

III. Do’s and Don’ts of the Interview
   A. Do’s
      1. Listen and get interviewer’s name right
      2. Do your best at each interview
      3. Look the interviewer in the eye
      4. Do/say something to set yourself apart
      5. Be positive in all your responses
      6. Be alert – concentrate on questions
      7. Psych yourself
      8. Have a sense of humor
      9. Ask for a business card
   B. Don’ts
      1. Have anything in your mouth, no gum, candies, etc.
      2. Talk about inappropriate subjects
      3. Show your nervousness by drumming fingers, swinging your leg
      4. Keep adjusting your clothes or fiddling with your hair
      5. Bash on other firms
      6. Give on or two word answers or simply answer yes or no
      7. Slip into speech making tone of voice
      8. Use a lot of slang
      9. Look at watch during interview
C. Etiquette
   1. What to Bring
   2. Attire/Presentation
   3. Body Language
   4. Arrive early – 10 minutes

IV. During Interview
   A. Interview Structure

   B. Fielding Questions
      1. Frequently asked questions
      2. Tough topics
      3. Handling inappropriate questions

   C. Ask Questions
      1. Do not dwell on the routine
      2. Ask questions designed to find out about the firm
      3. Ask questions designed to find out about the interviewer’s practice
      4. What is it like to be an associate/partner in the firm?

D. The Law Firm Perspective
   1. Are there any distinguishing or memorable characteristics that will help you remember the interviewee?
   2. Subjective observations
   3. Would he/she be a good attorney for this firm?
   4. Was the interviewee interested?

E. Lunch/Dinner Interview

V. Post Interview
   A. Send a Thank You Note
      1. To the person responsible for organizing the interview process and each call-back interviewer
      2. Make it personal
      3. Include references to details of visit

   B. Monitor Status Tactfully

   C. Acknowledge Job Offers Immediately

VI. Conclusion
   A. Miscellaneous
      1. Writing samples

   B. Letters of Recommendation
FIELING QUESTIONS

I. Frequently Asked Questions

Be prepared to talk about anything on your resume. If you have any papers or publications mentioned on your resume, be sure to reread them before the interview. It is embarrassing to be asked about something you wrote and not remember major portions of it. The same is true of writing samples; many employers do read them and will want to discuss them.

The following list of often-asked questions can help you prepare for an interview. Be prepared to answer any of them before you enter the interview. Always be honest. If you do not know the answer to a question, say so. If you do not understand a question, ask that it be repeated or rephrased. Try to make the interview seem as much like a conversation as possible, rather than a question-and-answer period. Think of the most difficult questions that could be asked of you and be prepared to answer them. Always turn any perceived weakness into a “positive”, e.g.: “My legal research has been limited, but I master tasks quickly and look forward to the opportunity to develop my research skills further.”

- Why did you decide to go to law school? Why did you choose [your law school]? What prompted your decision? Did you see yourself in any particular role as a lawyer at the time of the decision?
- What was your reaction to law school? What classes do you enjoy most? Is there a parallel between your performance and your interest in particular courses?
- Do you have a particular career objective at this time? Have you decided on a specialty? What do you see yourself doing five years from now?
- Have you made a decision as to the city in which you ultimately wish to practice? Why have you selected this city at this time?
- Why did you decide to seek a position with us?
- How would you describe yourself?
- What qualities do you have that make you think you will be a successful lawyer?
- What would you consider to be your greatest strengths? Greatest weaknesses?
- If I called up your most recent employers, what three things would they most likely say about you?
- What two or three accomplishments in your life have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
- What is the greatest obstacle you have overcome in your life/career?
- What are your grades? Do you think they are a good indication of your achievement?
- Can you explain your school’s grading system to me?
- What have you learned from participating in a journal/moot court/an externship/a pro bono experience/a clinical program?
- In what type(s) of work environment(s) are you most comfortable? What two or things are most important to you in a job?
- What do you know about our firm/agency/company?
• With what other kinds of employers are you interviewing? Do you have any pending job offers? If so, where?
• Is there anything I should know about you that we haven’t covered?
• Tell me about yourself.
• What are your short-term and long-term goals?
• How would you describe the ideal position for you?
• What two or three things are most important to you in a job?
• What courses did you like the best? Least? Why?
• Tell me about your participation on the journal (in your clinical program, your thesis or research project, publication, or your courses).
• Describe your recent work experiences.
• What did you like or dislike about your recent work experiences? Why did you leave?
• Did you get an offer from your prior summer employer? (Why not?)
• How is your work experience relevant to our practice?
• Do you have a geographical preference? Why?
• What ties do you have to this area?
• Where else are you interviewing? Why?
• How long have you been looking?
• Have you been offered a job by any other firms? Call-backs?
• How did you learn about us?
• What do you think it takes to be successful in a firm like ours?
• Why should we hire you?
• What have you learned from the attorneys you have spoken with here?
• What would you like to know about us?
• How has your volunteer/pro bono work prepared you for our practice?
• What school activities have you been involved in and why?
• Isn’t your resume too “public interest/corporate” for us?

II. Your Own Questions

One of the ways that an employer may evaluate the depth of your interest is by the nature of the questions you ask. Assume for a moment that you find yourself in the absolutely best case scenario: you have offers from more firms than you can handle. Ask yourself what factors will help you determine which employer you will choose. View this as an opportunity to determine your further interest in the employer, based on the nature of the answers to some of the following questions. Please note that some of these questions can be answered with simple research e.g., NALP form, firm resume. Try to take your questions to greater depth; employers appreciate interviewees who have done their research.

• How is the organization departmentalized? Size of department?
• Do associates/summer associates rotate? Length of rotation period?
• Do attorneys both litigate and do transactional work?
• Are offers extended by a particular department?
• Once you join a department/group, is there mobility?
• How are assignments distributed? Does this vary by department?
• How many associates have made partner, by class, over the last five years?
• What is the “normal” partnership track? Is this standard for all practice areas in the firm?
- What does “becoming a partner” mean? One tier or two tier system? What are the differences between the two? How long to make first tier or second tier? Is there attrition between the two? If so, on what basis? What happens to those who don’t make second tier? Do they stay or leave?
- How are important decisions made within the firm? What are the major firm committees, their jurisdictions and ultimate authority within their jurisdictions?
- How does the firm handle associate evaluation? How many people determine an associate’s progress/compensation?
- Is there a mentor or “buddy” system? Is there an organized system for associates to discuss individual or collective questions?
- How many billable hours are annually expected of an associate?
- Is pro bono work allowed? Encouraged? Required?
- How are associates trained?
- What types of logistical support are available to associates?
- Describe the breadth of the client base. Does one client represent more than 10% of the firm’s business?
- In what areas does the firm need attorneys?
- Are attorneys asked to specialize? How soon?
- What are future growth areas of the firm?
- What makes the firm unique? What are some of its special qualities or traditions?
- How would you characterize the firm’s strengths and weaknesses?
- What is the organization looking for in the ideal associate?
- How would you describe the general character of the firm?
- How much emphasis is placed on bringing in new business?
- What types of clients does the firm represent?
- Where do most members of the firm live?
- Do members of the firm socialize outside the office?
- What opportunities exist for becoming involved in community activities?
- What cultural and recreational activities do members of the firm pursue?

Remember that an introductory interview is just that, it is intended to determine whether there is a desire on the part of both parties to proceed with further interviews. For that reason, keep your questions more general, and appropriate to an entry-level lawyer’s interests, in a screening interview, saving the more in-depth and long-term questions for the call-back interview.

III. Tough Topics

Grades. Grades inevitably are a topic of discussion at interviews. If your grades do not appear on your resume an employer is likely to assume they are not high and ask about them. Do not be defensive and do not offer alibis or apologies. Family obligations, employment, or other commitments which took time from studying can be briefly explained. Be careful of the “I don’t do well in high-pressure situations, but really know a lot” type of answer. It sounds like an excuse and, because the majority of legal positions require the ability to work well under pressure at least some of the time, you may find yourself convincing the employer not to consider you for the job. Remember that 90% of all attorneys were not in the top 10% of their class.
Salary. You may want to avoid discussing salary during your interviews unless the interviewer does so first. In some cases salaries are not negotiable (e.g. government, many Legal Services and other public interest employers, many larger private employers); in other cases, offers depend upon how you are viewed as a candidate. You can obtain information about pay ranges by asking people who are working in the field.

It is often appropriate to delay your discussion about salary until an employment offer has been made. However, once the subject has been brought up, if you are asked what salary to expect, try to avoid giving a direct answer initially by asking what salary range has been budgeted for the position. Candidates new to a field tend to either overestimate or underestimate their worth. After you have been given a range, it is better to answer with a figure that is at least at the midpoint of their salary range if you feel your qualifications and experience merit it. Remember, the tighter the job market, the lower the salary offer. Be realistic and consider future salary potential in your deliberations. You should request that written confirmation of any salary offer and fringe benefits be sent to you.

IV. Handling Inappropriate or Discriminatory Questions

Interviews are very difficult situations even without the added problem of discriminatory questions. The applicant is under stress, wants to make a good impression, and is probably both shocked and angered by the discriminatory question. Or, as sometimes happens, the applicant may not realize until after the interview is over that the question was probably improper. Handling this kind of situation is very complex and difficult, aggravated by the fact that the interview situation demands an immediate response. What an individual does in such a situation depends on many things, including whether s/he still wants to be considered for the job, whether s/he immediately recognizes the question as inappropriate, and many other factors. Some will try to handle the situation so that prospects for being hired aren’t harmed; others will walk out of the interview; others will challenge the interviewer. The range of responses is enormous and the decision is yours.

What will you do if you get a potentially discriminatory question? Many of you will want to respond so that you will not hurt your chances for a positive decision from the interviewer. If you are troubled by an interview experience, or you experience overt discrimination, please report it to your Office of Career Services while the experience, feelings, and dialogue are still fresh in your mind.

Also, one of the skills most lawyers develop is the ability to turn a negative into a positive. You will need to develop that ability too. So, if you think someone is less impressed with you because of your sex or skin color, etc., and if they demonstrate that verbally, you may want to try to turn them around by showing them just how good you are. Do it positively, then consider going to your Office of Career Services.
Squire Sanders

Introduction to Interviewing Techniques
Introduction to Interviewing Techniques

Presented to

Arizona State University College of Law

I. SELECTING WHERE TO INTERVIEW.

A. Public v. private; BIGLAW v. small shops.

B. Identify your short-term and long-term goals.

C. Focus on employers offering jobs that will enable you to fulfill these aspirations.

II. PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW – RESEARCH! RESEARCH! RESEARCH!

A. Research the firms or organizations that seem to match your practice goals using Martindale-Hubbell, the employer’s own “firm resume”, a NEXIS search of news articles, or other sources such as The Insider’s Guide to Law Firms.

B. Learn ten or more facts about each firm to use as reference points in your answers.

C. Examine your strengths and weaknesses and identify an example of each.

D. If possible, determine who will be interviewing you and review his or her profile.

E. Outliner your interview, including names of interviewers, questions about the firm, areas of interest, and bring it with you to the interview.

III. TYPES OF INTERVIEWS.

A. Screening Interview. A brief interview in person or over the phone to see if you have general communication skills and to review any questions regarding your resume.

B. One-on-one/OCI Interview. In person interview where the interviewer is testing your fit with the firm/organization. Goal is to establish rapport with the interviewer.

C. Callback Interview. A series of interviews to see how you handle yourself with a variety of people. Do not forget the recruiter is an interviewer as well. Goal is to find a common thread with each interviewer, but keep answers fresh.

D. Lunch/Dinner Interview. Same rules apply in lunch interviews as in those held at the office, but the atmosphere is usually a bit more congenial. Goal is to connect in a casual setting and display your
social skills. Do not be fooled if you are told lunch is “not an interview”. Follow the interviewer’s lead in both selection of food and in etiquette.

E. **Committee/Group Interview.** Acknowledge all on arrival, but speak directly to the person asking the question. After each question, scan the group and make eye contact with the others. Goal is to show that you interact well with others and that you are comfortable being the center of attention.

IV. AT THE INTERVIEW

A. First Impressions Count.

1. Dress for the interview – nearly always professional dress.
2. Firm handshake and smile.
3. Eye contact is critical.

B. The three “A”s of Interviewing.

1. Attitude. The number one reason a candidate is rejected. Project enthusiasm and interest; earnest over arrogant.
2. Aptitude. Know the answer to the question of why you would be a good fit with the employer. Display your analytical skills.
3. Aspirations. You have goals and ideals that motivate you. Illustrate that your career is important to you and you have put thought into your career plans.

V. THE QUESTIONS – THEIRS AND YOURS.

A. Typical Questions. You will likely get at least half of these in each interview.

1. Why did you decide to go into law?
2. Why are you interested in our firm (or other employing organization)?
3. What are your perceived strengths and weaknesses?
4. Where do you see yourself in five years? What are your career objectives?
5. What have you liked most about law school? What are your favorite courses?
6. Why did you pick your particular law school?
7. What achievements do you look back on with pride and why?
8. What would you most like us to remember about you?

B. Resume Questions. Anything on the resume is fair game so be prepared to answer questions about your college thesis or major papers if listed on your resume.

C. When It’s Your Turn to Ask Questions. Good questions establish knowledge of the firm, genuine interest and enthusiasm. Your questions should also address whether the firm or organization is compatible with your career goals.

1. The Right Questions.
a. What can you tell me about working at your firm? How do you assign work to first-year associates? Do associates work with a particular partner or are they assigned to a pool of associates available to work in a particular practice group? How soon may a new associate be able to participate in a deposition or a closing?

b. How is your firm organized? How is the organization structured for purposes of management and administration? How much control do the satellite offices have over associate issues and progression throughout the firm?

c. What are the features of the summer program? Who runs the summer program? What types of projects do you give to summer associates? How do you evaluate the work of the summer associates? Did you make any permanent offers to your summer associates from last year?

d. Do you provide structured training to your attorneys? Do new associates receive scheduled training? How is feedback given to your associates? How does the firm evaluate the associates?

e. What are some of the firm’s future development plans? Do you expect the firm to grow over the next year/five years/ten years? Are particular practice areas expanding?

f. What brought you to the firm? Why do you like being a part of this organization? Why did you choose this firm? What do you think sets this firm apart from other firms in the field?

2. The Wrong Questions.

a. Asking a “dumb” question. Asking a question to which you should already know the answer or one that illustrates your lack of knowledge of the firm, *i.e.* asking about the Tucson Office when no such office exists. Review the NALP form and Workplace Environment Questionnaire before asking questions about diversity and quality of life issues.

b. Compensation questions. Generally, avoid compensation questions unless the interviewer brings up the subject. You may appear too focused on money.

c. Billable hours questions. For similar reasons, questions about billable hours/quality of life should be the first question or the singular focus of the interview.

3. The Difficult Questions.

a. Low grades. Take responsibility, but do explain any extenuating circumstances or recent improvements. Move on to positive achievements.

b. Not receiving an offer from a summer employer. Honestly assess any problems you may have had and what you have done to remedy those problems.
c. Lack of geographic ties to the employer’s area. Geographic ties are very important. Clearly explain why you are interested in relocating.

d. Lack of certainty about preferred practice area. At least be able to articulate interests in particular subjects or pastimes, e.g. public speaking, creative writing.

4. The Inappropriate Questions.

a. Notify your career services professional.

b. If you are comfortable doing so, notify the recruiting coordinator.

VI. AFTER THE INTERVIEW.

A. When you should hear back from the firm. It varies by firm and by the type of interview. Employers may respond quickly after an on-campus interview, but may take several weeks, or even months, deciding to extend permanent positions. Take comfort in the fact that no news is generally good news.

B. Thank you notes. Should you send a thank-you letter to the interviewer following the interview? Not required, but may be useful to follow up on something you discussed. E-mail is also an option.

C. Contacting the firm. If you haven’t heard from the employer within two to three weeks or more, you may write or call the recruiting coordinator or interview to check on your status. Simply state that you are very interested in the position and would like to ask about your status.

*Good luck!!*