

GENERAL INTERVIEW TIPS

Whether your interview is through an on-campus interview program (OCI), a career fair, or on-site at the employer's office, some general rules for success apply. Learn as much as you can about the employer before the interview by conducting research on the employer's mission, clients, practice area, and people. Check with the CDO to see if there are other students or alumni who can give you tips about the specific employer or interviewer. Practice your interviewing skills with mock interviews, and seek advice from the CDO if you have questions. Be prepared with questions to ask the interviewer.

1. Be on time! In fact, arrive early. If the interview is on-site, make sure you know where you are going and have ample time to park. Be sure to act in a professional, friendly, and polite manner with everyone you interact with, including all administrative and recruiting staff.

2. Dress appropriately. Always dress professionally. Avoid strong colognes or perfumes (interviewers may have allergies). For women, be sure to wear pantyhose. Ask a trusted friend or advisor to give you feedback on your intended interview attire and appearance.

3. Be aware of your nonverbal communication. Mock interviews can help you catch unconscious habits and project confidence. Practice your handshake so that it is firm but not aggressive. Maintain eye contact when greeting and listening to the interviewer. Focus on the interviewer. Be a good listener. Do not fidget or spin your chair, or otherwise distract the interviewer from the content of your answers.

4. Be aware of your verbal communication. Again, mock interviews can help you catch speech habits, including verbal tics ("y'know," "actually," "basically," "like") and voice tone (monotone or uptick at the end of sentences).

5. Review the resume you submitted to the interviewing employer. Interviewers will want you to expand on your resume descriptions. For each entry, know what you did and what you learned from the experience. Speak positively about your experiences and employers. Bring several copies of your application materials (resume, cover letter, writing sample, list of references, etc.) with you, in case an interviewer requests one.

6. Think about your skills, interests, and goals. Be honest with yourself about your strengths and weaknesses. Be prepared to explain why you applied to that employer and why the employer should hire you.

- 7. Think about your answers to common interview questions.** You even can write your talking points, which may help you commit them to memory. Just be sure not to refer to your written notes during the interview, or to sound robotic. If there is a question that you hope you will not be asked, it is especially important to prepare an answer so that you are not caught off-guard.
- 8. Research the employer and your interviewer(s).** Prepare a list of questions that you plan to ask the interviewer. The questions you ask can help demonstrate your knowledge, or allow you to highlight an experience or strength relevant to the employer.
- 9. Be prepared for the unexpected.** You may have a strange interview, or even a bad interviewer. Prepare a response if you are asked a question that may be inappropriate. Sometimes interviewers get so caught up telling you about their employer that they forget to ask you questions. You will want to be prepared to navigate the conversation so that you have the opportunity to share information about yourself.
- 10. Even if the interviewer asks a brief/general question, do not give a brief response.** Always take the opportunity to expand a bit and provide examples.
- 11. Remember that not only are you there to be interviewed, you also are there to interview the employer.** You need to decide if it is a good fit for you.
- 12. Do not take things personally.** If the employer does not make an offer, know that you could have been very close to receiving one. It does not mean the interviewer did not like you. It just means that it was not the best fit at that time. You may have another opportunity later.
- 13. Smile! and show enthusiasm.** Sitting up straight, and even leaning slightly forward in your chair, shows you are engaged, energetic, and paying attention.
- 14. Be yourself.** It is important to be the best version of your authentic self. Authenticity is key to succeeding in an interview, during the summer program (if applicable), and as a new employee.
- 15. Send a thank you note.** Regardless of the interview format, follow up within a day with either an emailed or handwritten thank you note. Use the opportunity to convey your appreciation for the interviewer's time, and perhaps touch on a discussion you had during the interview. End the note by reiterating your interest in the position. If you are writing to more than one interviewer, each note should be customized. To determine whether email or U.S. mail is more appropriate, ask your interviewer about the timing for second-round interview and offer decisions. If the employer will be

making decisions in the next 1 – 3 days, email is best. If you hand write a note, be sure to use professional looking stationary and neat handwriting.

COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Employers often ask similar questions, intended to find out if you will be a good fit for their workplace or well-suited for their practice. Some questions may be specific to a particular area of law. Occasionally, employers ask questions about a recent Supreme Court case, the Constitution, or even a hypothetical – either to test your legal knowledge, or get a sense of how you react under pressure. Stay cool – it is ok to pause briefly to collect your thoughts! Questions commonly asked by employers include:

- Why did you decide to go to law school? Did you know what area of law you wanted to practice before you started? Has this changed? Why did you choose to attend Richmond?
- What classes do you enjoy the most? The least? Is there a parallel between your academic performance and your interest in a particular course?
- What is your impression of your grades? Do you think that grades in law school are indicative of one's substantive mastery of a topic or potential as a lawyer?
- What would you be doing if you were not in law school?
- Tell me about yourself. How would you describe yourself in three sentences?
- Where are you from? How did you end up in Richmond?
- How has your previous work experience prepared you for practice? If I called your most recent employer, what three things would he or she be most likely to say about you?
- Tell me about what you are doing/did this summer. Tell me about one particularly challenging/interesting research project? What did you like most/least about this experience? What skills were you able to use/develop through your work? Why did you choose this particular job?
- What experience have you had with clients? Do you interact with people who may be challenging? How would you feel about representing an unpopular client?
- What are your short-range and long-range goals and objectives? When and why did you establish these goals, and how do you plan on achieving them?
- What practice areas are of interest to you? What interests you about our practice area?
- What do you see yourself doing in 5 or 10 years? Where do you want to be in your career/life?
- Have you made a decision as to the geographic area in which you ultimately wish to practice? Why have you selected this city? What ties do you have to our area?

- Why did you pick your undergraduate institution? Why did you pick your undergraduate major? In retrospect, what are the pros and cons of your major as preparation for law school (or the practice of law)?
- How would you describe your ideal job after graduation?
- Why are you interested in working at our firm or organization?
- We have many qualified applicants; why should we hire you? What distinguishes you from your University of Richmond classmates and/or other law students?
- Do you have other job offers? Where else are you looking? Where else are you interviewing?
- What are your greatest strengths? Greatest weaknesses?
- What qualities do you have that will make you a successful lawyer?
- What does it take to be a good manager? In what kind of environment are you most comfortable?
- What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort? What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
- How do you work under pressure?
- How would you describe success?
- What is the greatest obstacle you have had to overcome in your life/career? Tell me about a challenging situation you faced, and how you handled it.
- What are your interests outside of work and school?
- What is not obvious from your resume that you would like to share? How does that experience or aspect of your background reflect your unique qualities and capabilities?
- What questions would you like to ask me?

SAMPLE BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

Some interviewers ask questions aimed at learning how you might behave in the workplace. These questions provide an opportunity for you to sell yourself to the employer. Even if you are not asked any of these questions, have a narrative prepared to help you answer those “what are your strengths/weaknesses” questions.

- Describe a situation in which you had to work with a difficult team member.
- Discuss a recent experience when you had to work under pressure and make decisions quickly without complete information.
- Talk about how you have dealt with communication problems with a co-worker.
- Describe a time when you received constructive feedback on your work.
- Describe a situation where you had to persuade your colleagues or others that following your recommendation was the correct course of action.

- Give an example of a situation where you used good judgment and logic to solve a problem.
- Tell me how you prioritize your workload and juggle multiple projects and deadlines.
- Describe how you would respond if a supervisor asked you to do something unethical.

WHAT ARE EMPLOYERS LOOKING FOR?

What employers want to learn from your responses may not be obvious. How you frame your answer is important. Employers are often looking for answers that:

- Indicate self-awareness and demonstrate what kind of employee you are likely to be.
- Demonstrate your communication skills and ability to work well with others.
- Reveal passion about something: an area of law, working with clients, learning new things, serving a particular mission.
- Show intellectual curiosity and engagement.
- Indicate professionalism.
- Show confidence, without cockiness or arrogance.
- Show concern and respect for clients.
- Demonstrate a realistic understanding of law practice and economic realities.
- Indicate personality factors that may make you suited to the particular culture and environment of the workplace – *i.e.*, are you friendly and easy to get along with? Do you relate easily to people? Are you respectful to others?

SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK A PROSPECTIVE EMPLOYER:

The questions you ask may depend on the position for which you are applying. In most cases, you will want your questions to demonstrate your existing knowledge of an employer: avoid asking questions that could be answered by looking at an employer's website! Questions should demonstrate an understanding of the employer's practice areas and an eagerness to understand how you can contribute and be successful there. Ask open-ended questions that show a real interest in the employer. If you are applying for a permanent position, you may ask questions about the workplace, and opportunities for training and advancement. Avoid asking about compensation or benefits until you have received an offer and reached the negotiation stage.

- What matters or cases are you (the interviewer) involved in now? What kinds of work have you done since you started working for the employer?
- What do you enjoy most about your work?

- What is a “typical” day at work here? What kinds of clients, cases, or projects are most typical of your office?
- What training is available for summer? How are interns supervised?
- What are the key characteristics of a successful summer associate or intern?
- Please describe the mentoring system for summer associates or interns. How should summer associates or interns seek feedback?
- Are there opportunities to learn about work in other sections? Are there opportunities to socialize after work hours?
- How is work assigned to summer associates or interns? Are summer associates or interns placed with particular practice groups, or do they rotate through different areas?
- What is the firm’s pro bono policy? Does the firm encourage new attorneys to participate in the local bar associations and community organizations?
- What are the plans for the firm’s or organization’s future? How might a summer associate/intern/new attorney help achieve organizational goals?
- What would you say is the biggest success that your office has achieved?
- How has your organization weathered the economic downturn? What practice areas are growing?
- What is the biggest challenge your office now faces? How would you expect a summer intern or new attorney to be involved?
- How do you evaluate and provide feedback to attorneys? How do attorneys advance?
- What is the organization’s history in hiring summer associates or interns into post-graduate positions?
- What are the next steps in the interview process?

RESPONDING TO POOR OR INAPPROPRIATE QUESTIONS

Sometimes employers may ask questions that are inappropriate or even illegal. Employers should not ask about your age, national origin, religious affiliation, marital status, health, physical condition, political views, or family situation, unless they are bona fide occupational qualifications – for instance, if you are applying for a job at a religious or political organization. Although most hiring attorneys know what questions they must avoid, many do not. If you are asked a question that you feel is an improper inquiry, remain polite and tactful, deflect the question, and redirect the conversation by talking about your accomplishments, or asking one of your prepared questions. If you are asked an inappropriate or impermissible question in an interview, notify the CDO.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

An Insider’s Guide to Interviewing: Insights from the Employer’s Perspective:

This NALP booklet is available in the CDO.

How body language affects your presentation:

http://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are.html

Dressing for job interviews:

<http://looklikealawyer.wordpress.com/2008/02/08/the-job-interview/>