

# Interviewing Tips

## Types of Interviews

*Screening interview.* This is the term used for your first interview with the prospective employer. It can take place at the employer's office, during an interview program, such as the Fall Interview Program (FIP) at Yale or the Equal Justice Works Career Fair, or over the telephone. During FIP, screening interviews are 25 minutes in length. In other settings, they may last as long as an hour.

*Callback interview.* This interview is usually scheduled only after you have survived a screening process. Typical callback interviews last for half of a day, and involve you meeting individually for 20-30 minutes with four or more attorneys from the employer. The interview may include a meal. Consult CDO's handout *Turning a Callback into an Offer* for additional callback advice.

## Employment Sector Differences

*Law firms.* Law firm interviews are not known for being particularly rigorous. The interviews are a conversation, with the interviewers using your resume to ask questions to see if you have a sincere interest in their practice and if you would be a good fit with their firm. Substantive legal questions are rarely asked. Academic achievement is often important.

*Public interest employers.* Interviews for summer positions are usually less formal than those for permanent positions and may involve only a few minutes of chatting on the phone. Some public interest employers hire summer interns on the basis of a resume and cover letter alone. Public interest employers seek students with a commitment to service and will ask questions to gauge your commitment. Some government employers, including district attorneys and public defenders, ask hypothetical questions to see how well you think on your feet.

*Management consulting firms.* In consulting firm interviews, you will be asked a hypothetical business question and be asked to analyze the problem during the interview. These interviews are known as "case studies."

*Investment banks.* Following their often aggressive work atmosphere, ibank interviewers will question you about your analytical skills and interest in banking. Using a strong, "hard sell" approach can be preferred in these interviews.

## Preparation

*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 the three or four things you most want an employer to know about you and make sure to bring these qualities up during your interviews. 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 Myspace or Facebook? 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 of links to other content from your site – it is certainly possible that a prospective employer will follow the links provided. If you share your thoughts 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. Feel free to talk to a CDO counselor if you have any concerns about your online image.

*Know the employer.* Read their web site, NALP Form and Student Summer Employment Evaluations. Talk to students who have worked for the employer. Read recent news items discussing the employer so that you know about current issues for them. Know why you want to work for the employer.

*Know the city.* Be able to articulate your interest in and connection to the city in which you are interviewing.

*Be prepared to ask and answer questions.* Review CDO's handout of sample questions to ask and questions you may be asked available on the CDO web site and in CDO. Prepare answers to your most difficult questions. Think in advance about what questions you wish to ask. Ask questions that reflect your interests and research.

*Participate in CDO interview skills programs.* Be sure to take part in CDO programs, including the interview skills workshops and mock interview training, to brush up on your interview skills before the real thing.

*Know what to expect on interview day.* When arranging your interview, make sure you understand (and write down) the logistics – the time, the location, the length of your visit, the number of attorneys you will meet and their names, and what materials you should bring (although it is probably wise to bring a resume, writing sample, list of references and transcript even if not requested). Look the interviewers up on the employer's website or [www.martindale.com](http://www.martindale.com). Map out your travel route in advance and be sure to arrive a few minutes early. When you go to the interview, be sure you have eaten properly and have had enough sleep.

## What to Wear

Your attire should contribute to your professionalism. Although employers may have different dress codes, err on the conservative side when interviewing.

### *Women*

- Black, navy and gray are the most conservative colors, but other subtle shades are also fine. Solids are preferable to patterns.
- If worn, skirts should be around knee length. Wearing pantyhose (as opposed to bare legs) is the more conservative approach.
- Avoid low-cut shirts. Tank tops and camisoles are too casual.
- Keep heels on the shorter side. Stay away from sling backs, open toes, elaborate bows, buckles etc.
- Keep jewelry simple so as not to distract you or the interviewer.
- Long hair/curly hair does not have to be pulled back, unless it will be in your face or distract you.
- Use a light hand in applying makeup and perfume.
- Nails should not be too long and, if polished, should be in a neutral shade.
- Carry a briefcase or folder that contains your interview materials. If you carry a briefcase, do not also carry a purse.

### *Men*

- Suit should be a well-tailored pin-striped or plain wool single-breasted suit in navy or gray.
- Ties should be tasteful color and design. The width of your tie should be between 2 ¾ and 3 ½ inches and should extend to your trouser belt. Do not wear a bow tie.

- Wear a plain, light-colored long-sleeved shirt - white or light blue work well.
- Shoes should be polished with socks that complement the suit. Shoes should match your belt.
- For jewelry, do not wear anything more than a simple watch and wedding band. Leave your earring/nose ring at home.
- Hair should be neatly cut. Although long hair is not recommended, if you have it, pull it back into a neat ponytail. Beards and mustaches should be trimmed or, if acceptable to you, removed.
- Use no cologne or aftershave or, if you must, apply it very lightly.
- Carry a briefcase or folder that contains your interview materials.

#### *YLS Loan Policy for Suit Purchase*

If a student is on financial aid (loans and/or grants) and does not have appropriate clothing for interviews, the student may request a one-time loan of \$350 to purchase a suit. If the student enters COAP after graduation, this loan will be covered. Students should talk to Pat Barnes before they purchase the suit, and should submit the receipt to the Financial Aid office within 10 days.

## **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

## **Making a Great Impression**

- Start with a firm handshake and good eye contact.
- Demonstrate that you have thoroughly researched the employer. Explain why the employer and its work interests you.
- Treat the interview like a conversation, not an interrogation. Don't just respond to questions, ask good questions too.
- Show your ability to be a problem solver.
- Be enthusiastic. Use your voice, your body language, your smile, and your hand gestures to demonstrate your excitement for the position and the practice of the employer.
- Be positive. Avoid negative comments about prior employers, law school, etc.
- Take opportunities to get your 2-3 best qualities across to the interviewer.
- Be confident, not arrogant.
- Demonstrate good judgment. One way to accomplish this is by not revealing client confidences or privileged information.
- Be forthright about "negatives," such as poor grades or lack of an offer of permanent employment from a previous legal employer. If you have a "negative" on your record and are asked about it, acknowledge it and don't be defensive or make excuses. Consult CDO's handout *What to Do When You Don't Get an Offer from Your Summer Employer* for additional advice.

## Sample Evaluation Form

Rate the candidate from 1-5 on the following characteristics:

Achievement

(1) excelled - (5) seems limited

Intellectual ability

(1) reasons well, creative, thoughtful, insightful - (5) unfocused

Work experience

(1) useful, relevant - (5) not useful

Verbal expression

(1) articulate, logical - (5) inarticulate

Personality

(1) personable, outgoing - (5) arrogant, withdrawn

Maturity

(1) confident, balanced - (5) immature

Presence

(1) focused, at ease - (5) nervous, uneasy

Interest in firm and practice areas

(1) keen - (5) shopping

## Thank You Letters

In some regions of the country (i.e., the Northeast), thank you letters are generally not expected. In other locales (i.e., the Southeast), they are more common. In CDO's view, thank you letters are most appropriate after an informational interview, an in-office job interview with an organization you are very interested in, or after a lengthy and/or informative telephone call. If you decide to write one, it is critical that it is well written, as it is ultimately another writing sample. Send it promptly.

## CDO Resources

- CDO's Introduction to Career Development (2011)
- CDO's Turning a Callback into an Offer (2011)
- Fair and Effective Interviewing (NALP Brochure, 2005)
- Guerrilla Tactics for Getting the Legal Job of Your Dreams (Walton, 2008)
- Guide to the Case Interview (Vault, 2007)
- Ace Your Case: Consulting Interviews (Wetfeet, 2008)
- Beat the Street: Investment Banking Interviews (Wetfeet, 2008)
- Interviewing Tips for Law Students with Disabilities and Employers Who Recruit Them (NALP Booklet, 2006)
- To Be Out or Not To Be Out: Information for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Job Applicants (NALP Brochure, 2005)
- Nail Your Law Job Interview (Prescott & Cross, 2009)

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