

ANSWERING COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Different interviewers have different styles, so it's hard to predict what kinds of questions you will be asked when you interview. Preparing for a wide variety of questions is the best way to head into any interview confident that you will be able to answer any question that comes your way.

Practice Your Answers Out Loud: As you read through the questions below, stop to consider how you would answer each one – and then verbalize those answers out loud. You will find that “knowing what you think you will say” and actually saying it are two different things. Practicing answers aloud will ensure that your answers are well organized, concise, and articulate. It may take you several tries to get your answer to come out best. You do not want to go into an interview with pat, preplanned answers or you risk sounding scripted – but you do want to go into an interview confident that you will be able to talk about your skills and experience in an engaging and articulate way.

- A. “Why should we hire you?”** is the question behind every question you will be asked. Make sure that your answers express your interest in the practice of law and the particular employer you are interviewing with. Prepare to give the interviewer concrete examples of your strengths, skills or and experience. Saying that you have “strong leadership skills” doesn't really tell a potential employer anything, but discussing a group, program or project that you have led does. Make sure that your answers reflect the characteristics employers are looking for – good judgment, problem solving skills, dedication, strong work ethic, legal writing and reasoning skills, the ability to work independently, the ability to get along with others, and plain old common sense.
- B. “Tell me something about yourself”** Employers are looking for a 60 second focused, concise statement that showcases your experience, career progress, major accomplishments, some of your best traits, and casts you in a positive light. A good answer includes some personal information (especially if it ties you to the geographic location of the employer or practice area) and your professional goals. For example: *“I'm a transplant to Chicago, but I'm here for good. I was born and raised in Cincinnati, but I came to Chicago for undergrad, and worked as a consultant here for four years in PriceWaterhouseCoopers's tax group. My wife teaches 3rd grade at St. Athanasius in Evanston, so we live in Evanston now. I'm a 1L at Loyola, and I'm really enjoying it, especially my civil procedure class. I'm interested in building on the experience I gained at PriceWaterhouseCoopers as a tax attorney. That's one of the reasons I'm so interested in XYZ firm – I've heard great things about your tax practice.”*
- C. Why are you interested in our firm/organization?** Research the firm by going to the website and searching the internet and be able to articulate specifically what about the organization that interests you. Look for facts: specific practice areas, successes, clients, (successful completion of the merger between Client A and Client B).
- D. Why are you interested in this geographic area? Do you have any ties to this community?** If students have lived/worked in the area, this is easy. For students with no ties to the area, you should refer to ties to the east coast; experience in large urban areas; visits to the city; interest in living & working in a large city/small town; extra points if they have talked to classmates/friends who have lived and worked in the area and can give details about events/places/neighborhoods.
- E. What can I tell you about the firm?** Applicants should have a list of 5-7 good questions just in case the first question from the employer is this one. Lead with something you know about the firm, e.g., “I know that you recently added an Intellectual Property group. What led to that decision?” This shows that you were interested enough in the employer to do some research to prepare for the interview.
- F. Why did you go to law school?** Employers are looking for answers that makes sense, that add up, that

show you have good judgment. They do not want to hear that you came to law school because you didn't know what else to do with your life.

G. Where do you see yourself in five years? Interviewers want to know this because they want a better understanding of your overall goals for yourself and how the job is a part of that. That matters to them because they want to hire someone who will be excited about the job and where it will lead them, whether that's to a higher-level position or just increased accomplishment or satisfaction. They want to know that you're not just applying for jobs randomly and taking whatever you can get, because if you are, you're more likely to get bored or leave as soon as something else comes along. By showing your interviewer how the job fits in with your overall goals, you can show that you'll be excited to do the work and aren't likely to leave prematurely. Here is one example of a good answer: "In five years, I'd love to have increased my skill level enough that I'm able to train others how to do this work. I love this work, and I've found that I really enjoy mentoring colleagues, so I'd be thrilled to be able to combine the two—continuing to work in a role like this one, but with a training or mentoring component to it."

H. Do you think your grades are a good indication of what kind of lawyer you'll be? No matter what your grades are, you need to go beyond grades to those profession/leadership/counseling/advocacy skills that are essential to good lawyering. If your grades are strong, don't brag. Instead, go beyond your grades to talk about how much you have learned, the classes you have taken, and the experience you have gained. If your grades are weak, tell the interviewer the steps you have taken to improve your grades. Show that you have a plan and that you are looking forward to performing better in your future classes.

Behavioral Interviewing Questions

Behavioral interviews are based on the premise that a person's past performance on the job is the best predictor of future performance. When a company uses behavioral interviewing they want to know how you act and react in certain circumstances. They also want you to give specific "real life" examples of how you behaved in situations relating to the questions. Although it is difficult to predict which behavioral questions an employer might ask, below are examples of typical behavioral questions you may encounter:

1. Tell me about a situation from past job that required you to exercise judgment. Employers are interested in hearing about how you approach problem-solving and whether your approach is logical and analytical. There is no "right" answer. To prepare for this question, think about a situation that you have faced in your past that required thinking logically through an issue.

2. In law school, how do you approach a problem for which there appears to be no definitive answer? Employers are interested in hearing how you analyze a problem or issue. Show that you are thoughtful and methodical in your approach.

3. Assume you are asked by two partners to complete two different assignments, but you only have time enough to complete one. What would you do? Students should show good judgment and problem-solving skills, e.g. get the supervisors together to discuss priorities. An answer like, "Stay up all night and all day and multi-task until they're both done" is not good.

4. Tell me about your last big mistake. How did you handle it? Discuss the mistake and the steps you took to overcome and learn from it.

5. What is your biggest weakness? Employers are looking for a fairly minor weakness that won't interfere with your job performance and is correctable. Perhaps, less than stellar public speaking skills, which you plan

to get better at while in law school through advocacy classes. Some jobs don't require a lot of public speaking so this can be a somewhat safe weakness.

6. Have you been on a committee or had a work-related situation in which you were asked to accomplish a task with insufficient guidance? How did you proceed? This is an opportunity for students to show process-how they ask for guidance, how they get the information they need, and maturity-their ability to admit that they need help.

7. All of us have had times in our lives in which we felt unmotivated, or encountered problems which seemed insurmountable. Describe such a situation and explain how you dealt with it. This question goes to the heart of professionalism-how do we maintain high personal and professional standards day-in and day-out, even when inspiration and motivation are lacking. Look for evidence of structure, e.g., (1) Getting up in the morning, showering, getting dressed-physically preparing for work/study as if one was motivated, rather than waiting for inspiration to strike; (2) Sitting down at the desk with books open and beginning the motions of studying knowing that habit can replace inspiration.

8. Describe a situation where you failed to reach a goal? Interviewers try to determine how you deal with adversity and see if you have a need to win every time. Identify a situation where you had to adjust your sights and, if possible, go back to succeed at a later date. Succeeding, however, is not as important as your demonstration of an ability to deal with tough times and make adjustments.