5 PREPARING FOR YOUR LEGAL INTERVIEWS IN FIVE STEPS

A guide to preparing for legal interviewing.
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 Checklist (available on the Preparing for Legal Interviews page on the CSO website) to prepare for interviews by identifying three to four strengths 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.

**TAKE ACTION:** Use the Interview Preparation Checklist to take inventory of your strengths and identify your accomplishments.

**GO DEEPER:** Review the 26 Lawyering Effectiveness Factors for ideas on the skills and qualities legal employers value.
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 demonstrate to the interviewer how you’ll approach work assignments. Taking the time to research an employer shows your genuine interest in both the organization and the position. When preparing for an interview seek insight about the employer and interviewer that will make you a more informed, prepared, and convincing candidate.

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 Preparing for Legal Interviews webpage, but don’t overlook human intel in your search.

Ask people in your network about employers and interviewers. 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 forget to tap into that resource. 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.

**TAKE ACTION:** Use the Interview Preparation Checklist and prompts to document and guide your employer and interviewer research.

**GO DEEPER:** Utilize our online resources for researching employers, including visiting employer websites to learn about their practice areas, locations, and recent news articles.

Connect with 2Ls and 3Ls to discuss their experience working for employers you’re interviewing with by requesting Peer-to-Peer Employer Insights.
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, your response 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 Checklist to identify your strengths, skills, and accomplishments that are relevant to the interviewing employer. Also consider other relevant qualifications including your education, credentials, motivations, and interests. Your core message should be memorized, but not rigid, and you should be able to articulate it in 60 seconds or less.

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.*

**TAKE ACTION:** Draft and document your core message based on your interests, skills, experiences, and what you know about your interviewing employer.
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 ready 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 Preparing for Legal Interviews webpage, you’ll find a list of interview questions commonly asked by and of legal interviewers. Based on your strengths and experiences, craft your responses and develop tailored interviewer questions.

**TAKE ACTION:** Consult our list of questions employers may ask and craft responses based on your strengths, skills, interests, and experiences from the Interview Preparation Checklist.

Prepare personalized questions for your interviewers based on your research. Review our list of questions to ask employers for ideas.

**GO DEEPER:** Watch Mock Screening Interviews to learn about the common format and kinds of questions you may encounter in a legal interview setting.
The final step of interview preparation is to practice your delivery. The more prepared you are, the more confident you’ll feel, and the more confident you feel, the better you’ll interview.

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.

Once you receive an interview, schedule a mock interview with the CSO to practice your responses and get feedback on your delivery.

**TAKE ACTION:** Schedule a practice interview with the CSO by stopping by our office in TNH 3.130 or contacting us at 512-232-1150 or cso@law.utexas.edu.

Practice interviews are available in person, by phone, and via videoconference.