

Preparing for an Interview

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1. General Advice

Interviewing is a learned skill. We highly encourage you to take advantage of opportunities to prepare for interviews. One way to prepare is to request a **mock interview** with a local practitioner through the CSO. Another way is to do a mock interview through [InterviewStream](#). Please contact a counselor if you are interested in either of these options. In addition, we encourage students to meet with a CSO counselor or conduct informational interviews to get additional insight on employers.

In this packet, we have provided some practice questions from which you can prepare. It is important to note that different types of employers look for different characteristics in candidates. To properly prepare, you will want to take the time to determine which characteristics are most important to the employer with whom you are interviewing, evaluate what it looks like to have these characteristics, and think about ways you can reflect these characteristics during your interview. For example, a big firm (Sample 1) may predominantly be looking for candidates with intellectual agility, effective communication skills, ability to work on a team, and committed professionalism. The Public Defender's Office (Sample 2) may be predominantly looking for candidates with commitment to public service, passion to litigate, confidence in confronting authority, and unswerving loyalty to clients. We encourage you to reflect on what it means to have those qualities, then practice answering questions to reflect those behaviors and values.

You should always be prepared to answer the question of why you want to work for a particular employer. This is your big opportunity to show them that you are a great match for what they do and their mission. Also, be prepared to give examples from past experiences in your interview to support and strengthen your answers.

Top executive recruiters agree that the only three true job interview questions are*:

1. Can you do the job? – **Strengths**
2. Will you love the job? – **Motivation**
3. Can we tolerate working with you? – **Fit**

* See [\[See Article\]](#)

2. How to Nail the On-Campus Interview**

1. **Own the room.** Greet the interviewer confidently. One way to exhibit confidence is not to slouch. Look the interviewer directly in the eye and give a firm handshake (but not a bone-crunching one). And smile. If you exude enthusiasm, you are likely to get it back from the interviewer, which will help put you at ease.
2. **Ask strategic questions.** You do not have much time, so the more time the interviewer spends telling you about the organization, the less time you have to highlight your attributes. Ask questions that show that you

researched the organization and that you are enthusiastic about working there. You should be ready to answer the “Why do you want to work here?” question with an answer that is specific to each employer. On the other hand, if you ask a question that is obvious or could easily have been answered on their website, you show the interviewer that you were not fully prepared and motivated enough to learn about the organization.

3. **Don't ask about the quality of life.** Organizations want to know what you can do for them. Initial interviews are not the time to address your personal concerns. For example, if you ask about work/life balance, the interviewer is likely to hear, “I am not interested in working hard.” Get that kind of information another way – or ask after you have an offer.
4. **Develop key messages.** Come up with a list of points that you want to get across – regardless of the questions you are asked. Again, research the organization. If you understand the qualities that an organization values, you will do a better job of crafting answers and questions to demonstrate that you will be an asset to the organization. Whenever you can, provide specific examples of your skills and show how they will benefit the employer.
5. **Listen closely to each question.** If you are anxious, you may be tempted to blurt out the first answer that comes into your head or start talking before you have fully composed your answer. Do not fall into those traps. Pause for a second or two before answering. That may seem like an eternity, but it will become more natural if you practice. The time will give you a chance to compose your thoughts and hit the most important key messages in your answer. If you do not understand a question, ask for clarification rather than guessing at an answer.
6. **Be Memorable.** Try to highlight an interesting fact or accomplishment – preferably one that took tenacity. If the interviewer remembers you as “the one who ran the marathon,” you are much more likely to make it to round two.
7. **Manage anxiety.** Interviewing is anxiety-provoking for almost everyone. Remember that the interviewer was once in your chair. If you have done your research, practiced your answers, and have your key messages down cold, you will be much more confident. And exercising will help banish adrenaline so it will not mess with your mind.

** Adapted from *The Careerist* (Vivia Chen, August 6, 2012)

Sample 1: Four Desired Behavioral Characteristics in *Large Firms****

1. **Intellectual Agility:** the ability to identify and focus on key issues, apply creative thinking to solve problems, integrate past experience and knowledge, anticipate roadblocks, know when to ask questions, ask appropriate questions, understand limitations, use good judgment under pressure, and adapt well to different situations and people.

Possible interview questions to assess a candidate's intellectual agility:

- Describe a situation where you had to get the results with very little direction or supervision.
- Describe how you solved a problem that was in an area that was new to you.

2. **Effective Communicator:** the ability to organize thoughts before communicating, present findings in a useful manner, demonstrate confidence, be able to persuade, listen and demonstrate understanding, keep others apprised of progress, customize tone to type and purpose of communication, give clear and complete directions, and tactfully respond to requests.

Possible interview questions to assess the effectiveness of a candidate's communication:

- Tell me about a work situation when you had to communicate a piece of negative information. How did you go about doing this?
- Tell me about a situation where you had to persuade another person to your point of view.

3. **Team Player:** the ability to understand role in the team, seek out work if not busy, eagerly pitch in, share information, accept and follow through on guidance, direction, and feedback, thrive in a fast-paced environment, and willingly admit mistakes.

Possible interview questions to assess a candidate's ability to work on a team:

- Give me an example of a work or school scenario when you worked with a team. Describe your role.
- Tell me about a situation where you had to work with a group of people whose working styles were very different. How did you manage this?

4. **Committed Professional:** the ability to be persistent and tenacious, detail-oriented, actively involved, take ownership, contribute beyond normal expectations, show reliability, make necessary personal sacrifices, and understand business realities of clients.

Possible interview questions to assess a candidate's commitment to professionalism:

- Tell me about a situation where you had to juggle multiple priorities simultaneously. How did you handle it?
- How did you choose the extracurricular activities you did? What did you gain? What did you contribute?

***Sample 1 provided courtesy of Morrison Foerster

Sample 2: Four Desired Behavioral Characteristics & Values in *Public Defenders*

1. **Commitment to Public Service/Advocacy for the Underserved**

Possible interview question to assess a candidate's commitment to public service:

- Have you ever worked with an indigent population?

2. **Passion to Litigate/Be a Trial Attorney**

Possible interview question to assess a candidate's passion to litigate:

- Why don't you want to work for legal aid? (In other words, why do you want to work in the PD's office rather than a public interest organization?)

3. **Confidence in Confronting Authority**

Possible interview question to assess a candidate's confidence in confronting authority:

- Have you ever had a conflict with a supervisor? If so, how did you resolve it?

4. **Unswerving Loyalty to your Clients**

Possible interview question to assess a candidate's loyalty to clients:

- In this situation, it is often common practice to test client loyalty through a hypothetical.

3. Additional Sample Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Why should we hire you?
3. What can you offer us that another candidate cannot?
4. Why do you want to work for this company/law firm?
5. What is your ideal job?
6. Where do you see yourself in five years?
7. What are your strengths?
8. What are your weaknesses?
9. What kinds of hobbies do you have?
10. Do you have trouble working with a certain kind of person?
11. How would you describe your education? What is your favorite class in law school? What is your least favorite class in law school?
12. How is law school going?
13. What are your career goals?
14. Why did you leave your last position?
15. What would your last employer/professor/judge you clerked for/law firm you clerked with say about you?
16. What is your working style?
17. What is your leadership style? Are you a leader or a follower?
18. If you could relive an event in your life what would it be?
19. When are you taking the bar? Are you going to take a bar review course?
20. Have you ever been fired? Why?
21. Did you intend to go back to school after you received your B.A.?
22. How do your friends describe you?
23. In your last job/clerkship what was your most satisfying part about the job? The least satisfying part?
24. Why do you have time gaps in your resume? What were you doing?
25. Why did you decide to go to law school right after undergrad? Why did you decide to go to law school so many years after undergrad?
26. Why do you want to be a lawyer? What made you decide to go to law school?
27. Describe yourself in three adjectives.
28. Why isn't your ranking on your resume? Why isn't your GPA on your resume?
29. How much money do you want to make?
30. How do you determine success or failure?
31. Are your grades and ranking a good indication of your academic achievements?
32. How do you handle pressure or stress?
33. What is your ideal work day like?
34. What are two or three things that are most important to you when deciding if you want a particular job?
35. How much did you make in your last position?
36. What are you most proud of?
37. What do you think would be the most challenging task for you in this position?

Interview **WINNERS**

1. Firm handshake
2. Preparation - answering and asking questions
3. Investigation of the interviewers and firm
4. Professional attire
5. Exude confidence, but not arrogance
6. Interest in the interviewer and firm
7. Be interesting - Often employers want to see if you are a good fit for the firm culture
8. Timely thank-you letter
9. Callback interviews scheduled as quickly as possible (most hire on rolling basis)
10. Enthusiasm for the job

38. Can you please explain what this association/club/organization/event is on your resume?
39. Do you like to write? Do you like to research? Do you know how to use Westlaw and/or LexisNexis?
40. What special skill do you possess?
41. How far of a commute would this be for you?
42. Do you believe that people should follow the rules?
43. What is your favorite internet site?
44. What was the last book you read other than a textbook? What was the last movie you saw?

Interview **KILLERS**

1. Being late to an interview
2. Lack of preparation
3. Unprofessional attire, hair, jewelry, etc.
4. Not asking questions/
showing lack of interest in
interviewer or firm
5. Bad mouthing former
employers
6. Not having any good/
substantive questions for the
interviewers
7. Distracting mannerisms
8. Indecision/indifference
9. Asking improper questions
at the wrong time (e.g.,
salary, hours, benefits)
10. Nervousness that impedes
your ability to be yourself
and communicate effectively

45. What do you feel has contributed most to your success or failures at work? At school?
46. Why did you pick Chapman University School of Law? Tell me about Chapman.
47. Do you like Orange County? Los Angeles? California?
48. Who else are you interviewing with?
49. Why didn't you get an offer from the last place you worked during the summer?
50. Do you have any questions for me? Us?
51. Tell me about an idea you developed and implemented that was particularly creative or innovative.
52. What kinds of opportunities do you thrive on?
53. What resources did you find most useful in completing your assignments this summer?
54. What challenges are you looking for in your next position?
55. Give me an example of a work situation where you had to deal with a crisis. Describe how you handled it.
56. How do you currently work with your colleagues on the journal? What works? What would you change?
57. Describe a situation where you have been able to impact how your team worked together more effectively.
58. Tell me about a situation where you were able to help a colleague achieve a goal.
59. Describe the type of atmosphere/environment that brings out the best in you.
60. Could you describe a situation to me when you felt "in over your head?" How did you handle it?
61. What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction and why?
62. What do you consider to be the most important aspect of delivering excellent client work?
63. Can you give me an example of a matter that would not have been completed without your intervention?

4. Questions to Ask Interviewers

GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. Where could you use the most support right now in your practice?
2. Who would be your ideal candidate for this position?
3. Are there any particular characteristics of attorneys who do especially well in your practice group?
4. Is there a formal mentoring program or do mentoring relationships occur informally?
5. What are typical assignments for summer associates or new attorneys?
6. Tell me about your practice. What do you do on a typical work day?
7. What is the most interesting matter you are working on now?
8. What is it that attracted you to this employer and/or what keeps you here?
9. Where do you see the agency/firm/department in five years?
10. In your mind, what makes this employer stand out from its competitors?
11. How do you measure success in this position?
12. What qualities are you looking for in the person you are hoping to hire?
13. What scope is there for personal development at your firm/company/agency?
14. How soon can I expect to hear from you if an offer is to be made? *(Use towards end of the interview.)*

AT LAW FIRMS

1. Why did you choose to work at this firm as compared to similarly-situated law firms?
2. What do you see as the benefits of working at a firm your size?
3. Are the offices independent or do they work collaboratively on certain projects? *(For interviews at an organization with more than one location.)*
4. What do you like about practicing in your group/firm?

AT GOVERNMENT/PUBLIC INTEREST AGENCIES

1. How does the legal department relate to the head of the agency? *(If the agency/organization is not solely made up of attorneys.)*
2. Why did you choose to work in public service over the private sector?
3. What do you find to be the most satisfying part of your work?

AT CORPORATE LAW DEPARTMENTS/IN-HOUSE COUNSEL

1. Do you expect growth in the corporate law department? How much and in what areas?
2. What will a typical career path look like?
3. How is the department organized?
4. What is the relationship of the General Counsel to the Chairperson of the Board? Board of Directors?
5. How is outside counsel used and for what matters?

WHEN INTERVIEWING FOR SUMMER EMPLOYMENT

1. How is your summer associate program structured?
2. What types of projects/assignments do summer clerks receive?
3. Is there a chance for involvement in client meetings? Depositions? Hearings?
4. What type of evaluation/feedback process do you have?
5. Can you recommend anything I could do/read before the start of the summer to help prepare for the work that awaits me?