NKU NORTHERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY SALMON P. CHASE COLLEGE OF LAW

Career Development Office

Interviewing Guidelines

Before the interview

Research:

- The interviewer: Find out the name of the interviewer(s) and their bios or background information.
- The firm: Find out about its practice areas, structure, pro bono work, attorneys, clients, published cases, office locations, etc. Interviewers will not be impressed if you discuss career aspirations in a practice area in which the firm is not involved.
- Yourself: Know yourself, your skills and your interests. If you are interested in bankruptcy law, be able to explain your reasons and qualifications. Know where you want to be in five years, ten years, etc. This shows that you have taken your career seriously.

The more research you conduct about the interviewer(s) and the firm (whether it be via website, articles, case law, networking, etc.) the more opportunity you will have in the interview to relay your knowledge and display your interest in seeking employment with that firm. The interview is also an opportunity to determine whether the employer will a good fit for you.

First impression

Make a good first impression. Arrive on time. Look and dress professionally. Be conservative in your use of jewelry, cosmetics and fragrance. Bring a portfolio with extra copies of your resume, writing sample and references. Be polite to everyone including the support staff as they often provide feedback to the interviewers. Greet the interviewer with a smile and firm (but not bone-crushing) handshake which shows confidence. Limp handshakes get noticed. Start or facilitate a small conversation before the interview begins to help establish a rapport and "break the ice."

Practice before the interview

Anticipate potential questions and practice your responses so when you are interviewed, you will feel prepared and confident in responding. The more prepared you are, the more relaxed you will feel.

During the interview

The interview is the time to sell/market yourself and explain why you will be a great law clerk or attorney for that employer. Focus on your skills and experience.

Interviewers are not only interested in whether you are qualified to perform the duties of the job but also whether you will be a good "fit" with that employer (i.e., that you "fit" the culture of the firm, you have good interpersonal skills, you are someone who will get along with others every day, and that you are someone they like as a person.) Employers look for candidates who can

interact with a variety of clients and colleagues and represent the employer in a variety of settings.

Employers also look for candidates who can understand the business side of practicing law including how to assess the needs of clients, how to retain clients, how to develop a client base, how to market the firm, etc. A candidate's connection to the region and/or a genuine interest in working in a particular location is helpful and often an important consideration for employers. Be prepared to articulate your interest in the location and in the firm. Employers want to know that you are serious about pursuing a job with their firm, especially because they invest considerable time and money in their employees.

During your first interview, it is suggested that you do not ask questions that can be answered on the website or that are administrative or self-serving in nature such as office locations, number of attorneys, vacation time, etc. Benefits related questions are more appropriate at a second interview or when the employer has expressed a serious interest in hiring you. For a list of sample interview and interview questions, please see the handout entitled "Sample Interview Questions."

Helpful hints during the interview

Relax. Take deep breaths. Anxiety may cause you to talk fast and appear awkward. Watch your body language (sit up straight) and maintain eye contact (but do not have a penetrating stare).

Do not appear to be overly eager or under pressure to get a job quickly. Do not act desperate or artificially enthusiastic.

Remain calm and professional. Be mindful of your facial expressions. Interviewers are looking for attorneys who can remain calm under pressure and in stressful situations (and an interview is one such example).

Be pleasant and friendly. Smile. Show the interviewer that you can get along well with him/her and anyone else. This helps to demonstrate you interpersonal skills and maturity.

Show an interest in what the interviewer is saying. Do not act bored or uninterested. Do not look at your watch or the clock. As he/she is talking, think about follow-up comments or questions. This helps to show that you are interested, paying attention, that you can focus on the moment and not respond with rehearsed scripts. This is an opportunity to incorporate information you have discovered during your research. It is also helpful to make a connection by finding a common interest and developing it if appropriate. Try to make the interview conversational, not like a deposition.

Answer questions positively. Focus on the employer's needs and how your skills and experiences meet those needs. Though the position may be a great learning experience for you, employers are interested in knowing what you can do for them. Interviewers ask questions not only to gather information but also to assess your poise, your use of language, your style of delivery and your communication skills.

Know your strengths and incorporate those into your answers by using specific examples. Even if not directly asked "Tell me about your strengths" or "Give me an example of your ability to pay close attention to detail," find a way to weave in examples of your skills, accomplishments,

etc. into your conversation. Do not just answer "Yes" or "No." Try to elaborate by using specific examples of how you have demonstrated a particular skill, etc.

After the interview

Follow-up within 24 hours with a thank you note to each person with whom you interviewed. If you have the time, a handwritten note is preferred. If not, an individualized email or typed letter is acceptable. In either case, make sure there are no typos. Do not send an email to one person and ask him/her to forward it to the other interviewers. This is unacceptable by many interviewers and often will not be forwarded anyway.

Unless you have a good reason to contact employers inquiring about an offer, such as another offer with a deadline, do not contact them repeatedly. If you have been given a date by which a decision will be made, it is generally appropriate to place a status call after a reasonable time.

Suggested reading

Please visit our Career Development Collection in the Law Library for great resources on interviewing.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Employers will often ask you to describe yourself or to tell them a little about yourself in an interview. Before interviewing, give some thought to the personal qualities that best describe you, specific examples that you can relate to the employer, and how these qualities would bring value to the employer.

Accurate	Diplomatic	Persevering
Adaptable	Discreet	Poised
Ambitious	Disciplined	Positive
Analytical	Efficient	Practical
Articulate	Enthusiastic	Precise
Assertive	Flexible	Productive
Attentive	Friendly	Professional
Calm	Honest	Persuasive
Capable	Independent	Realistic
Competent	Innovative	Reliable
Confident	Inquisitive	Resourceful
Congenial	Intelligent	Respectful
Conscientious	Inventive	Responsible
Considerate	Logical	Self-starter
Consistent	Motivated	Sincere
Cooperative	Objective	Tactful
Creative	Open-minded	Team player
Decisive	Optimistic	Tenacious
Dedicated	Orderly	Thorough
Deliberate	Organized	Trustworthy
Dependable	Outgoing	Versatile

Employers have also identified certain characteristics as indicators of potential success as a lawyer. Some of these characteristics or qualities are:

Good communicator	Enthusiasm
Charisma	Ambition/drive
Team player/consensus builder	Hard-working
Intelligence	Confidence/ humble assertiveness
Personal integrity/strength of character	Problem-solving skills
Client development potential	Creativity
Common sense	Good personality
Ability to work under pressure	Ability to think on one's feet
Institutional loyalty	Ability to relate to diverse persons
Initiative	Self-motivation/Self starter

SKILLS

Many employers have identified certain skills that are necessary for a person to be an effective advocate. Consider the list of examples provided below and determine which skills you possess, as well as any other skills you currently have or are developing that make you an ideal candidate for the position. Then think of specific examples or experiences that you can discuss with an interviewer to demonstrate how you have displayed these skills in your past.

Listening	Interpretation of data
Reasoning	Public speaking
Analysis	Problem solving
Mediation	Negotiation
Empathy	Research and writing
Organization	Time management
Diplomacy	Client development

Four Main Categories of Skill Sets:

- Problem Solving/Analytical Skills
- Interpersonal/Communication Skills
- Time Management/Organizational Skills
- Self-Motivation

TYPES OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS & SAMPLE QUESTIONS THAT INTERVIEWERS ASK

You should expect to be asked some of the following questions. This will help you to be more prepared and effective when making your responses.

Traditional Interview Questions:

These are the very commonly posed types of interview questions. Can ask more of these type questions in an interview because answers are generally short answer. Problem = cliché answers that are hard to distinguish among candidates.

1. Why did you decide to attend law school?
2. Why did you decide on this particular law school?
3. In what school activities have you participated? Which did you enjoy most?
4. What law school classes have you enjoyed most? Least? Why?
5. In what classes did you excel the most and in which ones did you have difficulty?
6. Are your grades a good indicator of your academic abilities/ Why or why not? Why aren't your grades higher? What do you plan to do to improve your grades or rank?
7. Why do you want to be a lawyer?
8. What area of law interests you? Why?
9. What type of law do you want to practice? (In what areas of practice are you most interested? Why?)
10. Why did you decide to interview with our firm?
11. What do you know about our firm and our clients?
12. What interests you about our firm? Why would you want to represent our clients?
13. What jobs have you held? How were they obtained? Why did you leave?
14. What have you learned from other jobs you have held? (What relevant skills did you develop?)
15. What did you enjoy the most/least about your work at [one of your past employers]?
16. What characteristics do you think a person needs to be a successful attorney?
17. What qualities do you possess that you think will make you a successful lawyer?
18. What qualifications do you have that will help you be successful in law practice?
19. How have your prior work experiences prepared you for a legal career?
20. Do you prefer working with others or by yourself?
21. Can you take instructions without feeling upset?
22. Why should we hire you?
23. Tell me about yourself. (or How would you describe yourself?)
24. What job with the firm would you choose if you were given the choice?
25. What are your greatest strengths?
26. What are your major weaknesses? (Prepare 2-3 weaknesses to discuss)
27. How well do you work under pressure/stress?
28. Describe the best boss you have ever had.
29. How would your co-workers describe you?
30. What have you done that shows initiative and a willingness to work?
31. What are your goals?

32. Where do you see yourself in 5 years? 10 years?
33. What 2-3 accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?
34. Have you ever had any difficulty getting along with fellow students or faculty?
35. How do you spend your spare time?
36. What kinds of books or publications do you read?
37. What is your greatest obstacle that you have had to overcome in your life/career?
38. Is there anything I should know about you that we have not covered? (say something)

Situational Interview Questions*:*
"What would you do if…" types of questions.

Shows intellectually person knows process to address certain situations even if person doesn't have specific experience).

Problem with this type of question is that it assumes people do what they say they will do. So try to incorporate example if possible.

- How would you handle a situation where you had conflicting information with which to make a decision?
- What would you do if given a project and once you get in to it you realize you need more info but you can't reach your boss?
- What would you do if you were given a joint project to complete with a co-worker and he/she is not doing the work that he/she is supposed to do.

Unique Interview Questions*:*
Used to judge creativity, judge ability to think on feet, measure ability to deal with ambiguity, measure ability to convey an idea; keep a straight face when faced with something unexpected. Most interviewers don't use these types of questions):

- Who are your heroes and what makes them your heros?
- If you could invite three people to lunch, who would they be?
- If you had unlimited time and financial assets, what would you do?
- If you could be any animal, what would you be and why?

Behavioral Interview Questions*:*
Behavioral interviewing is a structured interview process that focuses on gathering specific, job-related, real-world examples of behaviors the candidate has demonstrated on previous jobs. Ensures that candidate has competencies for success in the position.

The underlying idea is that the best predictor of future performance is past performance or behavior. And the more recent the performance, the more likely it is to be repeated.

Employers identify the core "competencies" for the job, meaning the standards of success for the position and the behaviors needed to support the goals of organization.

By pulling out examples of times when the interviewee demonstrated the competency, the interviewer gains evidence of potential success.

Comparisons between Traditional and Behavioral Questions:

1. How do you deal with an angry or upset customer? Versus….
2. We all have to deal with customers who are angry. … tell me about the worst situation you have had to deal with a customer.

1. What would you do if someone asked you to do something unethical? Versus…
2. Tell me about a time you were asked to do something that you felt was unethical.

1. How do you work under stress/pressure? Versus…
2. Tell me about a time you had to perform a task under a lot of stress (or about a time when you did not handle a stressful situation well).

1. What motivates you to put forth your best effort? Versus….
2. We all get assignments we really don't want to do… give me an example of a time that happened to you and tell me how you motivated yourself to get it done.

Examples of Behavioral Questions:

Action Oriented:

- Tell me about a time when you willingly took on more work even though you were already busy.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to act with very little planning.
- Describe a challenging project that you worked on.
- Give me an example of something you've done in previous jobs that demonstrates your willingness to work hard.
- Tell me about a time when you had to work on a task that you were absolutely dreading.
- Tell me about a time when you had to motivate yourself to do something you did not want to do.
- Tell me about a time when you got enjoyment out of working hard on something.

Dealing with Ambiguity:

- Tell me about a time when you were asked to perform a task and the instructions received were ambiguous.
- Tell me about a time you had to work with conflicting or ambiguous information and what you did to make the best of the situation.

Analytical skills:

- Tell me about the most complex or difficult information you have had to analyze.
- Tell me about a task or project that you were responsible for that best demonstrates your ability to analyze information

Communication Skills:

- Tell me about the most difficult or complex idea or process you have ever had to explain to someone. Were you successful?
- Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully communication with another person when that person may not have liked you.
- Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully communication with another person you did not like.

- Tell me about a time when you had difficulty communicating your thoughts to another person or group. Where did the difficulty lie? How did you end up getting the point across?
- Tell me about a sensitive or volatile situation that required very careful communication.
- Tell me about a time when you persuaded others to adopt your idea.
- Describe a time when someone misunderstood something you wrote.
- Describe a time you wrote a report that was well received by others.
- Tell me about a time when you didn't document something that you wish you would have (or when glad that you did document something).

Composure:

- Tell me about an on-the-job crisis that you had to solve and you how you maintained your composure.
- Tell me about a time when your work or idea was criticized.
- Tell me about an instance when you had to admit a mistake and how you handled the situation.

Customer Service:

- Tell me about a time when you wished you would have dealt with an angry customer a different way.

Initiative:

- Describe a significant project idea that you initiated in the last year. How did you know it was needed? How did it work?
- Give me an example of something that you have done to make your job easier of more interesting.
- Describe a situation where you were responsible for motivating others.
- Relate a time when you have gone above and beyond what was required.

Learning:

- Describe a time when you had to learn something quickly to solve a problem.
- Tell me about a time you had to do an unfamiliar task.

Problem Solving:

- Give me an example of a time when you identified a potential problem and resolved the situation before it became serious.

Stress Management:

- There are times when we all feel overwhelmed with a task or project. Tell me about a time this has happened to you.
- Tell me about a time you were faced with stressors at work that tested your coping skills.
- Tell me about a time when you did not handle a stressful situation well.

Time management:

- Describe a time when you achieved a great deal in a short amount of time.
- Give me an example of a time you were unable to complete a project on time.
- By way of example, convince me that you can get more done in less time than others.

Formulating Responses to Behavioral Interview Questions:

You will want to utilize the **STAR Method** in formulating a response to a behavioral question. Describe:

Situation – briefly describe the challenge or problem faced
Task -
Action – concrete steps taken to address situation/solve problem
Result – how your efforts were successful

- In general, **one sentence** for each S-T-A-R is a good guideline so that each answer is roughly a short paragraph in length.

Story Ideas: you should be thinking about small and large accomplishments in your career history and contributions you have made to your employers.
Ideas to get you thinking about past success stories:

- Times when your job performance exceeded expectations?
- Commended even informally by anyone in the firm/organization/school for outstanding performance?
- Have employers typically regarded you as someone with a strong particular skill?
- Received awards or compliments for particular successes?
- Have reputation for being able to deal effectively with certain difficult legal areas, situations or people, or technology?
- Ever asked to deal with any special case or client?
- Ever handle a crisis gracefully/successfully?
- Ever troubleshoot and resolve a difficult problem?
- Time of particular stress but managed to produce successful outcome?
- Suggest ways to develop firms' business base or bring in new business?
- Initiate new office system or streamline the way/cost of doing business? (ex: design or implement new filing procedures?)

NKU NORTHERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY SALMON P. CHASE COLLEGE OF LAW

Career Development Office
Interviewing Workshop

SAMPLE QUESTIONS THAT INTERVIEWEES ASK

The questions you pose to an interviewer are critical to demonstrating your interest in the firm and the position. Make sure you prepare at least five to ten questions to ask an employer during the interview. You should also try to ask some questions in follow up to comments made by the interviewer during the course of the interview; this shows that you were paying attention and are interested. Do not decline to ask questions.

Here is a list of some sample questions that you might consider asking an interviewer:

1. What specific job duties and responsibilities would I have as a law clerk?
2. What kinds of projects or cases do your law clerks most typically work on? (Where is your greatest need?)
3. What does your firm look for in a successful candidate?
4. What personal characteristics do you think most successful attorneys share in common?
5. What skills should a person must possess to be a successful attorney/clerk at this firm?
6. How long have you been with the firm? Why did you choose to work at this firm (or what is it about the firm that has kept you here so long)?
7. What kind of responsibilities and tasks will I be given in my first 6 months?
8. What would you want the person in this position to achieve in the next 6 months?
9. How much direct client contact can I expect to have during my first and second year?
10. To whom would I report? (or) Will I work with certain attorneys or practice groups?
11. How does the firm delegate authority, responsibilities, and assignments?
12. What types of projects do summer associates or law clerks work on?
13. What type of feedback is provided to new attorneys (or law clerks)?
14. What criteria would be used to evaluate my performance? How often is work evaluated?
15. What opportunities for training/guidance are available to new associates (or law clerks)?
16. To what extent are partners involved in educating associates?
17. Which of the firms practice areas are expanding?
18. What types of new areas does the firm want to move in to?
19. What are the firm's priorities?
20. How have you seen your own practice evolve?
21. In your opinion, what distinguishes or sets this firm apart from other firms in the area?
22. Why do you like working at this organization?
23. How would you describe the personality or culture of the firm?
24. How have your clients' needs changed over the last five years?
25. Where do you see the firm heading in the next five years?
26. When will you be making a decision, and what is the process?
27. What has been a highlight of your career thus far?
28. What do you find most challenging/rewarding about your work?
29. I am interested in building a book of business someday. Do you provide client development training in order to attract clients?