

# The Employability Service



# Step 8: Preparing for legal interviews

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## **Practical issues**

Make sure you sort out the practical issues - where to go, what to wear, and how to ensure you arrive in good time before the interview.

### **Before the interview**

As soon as you get invited for interview:

Check the invitation and double check the date is there a requirement to do anything in preparation for the interview? For example, you may be asked to submit a piece of work or prepare a presentation.

Do you know where the interview is being held? The employer may have multiple offices, and the interview may not be held at the office you intend to work in. If you are going for an interview at chambers, finding your way around the Inns is not simple if you have never been before (especially at weekends when gates may be shut), and there can be more than one set of chambers with the same address.

Keep checking for legal news in relation to the organisation. If they announce a merger the day before the interview it will not look good if you are unaware of it.

### **What to wear at interview**

Law tends to be a conservative profession, so you need to dress accordingly. The recruiter will want to see someone who they could put in front of a client and part of this is down to the physical impression you make.

If you get the chance to visit the firm cha23(ep)3(TJET EMC /)-14(o)13(r)-3( )you inte TJETBT1 0 0 1 493.



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Communication skills are not just about speaking properly, they are also about how you listen and use body language.

## Oral Communication

It may seem obvious, but one thing you need to do is to speak clearly, and loud enough to be heard. If you are nervous you may end up speaking faster than you would normally, so deliberately slow down a little.

You are going for an interview as a lawyer, a member of a profession which prides itself on eloquence and precision, so speak properly. If you make obvious major unprofessional mannerism

impression a client will have of you and the organisation which employs you.

Vary your tone and pitch to emphasise points and keep the interviewer interested but do this sensibly: a statement is a statement - it should not sound like a question.

Break what you say down into convenient chunks. Some of the answers you give could be fairly lengthy, so break them down to make them more manageable to express and to absorb.

three main issues that need to be considered. First... secondly... and finally.

Remember, the interview is a two way process. You may want to clarify the question asked or check you have provided enough information. Interviews can sometimes develop into an engaging conversation rather than the question and answer format usually expected. Be prepared.

Remember to think before you speak, even if that means pausing before answering. Do not overdo the pauses, either in length or frequency, but to show you think before you leap into an answer is not a bad thing.

Showing you have a sense of humour can be important but it should be subtle. An interview is not the time for telling jokes.

## Active listening

Listening carefully and making a positive effort to show that you are listening demonstrates your interest in what the recruiter is saying and ensures that you answer the question asked.

There are various ways to show you are listening:

Nodding to show your understanding or making comments to acknowledge what you

Questioning anything you do not understand and asking for clarification rather than making assumptions.

Not interrupting.

Asking relevant questions that follow directly from what you have just heard.

Staying attentive during pauses; do not be afraid of silences. Use the time to give yourself space to think about what has been covered so far and what may still be covered in the time that is left.





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the interview will change considerably depending on the numbers (see below about panel interviews as an illustration) but broadly speaking, the more interviewers, the more formal





may seem unnerving, in essence it is like any other interview preparation, without over-rehearsing, combined with genuineness and enthusiasm are key to success.

It is obviously necessary to dress smartly – put on a whole formal outfit, not just on the top half, in case you have to get up for some reason. This can also put you in the right frame of mind, and you might like to do the same for phone interviews for this reason.

Other practical tips for video interviews:

- If possible, place the main light source in front of you (not behind)

- have a plain or non-distracting background, where there is unlikely to be movement



How did you get on with your colleagues at work?  
So was there anyone you didn't like?  
And how did you handle it?  
How did they take this news?  
And how did that make you feel?  
With hindsight, would you have handled it differently?  
How, precisely?

Sometimes the interviewer can seem unrelenting in the search for specific information but it is the same approach you might have to take in the future when getting information from clients. Try and view it as a positive thing – if they were not interested in what you were telling them, they would not bother digging deeper and deeper.

### **Challenging you and your opinions**

If you want an easy life, perhaps, law is not the profession for you. One of the skills needed in the law is to be able to defend yourself, your actions and your opinions (or those of your client), so you can expect questions which challenge you. This can be done in a number of ways, such as challenging you about something on your application: for example, asking you to defend a decision you have made in the past – pupillage a year ago, so

CV, it may be the focus of the interview – a pretty innocuous opening, but may become a direct challenge:

What went wrong during your A-levels?

What did you do to get an A grade in two A-levels and an E grade in the third?

We are looking for candidates with exceptional academics, but you have a grade C?

If the challenge is about a blip, one tip is to use positive language. Consider the impact on the interviewer of the following answers:

I was disappointed with my A-level results. I could have done better.

I was very pleased with the two As I obtained, especially as I was the only person in the year to get A's.





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**Result:** Give a clear account of the result. Try to quantify wherever possible as









throwing in something unexpected, such as interpreting your experience to show an interest in an area of law not practised by the recruiter. I

about you, think about what message you want to get across. For example if you think the

unwillingness to mix with others you can respond by highlighting evidence which counters this:

I am often involved in client events in the evening so, when I do get some spare time, I find reading

Similarly, if you think the interviewer is trying to pigeon-hole you into a type of law that does not appeal:

saying

I enjoyed family law at the Legal Aid Centre but have spent twice as long working in a commercial firm which is very similar to yours. Having experienced both working environments, I now have a better understanding of and interest in commercial law.

Often leading questions give you a chance to get the interview back on track or to provide evidence of qualities or attributes you think the interviewer may have overlooked.

### **Your career choice and match with the recruiter**

You will, invariably, be asked at some stage why you have chosen a career in the law. Given the time, effort, and money involved in training to become a lawyer, if you do not have an explanation for your career choice by the time you are called for interview, you had better work it out quickly.

The questions asked may be very broad about being a barrister or a solicitor, but it is quite common for questions such as 'Why do you want to work for our firm' or 'Why

In order to answer this type of question:

You must have done your research about the organisation, its clients, the sector and so on.

Recruiters will be impressed by details, especially those which show a good knowledge and understanding of the organisation, rather than general points about being a solicitor or a barrister.

Find evidence to support your claims. If you have previous experience, at that organisation or somewhere else, it can be brought into play to support what you are saying. Alternatively, you may have to rely on the legal news to find out about deals or cases they have been involved in.

Remember, the question is about *your* career choice the recruiter knows about you from your application and from rest of the interview. How you







Is the primary respon











recruiter would describe the organisation and you could then ask what he or she thinks is the best thing about the organisation or what they enjoy best about working there.

You might also want to think about how you phrase the question – what does this question say about you. For instance, if you were to say that you had read about a new international working arrangement between the recruiter and an overseas organisation, and you wanted to know how this would affect a certain aspect of the organisation, the question in itself is showing a good knowledge of the organisation, your research and your interest in the

5- Don't present a contrived question, just to show how clever you are – it may well be spotted. If you do have questions, it is worth trying to find the answer first in case it is a difficult subject for the interviewer to discuss.

Referring back to something that has been discussed in the interview and asking for further

to think on your feet, and not just trotting out prepared answers. For example, if the interviewer asked me just now what I thought about the impact on the emerging economies of China and India – does the firm have any plans to expand into these markets? – this example, if you speak a relevant language fluently, such a question would be a further opportunity to plug your attributes!

Always try and manage at least one question, but if all your preparation fails

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### **University**

- Why did you choose your particular university?
- Outline your time at university, both academically and socially
- What do you see as the main benefits of university life apart from obtaining a degree?
- Why did you choose your degree subject/what were your individual marks in each section?
- Why did you decide not to study law at university (GDL students)?
- Which aspects of your course did you find most interesting/challenging?
- Tell me about your project/dissertation
- Are you satisfied with your academic attainments to date? Any disappointments?
- Have you been required to re-sit any examinations?
- Were you an active member of any societies at university?

### **Work**

- Have you undertaken any
- How did you get these jobs?
- Which job did you enjoy most and why?
- What benefits did you gain from your work experience?
- Tell me something about your legal work experience at X firm. What did you learn from it?
- You express an interest in commercial law, but all your experience has been in legal aid practices (or vice versa) can you explain that?

### **General**

- What achievements in your life are you most proud of?
- Tell me about any achievements in a non-academic environment.
- What experiences most influenced your development as an individual?
- What in your life has given you the most challenge?

### **Competency questions**

#### **Teamwork**

- How do you work with and relate to others?
- How do you feel about working with a group of people from a variety of backgrounds?
- Are you someone who likes to take the lead and make the running?
- How would you react to a situation where you were not in agreement with the rest of the team?
- Tell me about a time when you had to negotiate to achieve a desired outcome.
- How would you cope with someone who took an instant and irrational dislike to you?
- How do you go about handling difficult people?
- How do you think you could win the trust and respect of a client or colleague?

#### **Time management**

- How do you go about organising your time and assessing priorities?
- Do you usually achieve what you set out to do?

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What subjects do/did you most enjoy studying?  
Describe a successful day you have had.  
Do you prefer to start tasks or to finish them?



Do you think that curfew orders are compatible with the Human Rights Act?  
What is your opinion of the bedroom tax?  
What do you think of film censorship?  
Do we live in a 'claims culture'?  
What is your opinion of victim statements being read in court?  
Should barristers be allowed to sit on juries?  
Should all drugs be legalised?

### **Argue for or against the following:**

Abolition of the title of QC.  
The right to anonymity in rape cases for the defendant.  
defendant's previous convictions.  
The removal of juries in serious fraud cases.  
The right to protest outside parliament.

### **Hypothetical/abstract questions**



