



# INTERVIEWING GUIDE *for* International LL.M. Students



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## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. THE PURPOSE OF AN INTERVIEW

An interview is merely an exchange of information between an applicant and a potential employer. Your resume sets forth certain facts about you but it is the interview that gives you an opportunity to bring your resume to life and to demonstrate your intelligence, competence, ambition and personality. Remember, the main objectives of the interview process are to convince the employer that you are a desirable candidate, and for you to find out whether the employer is a good fit for you. A desirable candidate shows good judgment and is reliable, enthusiastic, self-confident, able to willing to work hard, pleasant to work with, and interested in this particular firm/company, among others. Preparation and practice are essential to effective interviewing. This booklet is designed to familiarize you with the interview process and help you develop an effective interviewing technique. To help you demonstrate these qualities at the interviews, review below guidelines and be sure to practice your interviewing techniques BEFORE you go to the real interview. Overall, keep in mind that what employers seek in LL.M. students is fluency in written and spoken English, relevant professional experience, strong grades, contacts in their home countries, and a professional demeanor.

### B. TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

There are basically three types of interviews: 1) the screening interview; 2) the callback interview and the 3) telephone interview.

1. **The Screening Interview.** It is the initial one and it is short. It lasts approximately 20 to 30 minutes and it is conducted by one or two interviewers to determine which candidates to invite back for further, extensive interviews.
2. **The CallBack Interview.** If a candidate passes the screening interview, he or she is scheduled for a *callback interview*. These are typically lengthier (anywhere from two hours to a half day), and their success depends upon whether the candidate's personality, work ethic and professional objectives fit in with the rest of the employer's office. Therefore, callback interviews are usually held at the employer's office, where the candidate may meet and interview with numerous attorneys, either separately or simultaneously. Some law firms use a panel style interview (partners facing you from across a conference table); whereas others rotate the candidate from attorney to attorney – each interview lasting between 20-30 minutes and may be taken out to lunch.

*Lunch is part of the interview.* Lunch may be a part of the callback interview. However, YOU ARE STILL INTERVIEWING! Interviewers want to see how you behave in a social setting, as well as whether they enjoy your company. Express positive aspects of your personality that might not have surfaced previously, such as your sense of humor and any interesting hobbies. Never let your guard down. Be careful with entrees that can stain your shirt or blouse. Do not order an alcoholic beverage, even if someone else at the table does. Do not order the most, or least, expensive menu item.

3. **The Telephone Interview.** At times, employers may use telephone interviews to identify, recruit and screen candidates in order to narrow the applicant pool and limit the number of in-person interviews. Telephone interviews can also minimize expenses associated with interviewing out-of-town candidates. From a candidate's perspective, you should conduct the telephone interview in the same manner as an in-person interview, with a focus on certain additional factors. For example, you should:

- Keep your résumé at your disposal for easy reference;
- Have a pen and paper ready to take notes;
- Answer the call in an area that is quiet and without interruptions;
- Preferably not use a cellular phone to avoid dropped calls or misunderstandings; however, if you must use a cell phone, make sure that it is fully charged and in an area that has good reception;
- Refrain from eating, drinking, smoking or chewing gum during the interview;
- Have a list of your accomplishments and any points you want to bring up accessible to review;
- Enunciate clearly and slowly;
- Thank the interviewer at the close of the conversation and ask if it would be possible to meet in person;
- Follow-up with a thank you letter.

## II. THE ART OF INTERVIEWING

### A. PREPARATION

1. **Self-assessment.** Evaluate your strengths and weaknesses. Make a short list of three to five of your strongest selling points related to each particular hiring organization. Before each interview, review your resume from the perspective of the particular employer that will be interviewing you that day. What are the skills you developed through your work? Client service skills? Languages? Business in your home country? The interviewer wants to know what you have to offer to the organization. For example, if you wrote an article, be prepared to summarize its thesis succinctly. If you list a transaction on which you worked in your home country, be sure you can recall the salient details.
2. **Know Your Online Image.** Prospective employers may conduct Internet research to learn more about you than you've shared through your resume. You always have to maintain a professional online image. If you have, Facebook, MySpace or LinkedIn, among others, make sure that it contains a professional image as well as if you post any comments, opinions or thoughts. If you are not so sure about your image, google yourself! Consider restricting access to your online account and content whenever possible.

3. **The Employer, the Interviewer and You.** You should set aside a significant amount of time well in advance of your interview date to prepare for a successful interview. Skimming an employer's brochure or website five minutes before your interview does not constitute effective preparation. You should:
- a. *Learn About The Employer.* Do research, research and more research. Specifically, who is the potential employer? After you research, make a list of two or three things that are most important to you to know about each employer. In order to get more information, you can go to the links below:
    - The employer's website, résumé, brochure or annual report
    - Lexis and Westlaw
    - National Association for Law Placement (NALP) Directory ([www.nalpdirectory.com](http://www.nalpdirectory.com))
    - Martindale Hubbell Directory ([www.martindale.com](http://www.martindale.com))
    - [Vault.com](http://Vault.com) and [Infirmination.com](http://Infirmination.com)
  - b. *Learn About The Interviewer(s).* It is recommended that you review the respective biographies of lawyers who work with the employer (especially the person(s) who will interview you), including where they went to school, their practice areas, their publications, if any, professional affiliations, how long he/she has been practicing, etc. If you are returning for a callback interview, ask the recruiting coordinator for the names of the attorneys with whom you will be meeting.
  - c. *Learn about Yourself.* What do you want the employer to know about you? After carefully reviewing the employer's information, make a list of accomplishments or strengths that make you attractive to this particular employer. Evaluate your strengths, and think of specific examples that will illustrate those strengths to the employer. In doing so, do not limit yourself to legal job experience. Many skills developed in non-legal jobs are transferable to the legal profession. However, you must be able to articulate your qualifications in a convincing manner. Rather than telling the employer "I am smart," prove your intellectual ability by focusing on your academic performance and discussing the article you are writing for law review. "I work well under pressure" may not get the point across as well as "I presently work full-time, attend law school in the evenings, and am in the top 10% of my class." Similarly, you may choose to emphasize your potential for rainmaking by discussing a previous job in public relations, membership in various professional associations or a position in student government. You also should know your résumé, and be prepared to answer questions about any item on it.
4. **What to Bring to an Interview.** Gather any application materials the employer has requested, such as a writing sample, a transcript or a list of references. Proofread your writing sample carefully. If you are submitting a memorandum from your legal writing class, make corrections as suggested by your legal writing instructor. Have extra copies of your résumé. Finally, do not bring any unnecessary items into the interview. For example, if you are reading the newspaper while you wait for the interviewer, do not bring it into the interview.

5. **What to Expect on Interview Day.** Make sure you understand the logistics-the time, the location, the length of your visit, the number of attorneys you will meet, their names, and the material to bring.
6. **Practice, Practice, Practice.** Few people are "naturals" at interviewing. Since interviewing is generally an art, the more you do it, the better at it you will become. However, there are certain steps that you can take to feel more comfortable prior to your actual interview:
  - a. Sign up for a *mock interview* (is an emulation of an interview used for training purposes) with an advisor from the Career Development Office.
  - b. You can also practice your responses to common interview questions with friends, family or in front of the mirror. You can even videotape yourself and then watch to see mannerisms and other things you may not be aware of even doing (i.e., are you talking with your hands too much, make funny facial expressions, tendency to look around and not at the interviewer?).
  - c. The tape recorder is another valuable resource. Listen to your voice and tone. Also, listen to your answers. The most important thing you can do is to directly *answer the interviewer's question*.

## **B. PRESENTATION**

1. **First Impressions are Important.** As in personal interactions, first impressions are important in professional meetings. Although some interviewers will not make an immediate judgment (except in cases of blatant improper dress or inappropriate and unprofessional behavior), many will make a first impression within the first few minutes of an interview. So, be prepared to impress immediately.
2. **Focus on the Positives.** Avoid bringing up weaknesses or negatives. Put a positive spin on everything that may be considered a negative. Remember, the employer is trying to find out if you have what it takes to get the job done. Your answers should be confident and unapologetic.
3. **Sell Yourself.** The primary question you should focus on is "Why should this employer hire me"? Most people are uncomfortable touting their own accomplishments, credentials, achievements, honors, but you must do this in an interview. Take opportunities to market yourself to your interviewer. For example, if asked a question such as "*Tell me about yourself,*" discuss 3-4 things you want the employer to know about you.
4. **Always Maintain a Professional Demeanor.** Never let your guard down, even if you feel very comfortable with the interviewer. Professionalism is key.

### III. THE PHASES OF AN INTERVIEW

#### A. GREETING

The greeting sets the tone for the remainder of the interview process. Therefore, there are certain rules which should be followed from the onset:

1. **Be Punctual.** Plan to arrive 10 minutes in advance so that the employer does not have to wait for you, and also so that you have an opportunity to focus your thoughts before you are required to speak. There is almost no excuse for being late that will shake the poor initial impression, unless you have been in an accident or are in the hospital. Get detailed directions to the employer's office - you do not want to be late for an interview!
2. **Offer a Firm Handshake.** It is important that you offer the interviewer a firm and professional handshake.
3. **Wait to Sit Down.** Wait until the interviewer invites you to sit down before you do so or choose a specific seat.
4. **Pay Attention to Grooming.** First, be careful with using too much perfume or cologne. A clean and mild scent is recommended, if anything at all.

*Men:* Make sure that your hair is neatly trimmed and combed, and that your face is clean-shaven, except for a well-trimmed beard or mustache.

*Women:* Err on the conservative side when deciding about makeup, jewelry, hairstyle and fingernail polish.

5. **Dress for Success.** Because you hope to convince the employer that you will be a worthy representative of the organization, your appearance is extremely important. If you dress unprofessionally, the interviewer may assume that you will look that way when you meet with clients or appear in court. As an applicant, err on the conservative side. Strive to appear neat, clean and fresh.

*Men:* In most cases, a well-cut black, navy, or charcoal business suit, with dress shirt and tie is appropriate. If you do not have a suit, wear a blue blazer. Stick with well-shined black or brown lace shoes or dress loafers (and socks).

*Women:* If you choose to wear a suit skirt, make sure that the skirt maintains a conservative length. Since both pantsuits and skirt suits are considered professional, choose whichever makes you the most comfortable. Opt for leather or suede pumps, avoiding casual sandals or open-toed shoes, even in the summer. Try to wear stockings.

6. **Smile and Establish Eye Contact.** Eye contact is extremely important, especially in the legal profession. Usually, one can determine a person's credibility and honesty by looking into his or her eyes. Refrain from looking down, to the side or at the ceiling, as an interviewer may decide that you are trying to hide something and are not being forthright with your responses.
7. **Be Conscious of Mannerisms and Posture.** Be careful not to fidget or use your hands excessively or squirm in your chair. Sit up straight and do not slouch.

8. **Finally, Relax.** Since you should have already prepared thoroughly, enter the interview in a relaxed state.

## B. DISCUSSION

During this phase of the interview, try to remember that it is simply an exchange of ideas and information between yourself and another human being. It is a conversation between two people in order to determine, **from both sides**, whether this will be a good fit or not.

1. **Maintain Eye Contact.** The earlier rule applies throughout the various stages of the interview.
2. **Refrain From Bashing Yourself and Others.** Your focus should be on the experiences and skills you obtained from a position, rather than about any personal dissatisfaction with yourself, a previous employer or school. Never bash or badmouth your school, a professor, a particular job or a previous employer.
3. **Know Your Résumé.** Be prepared to talk about everything on your résumé and in your writing sample (if submitted).
4. **Be Assertive-Not Arrogant & Do Not Dominate an Interview.** Assertiveness and decisiveness are admirable qualities to convey, but arrogance and self-absorption are not. The line between them is thin. Try to strike a balance between providing thorough information so that the interviewer may evaluate you, and having a pleasant two-sided conversation. Be assertive but not arrogant, engaging but not overwhelming, relaxed but serious and professional.
5. **Be Upbeat, Positive and Enthusiastic. Show Your PERSONALITY.** No matter what your qualifications are, you will not interview effectively unless you establish a positive rapport with the interviewer at the outset. To do this, maintain a sincere and enthusiastic demeanor. Be an active listener, responding to the interviewer by occasionally nodding your head or interjecting relevant information when appropriate.
6. **Do Not Interrupt the Interviewer.** In your nervousness or anxiousness to make a point, do not speak over the interviewer or interject in the middle of his or her dialogue. Also, keep in mind that there may be interruptions during an interview. If the interviewer needs to take a call, answer a question, or even rush the interview somewhat, rather than be frustrated or disappointed, quietly observe and make a mental note of the organization's atmosphere.
7. **Do Not Raise Personal Issues or Crises.** A potential employer does not want to hear excuses for problem areas in your résumé or background. The employer wants to see that you have thought through both the question and the situation itself. Focus on the positive.
8. **Deal With Difficult Questions and Be Responsive, Not Evasive.** Be ready to deal with tough questions. Questions such as "Did you receive an offer from the firm you worked for last summer" or "What did you like least about your first year of law school" can catch you off guard if not prepared for them. If asked about grades and

your GPA is less than stellar, simply acknowledge the question (respond quickly and distinctively), and quickly move to a strength rather than a weakness. Be responsive and then indicate perhaps that your GPA has consistently gone up each semester, or that you received an "A" in LRW. Questions such as "Did you enjoy your first year of law school" or "Where do you see yourself in five years" should not provoke a one-word answer. Rather, answer each question by relating an anecdote that highlights a skill or a quality you possess. Take the time to review the questions in Section V below and practice your answers ahead of time.

9. **DO NOT Bring up Salary Before the Interviewer Does.** Ask relevant questions about opportunities for advancement, not money. Salary should not become an issue until a firm offer has been made.

### **C. CLOSING**

1. **Thank the Interviewer.** Shake hands and always thank the interviewer for his or her time.
2. **Ask When You Can Expect to Hear Back.** You may re-emphasize your interest in the position, and inquire about the timeline for making a final decision.
2. **Request a Business Card.** Prior to leaving, be sure to ask for a business card from each interviewer. This helps you to remember names and proper spellings, and will assist you in the future when writing thank you notes.
3. **Take Notes.** Immediately following each interview, take notes on specific information discussed and/or general impressions of the potential employer. This will assist you when writing thank you notes, and also when making a final decision.

## **IV. AFTER THE INTERVIEW**

### **A. EVALUATE THE EMPLOYER**

Take notes immediately after each interview. Record your impressions of the organization, as well as the people you met, while they are fresh in your mind. Also, make a note of any additional information the employer requested, such as a writing sample or a transcript. When you are weighing your options, be sure to revisit your strengths, your lifestyle preference and your long-term goals. If you can think on your feet and enjoy people and conflict, a litigation firm may be the place for you. If you prefer to research independently and enjoy writing, appellate practice may be more appropriate. If you went to law school because you wanted to help underprivileged groups, an advocacy organization or civil rights firm may be the place for you. With respect to lifestyle choices, do you need flexibility in your life? Do you want to have children (or do you have them already) and expect to take an active role in their lives? An employer that requires constant travel and high billable hours may not be right for you.

## **B. WRITE THANK YOU NOTES**

A thank you letter reaffirms your interest in the position and expresses your appreciation to the interviewer for taking the time to consider you. If you interview with more than one person, send individualized (not the same) thank you letters to each person with whom you met. You may view samples of thank you notes in the International LL.M. Cover Letter Pamphlet in the CDO Resource Library.

## **C. FOLLOW-UP WITH THE EMPLOYER**

Occasionally, an interviewer indicates he or she will get back to you within a given time frame that is not met. A follow-up phone, letter or e-mail (if appropriate) can clarify the status of your application and demonstrate your continued interest in the position. Of course, repeated and persistent telephone calls or e-mails will cause the opposite effect and likely lessen or negate your chances for an offer.

## **V. QUESTIONS DURING AN INTERVIEW**

### **A. QUESTIONS YOU MAY BE ASKED BY THE INTERVIEWER**

1. How would you describe yourself?
2. Why did you choose law as a career?
3. Why did you decide to pursue an American LL.M.? Why at University of Miami?
4. I see you are taking (immigration) at University of Miami – please tell me the differences in the U.S. immigration laws and the immigration laws of your country?
5. What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
6. What law school subjects have you liked best? Least? Why?
7. In what particular area of practice are you most interested? Why?
8. Where do you see yourself in five years?
9. Why have you chosen to interview with us?
10. What other academic and professional abilities should we know about?
11. Why should we hire you?
12. Why do you think you will succeed as a lawyer?

### **B. QUESTIONS YOU MAY ASK**

1. Describe a few typical projects done by LL.M. graduates at your firm?
2. How are projects assigned to LL.M. graduates?
3. What is the typical length of LL.M. graduate internships?
4. On what types of matters involving my country does your firm work?
5. What qualities do you seek in new attorneys?
6. Do you have any formal mentoring program/system?
7. How soon does a new attorney have direct client contact?
8. Describe a typical day for you.
9. How would you describe the structure of the firm/organization?

### **C. QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD NOT ASK**

Any question that you could answer yourself through simple research should not be asked. Do not raise problem areas in your applications by posing questions that can wait until an offer has been made (i.e., "I'm getting married in a year - is it ok if I take a two-week honeymoon to Paris?"). You should also avoid asking questions about salary, benefits, billable hours (i.e. how hard do you work?) or vacation and leave policy.

## **VI. TOP 12 REASONS PEOPLE DO NOT GET HIRED**

1. Candidate demonstrates a lack of integrity or honesty in person or on paper.
2. Candidate's application materials contain grammatical or typographical errors.
3. Candidate lacks motivation, enthusiasm, does not answer the questions asked, and appears generally apathetic.
4. Candidate lacks genuine interest in the city or the employer.
5. Candidate is neither articulate, nor engaging and fails to make eye contact.
6. Candidate is unprepared, and lacks basic knowledge about the employer or the interviewer.
7. Candidate is arrogant and more focused on the money and prestige than on the work expected of him or her.
8. Candidate exhibits irresponsible behavior, is too "laid back," or reveals tendency to "goof off."
9. Candidate does not handle criticism well and is quick to criticize or blame others (such as a former employer) rather than accept responsibility.
10. Candidate lacks social awareness or knowledge of current events.
11. Candidate lacks confidence or poise.
12. Candidate has a wimpy handshake.

**Good Luck Interviewing!**