



Preparing for Your Legal Interviews in Five Steps

How to prepare for the interview
that will land you a legal job.

Step 1

Inventory Your Strengths, Skills, and Accomplishments

Legal employers expect you to articulate the unique and relevant value you can contribute to their work, so the first step in preparing for interviews is to inventory your strengths, skills, and accomplishments. This will create a framework that will serve you in interview preparation.

Utilize the Interview Preparation Worksheet (available on the Interviewing 101 webpage on the CSO website) to prepare for interviews by identifying three to four strengths you want to highlight for legal employers. For each strength, provide three or four accomplishment stories. When it's all done, you should have around 10-15 examples.

It's tempting to skip that last part, but don't! The examples are key for two reasons. First, studies show that people connect to and remember stories far better than other types of information. Second, examples provide evidence that what you're saying about yourself is actually true.

In high-volume interview settings where employers are meeting with a large number of candidates, being both memorable and convincing is critical. Employers often interview between 20-75 candidates over the course of a couple days or weeks, so it can be hard for them to keep everyone straight. Your job is to make that easier by differentiating yourself and clearly articulating your unique strengths through memorable stories and examples.

If you need ideas on what strengths and skills to focus on, we recommend reviewing the "26 Lawyering Effectiveness Factors," available on the Interviewing 101 webpage, for ideas on the skills and qualities you have that legal employers value.

Step 2

Research the Employer

As an intern or new attorney, you'll be asked to perform research and synthesize what you find. These skills are also useful in preparing for interviews.

Your interview preparedness will signal to the interviewer how you'll approach your work. Taking the time to research an employer demonstrates your genuine interest in both the organization and the position. So, what type of information should you be looking for? Well, any insight about the employer or interviewer that will make you a more informed, prepared, and convincing candidate.

When preparing for an interview, make sure to find out the following employer information:

- What practice areas are represented in the office or offices you're interviewing for?
- In general terms, who are the employer's clients? Do they have institutional clients or individual clients? Do they represent plaintiffs or defendants?
- What is the organization's culture and if applicable, its mission?
- What qualities does the employer value in interns and attorneys?
- Are there any recent developments, press releases, or filings pertaining to the employer?

Research the Employer (contd.)

In terms of interviewer research, you want to find out:

- Who are your interviewers?
- Where did they go to law school, and what activities were they involved in?
- What have they done career-wise since graduating from law school?
- Are there any recent developments, press releases, or filings pertaining to their work?

Since time is precious and you're likely to have multiple interviews, you have to be efficient in your research. We have a comprehensive list of industry guides and directories on our Interviewing 101 webpage, but don't overlook human intel in your search. Ask people in your network about employers. Reach out to law school faculty, staff, and students, in addition to your family, friends, and former colleagues. Your CSO career counselor has a wealth of information about the hiring practices of legal employers, so don't be shy about tapping into that resource. Also, be sure to utilize the 2L & 3L Peer-to-Peer Employer Insights, which is available on the CSO website.

Remember, employers expect you to show up to the interview well-informed and enthusiastic about what they do, so don't gloss over this step.

Step 3

Develop Your Core Message

Once you've identified your strengths and researched the employer, it's time to develop your core message. In other words, how you respond to the questions: "Tell me about yourself," or "Why should I hire you?"

Your message should be clear, concise, and honest, and demonstrate that you're uniquely qualified for the position you're interviewing for.

In developing your core message, revisit your Interview Preparation Worksheet to identify your strengths, skills, and accomplishments that are relevant to the employer. Also consider other relevant qualifications including your education, credentials, motivations, and interests.

Your core message should convey your strengths and accomplishments, which will serve as the foundation on which you'll build your interview. You should articulate it in 60 seconds or less. Memorize your core message, but don't sound over-rehearsed.

Let's say you're a 1L interviewing with the Harris County District Attorney's Office. Your core message might be:

I'm a first-year student at Texas Law who is committed to public service. I interned with the Department of Justice prior to law school and developed a strong interest in criminal prosecution. I have sound judgment, an excellent work ethic, and strong advocacy skills. In fact, my undergraduate mock trial team named me the "2017 Advocate of the Year." I was born and raised in South Texas and I am energized by the work your office is doing in Houston.

Now you have a great foundation for the rest of the interview.

Step 4

Prepare Your Questions & Responses

While the first three steps walk you through defining the substance of your interview messaging, the last two focus on packaging and delivering your message. You'll now prepare personalized questions for your interviewers and craft responses to questions you're likely to be asked.

You should be prepared to discuss anything in your application materials, so be sure to review your resume, cover letter, writing sample, and transcript in advance of your interview. Make sure you can comfortably discuss all aspects of your resume, including grades and interests.

When responding to questions, you want to be responsive, yet stay on message. With your core message in mind, weave in examples and accomplishment stories as often as you can. And, to the extent that you're able, keep the interview conversational. Your answers should be no longer than 60 seconds each.

On the Interviewing 101 webpage, you'll find a list of "Commonly Asked Interview Questions and Answers." This is a useful resource in preparing for interviews. Based on your strengths and experiences, craft your responses and develop interviewer questions based on the interviewing employer.

Step 5

Practice Your Delivery

The final step of interview preparation is to practice your delivery.

Clear and confident communication is the name of the game in the legal industry. Clients hire attorneys on that basis, and your interviewers will too. The more prepared you are, the more confident you'll feel, and the more confident you feel, the better you'll interview.

Once you receive an interview, schedule a mock interview with the CSO to practice your responses and get feedback on your delivery. Practice interviews are available in person or by videoconference. You can contact us at 512-232-1150 or cso@law.utexas.edu.

In addition, you may view mock screening interviews conducted by law firms on the CSO website.

The CSO is here to help you, so please reach out if you have any questions.



Have a great interview!