A. Why Do Employers Interview?

Legal employers receive hundreds or even thousands of resumes from law students and lawyers each year. Given limited resources, it might be most efficient for these employers to dig through the piles to find the resumes with the highest GPAs at schools they consider to be the “best” and hire the applicants, sight unseen. Yet, most employers spend an enormous amount of time and money interviewing candidates. Since legal employers want to use their personnel and capital efficiently, there must be a good reason for them to meet people, rather than hiring them based solely on their paper credentials.

The reason is simple: the factual information contained in a resume cannot accurately reflect the entire person. While expensive, meeting a candidate face-to-face is the only way to determine what it will be like for lawyers and staff to work with this person, if he or she will represent the employer well before judges, clients and other lawyers, if the applicant really wants to work for this particular employer in this location, and if he or she has to potential to do the job. A good interview can yield a job offer that might not be forthcoming based on a resume alone, but a bad interview can take a otherwise qualified candidate out of the running. Because interviewing is so crucial to all hiring decisions, you owe it to yourself to read on to learn more about the specifics of interviewing for legal employers and to improve your interviewing skills.

B. The Art of Interviewing
Interviewing is an art. Success in any creative pursuit is fueled by training, practice, planning, work and natural ability. Michelangelo didn't just wake up one morning and paint the Sistine Chapel; he learned his craft, practiced it, planned carefully, worked diligently, and then let his talent do the rest.

The same holds true for interviewing. No one should walk into an interview hoping to rely on natural talent alone. Without learning how to interview, practicing those skills before the interview, working hard and planning, your chances of getting the job decrease significantly.

The pages that follow emphasize the planning and hard work aspects of the process, because those are the easiest to describe in writing. However, the training and practicing aspects should not be overlooked. By doing a mock interview through the Office of Career Planning and Professional Development (the "Office") and reinforcing your skills by practicing with friends or family before the interview, you can greatly enhance your interviewing abilities and success.

C. The Interview Overview

The interview is divided into three sections: 1) greeting, 2) discussion, and 3) closing:

1) Greeting

In the greeting, or sizing-up stage, interviewers make initial impressions based on your appearance, handshake, eye contact, smile, and demeanor. This may seem like fundamental advice, but be sure to know the firm name, interviewer's name, where the firm is located and where their satellite offices are located. You don't want to enthusiastically announce, "I've always wanted to live in Pensacola," to an interviewer who's firm is located in Jacksonville. (Yes, that really has happened!)

2) Discussion

The longest part of the interview is the question and answer section. This section is hard to predict. Sometimes, the interviewer may begin by "tell me a little about yourself" or the interviewer will begin to talk about the employer or the interviewer will ask you about an experience on your resume. Always remember the individuals who interview you are not in the business of interviewing but in the business of practicing law; therefore there is no set interview pattern. Some interviews will go better than others. Do not fault yourself if you did not "click" with a particular interviewer. Know that there are many different personalities and you will fit better with some than with others.

After the interviewer has finished asking you questions, he or she may ask you if you have any questions. You should ask at least one question to show your interest in the position and firm. (See sample questions for you to ask below.)

3) Closing
Usually the interviewer ends the interview. Express interest and enthusiasm in the position. You might ask when the employer will be in touch, but don't make an issue of this.

**D. Preparation**

Your interview success increases with the amount of preparation you do. When interviewers discuss problem interviews, they have two basic complaints: the interviewee was unprepared, or the interviewee was rigid and responded with "canned" questions and answers. To anticipate these potential pitfalls you should 1) prepare for the interview as outlined below, and 2) practice your interviewing skills.

1) **Research the Employer**

a) **Why research?**

Why research the employer? Isn't the interview simply an opportunity for the employer to learn about you?

There are several reasons you should research an employer before an interview:

i) Showing the interviewer that you have learned about the employer emphasizes how interested you are in the position. Looking at it another way: your lack of knowledge about an employer shows how unimportant this interview and job are to you.

ii) Understanding the difference between firms, even those which seem similar, lets the interviewer know that you want to work for that employer in particular. For example, all firms with 250 lawyers located in New York City are not alike. By illustrating that you understand the difference between the firm you are interviewing with an its competitors makes you a more attractive candidate.

iii) Learning about the firm will allow you to ask good questions of the employer, rather than "dumb" questions that the employer's literature would answer. Asking good questions of the employer reinforces how interested you are in the position. They also demonstrate what you are interested in and say a great deal about you as a person. See sample questions for you to ask below.

iv) Illustrating that you have prepared by researching demonstrates that you "do your homework." The message you are sending is that you are the kind of person who will prepare for meetings with colleagues, superiors, judges, clients and adversaries.

v) Knowing about the employer will make you feel more confident and secure before and during the interview. If you know enough about an employer, you can better articulate why you want to work there, how you will contribute, and why you are a good match with the employer's needs.

vi) Conducting research helps you determine whether you and the employer would be a good match. By waiting until after the interview to learn about the employer,
you rob yourself of the opportunity to ask the interviewer questions which may help you make that determination.

b) "Subjective" and "Objective" research

There are two types of research materials you should review: "subjective" materials prepared by the employer and "objective" materials prepared by other sources. Together, these resources will begin to give you a better understanding of the employer's culture and what the employer is all about.

Materials prepared by the employer or with the employer's input reveal information that the employer wants you to know about it. Demonstrating knowledge about the employer indicates that you are serious about wanting to work there. Look for areas of interest between you and the employer which will fuel your questions about the firm. Also, reading employer-generated materials will keep you from looking unprepared by asking questions whose answers could have been easily found by basic research.

After reading employer materials, outside sources' information and perspectives can round out your understanding of the employer. However, use such "objective" information wisely. For example, if your research reveals that the law firm recently began representing a major Chinese corporation, you might inquire as to how the firm began this relationship and what kinds of work the firm is doing for this client. But, if you learn that many associates have left recently due to increased billable hour pressure and low raises, it might be best to keep this information to yourself.

A note about researching the individual person with whom you will interview. There are pros and cons. On the one hand, knowing the basics about your interviewer will put you at ease. You may want to know where your interviewer went to law school, what type of law he or she practices, how long the interviewer has been with this employer and what his or her title or status is at the employer. However, do not spend an inordinate amount of time researching or memorizing facts about any particular interviewer. Sometimes, due to last minute changes, that person may not be available to see you, and you will meet with a different person instead. Also, showing the interviewer that you know an enormous amount about him or her may make the interviewer feel uncomfortable.

c) Where to Find Research Resources

Below is an overview of various resources which will assist you in researching firms. A more detailed explanation of these resources and their locations is available on the Resources for Researching Employers page.

i) "Subjective" Sources

- Employer brochure
- Employer web site
- Martindale Hubbell
- National Directory of Legal Employers
- Yellow Books: Law Firms, Federal Government, Non-Profit Associations, etc.
ii) "Objective" Sources

American Lawyer surveys
The Insider's Guide to Law Firms
America's Greatest Places to Work with a Law Degree
Lexis/Nexis or Westlaw: news articles and notable cases
W & L Student Evaluations
W & L students, faculty and administrators
Friends and family

2) Create/Collect Documents

You should bring four documents to every interview: resume, reference list, writing sample, and transcript. Even if you have already sent some or all of these materials to the employer before your interview, you should have multiple copies of each with you in case the interviewer has misplaced them. Carry your documents in a professional-looking briefcase or file folder to avoid seeming disorganized or awkward. You must know everything that is on each of the documents and be able to speak about them easily.

a) Resume

Many interviewers will use your resume entries as the basis from which to ask you questions. Therefore, before the interview review every experience, publication, organization, honor, interest, etc. that you have listed so you will be able to talk about it in great detail. If you only have a vague idea about the content of an entry, try to jog your memory, call someone who might have a better recollection than you do, or omit the entry from your resume.

Here's an example:

Q: "I see you worked for Senator Cumquat last summer, how did you like that"?

This type of question gives you the opportunity to illustrate, using concrete details, the skills and perspectives you gained through an experience and how the employer will benefit from your newly-gained knowledge. So, you might answer with something like this:

A: It was a great experience for me because I had extensive contact with the Senator's constituents. I listened to their requests, researched their questions for them and attempted to intervene on their behalf with various agencies. For example, one woman had a problem with her [problem]. . . Also I researched issues for a couple of the Senator's speeches and wrote a first draft of one speech. I found writing a speech on [topic] very interesting [because] . . . Because I am interested in litigation, I think this was a good chance for me to practice my advocacy, research and writing skills, as well as begin to understand the needs of clients.

b) Reference List

A reference list is the companion document to your resume; it should be on the same type of paper and in the same font and font size as your resume. It lists the
three or four people who know your work and have agreed to speak on your behalf. Preferably, the list should include law professors or legal employers. In your first year, you may include an undergraduate professor or non-legal employer, but by the second year, law professors and lawyers should dominate the list. The list should not include family members or personal references.

Before the interview, you must call every person on your reference list and make sure he or she is willing to serve as your reference. You may offer to give your referee a copy of your resume and/or transcript to refresh his or her memory about your background. By preparing your referee, he or she will not be caught off guard. Nothing will hurt you more than the following exchange:

Q: "This is Huey Dewey, of the law firm of Dewey, Cheatum and Howe. Professor Snaggletooth, can you tell me about Sarah Q. Student"?

A: "Sarah who"?

c) Writing Sample

In an interview, your writing sample does more than show the employer your writing skills. When asked about your sample in the interview, you have the opportunity to illustrate your oral advocacy and analytical thinking skills. Before the interview, read your writing sample again. This seems elemental, but you'd be surprised at how many students do not remember what their writing sample says when they get into the interview! Then prepare a brief overview of the facts, the main arguments, and the most crucial cases or statutes. Importantly, prepare to address weaknesses and counter arguments; you interviewer may challenge your conclusions to see your "on your feet" thinking.

Also, if your resume refers to other publications or works in progress, prepare to discuss those in the same way.

d) Transcript / Answering Questions about Grades

Many employers will want to see your grades before they hire you. Bringing a copy of your transcript to the interview, does not, however, mean that you must volunteer it. Rather, bring a copy to the interview in order to look prepared and efficient if the interviewer asks for your transcript.

If the interviewer asks you for a transcript, you should hand it across the desk cheerfully. Then, resist the temptation to comment on it without being asked. Almost everyone at some time in law school gets a grade of which he or she is not so proud. Naturally, you will want to explain the circumstances surrounding the course or the exam. However, by your explanation you may be drawing attention to a grade that the interviewer may have missed or doesn't think is important. Or worse, you may inadvertently say something you didn't want to say because you are feeling anxiety about discussing grades. Don't let the following happen to you:

Interviewer: "Do you happen to have a transcript with you"?

Student: "Yes, here it is."
Student: (Blurts out) "I really don't know what happened on my torts exam. I mean it is such an easy course that even ambulance chasers can do it. Maybe I shouldn't have gone to visit my girlfriend in Vermont the weekend before the exam . . ."

Interviewer: "It's interesting that you think that. My husband has been litigating personal injury cases for 20 years, and I know he still finds the evolving tort system challenging.

If the interviewer asks you about a particular grade or your grades in general, you cannot refuse to discuss them. But, this does not have to be a horrible experience! By the time grades come up, you'll be ready, because a big part of preparing is thinking about these kind of tough questions in advance (see below for a whole list of more typical questions employers ask). Understand that most employers who will press you on your grades are trying to ascertain how you react to stress. So, the key is to answer calmly and maturely, without making excuses or losing control of the response. Look the interviewer in the eye, take a deep breath, and say what you've prepared you'll say. Perhaps most importantly, when you've finished with what you want to say, stop speaking, even if there is silence. Often, when people are nervous they fill in that "dead air" with words they later regret. Easier said than done, right? Here are two examples:

Q: So, Ms. Second-Year Student, I see that there are a couple of grades here in the first semester of first year that aren't nearly as good as the rest. What happened?

A: [Breathe] "Well, I am not as happy with those first semester grades as I am with later grades. I've thought about them, talked to professors in those courses and read the exams I wrote. I think it really boils down to the fact that I didn't understand how to take a law school exam in the beginning. My background in computer science, while great training for analytical thinking, was not as good a preparation for essay exams as I would have liked. However, I learned from the problems I had, worked with an upper class student on exam writing, and really saw my grades come up in the second semester. I'm really happy with my progress.

Here's another one:

Q: "So, Mr. Third-Year Student, I've had a chance to read your writing sample, and I found it quite impressive. However, I am struck by the fact that your strong writing is not mirrored in your overall GPA. Do you have any thoughts on this?"

A: "I've given this a lot of thought. I think in part my GPA is the result of my struggles in the first year with the time pressures of writing an exam. However, I improved my test-taking skills in the second year and now think that I've gotten to be more efficient. Still, my GPA is not as high as I'd like it to be. I think that on the whole, my GPA does not reflect my level of understanding of various topics or my strong advocacy skills. For example, last summer at the Environmental Defense Fund, I argued a motion . . ."
Notice a couple of things about these responses. First, they honestly acknowledge the grades and admit that they have given them serious thought. Next, they don't try to blame professors, circumstances or other factors for their performance. Also, the students discuss the steps they took to address the grades of concern. They even managed to work a positive point into the discussion. Finally, they promptly either stopped speaking or segued into a topic they'd rather talk about.

This is one of the most difficult areas for everyone, so you should definitely think about your grades and practice out loud how you will respond to questions about them. Talk to a member of the Office of Career Planning and Professional Development if you have concerns about answering this or other types of tough questions.

3) Prepare to Talk about Yourself

a) Practice Talking Out Loud

Thinking about what you will say is a good first step, but thinking alone is not enough! You must practice responding to questions orally in a setting which simulates some of the nervousness you will feel at the real interview. Certainly a mock interview through the Office is one option, but there are others. You can have a friend or family member ask you questions you think will arise. Also you can sit in front of a mirror and ask yourself questions; if you add a tape recorder into this simulation, you'll be able to critique your own responses. No matter how you do it, you owe it to yourself to really practice your interview skills.

b) Prepare an info-mercial

Many people are thrown off when presented with open-ended questions like:

"Tell me about yourself."

"Why should I hire you"?

"What are your strengths"?

"What would your friends say about you"?

Rather than inspiring fear, these questions will inspire relief, if you've prepared your "info-mercial." An "info-mercial" is a two to three minute self-description of qualities and experiences you want to convey to the employer. How do you create one? Begin by listing three or four of your positive attributes. You may describe yourself as hardworking, trustworthy, dedicated, a good researcher, a good writer, organized, self-motivated, creative, loyal, etc. Next, find examples from your resume or other life experiences which support each of your attributes. Providing concrete examples does three things for you: 1) it provides evidence to support your self-descriptions which makes your descriptions believable, 2) it highlights salient points on your resume, and 3) it helps the listener remember you. Finally, find a way to introduce your info-mercial. Sometimes a short biographical introduction will do; other times, you may feel comfortable launching right into your discussion.
Here's an example:

Q: Tell me about yourself.

A: Well, as you know, I'm a second-year student at Washington and Lee. I graduated in 1996 from Colby College where I majored in English. I'd say that I'm a very self-directed person. I've always known that I wanted to do criminal law. So, I worked in the Portland District Attorney's Office in the two years between undergrad and law school. I found the work I did with the domestic violence unit most interesting because . . . . I'd also say that I am a good researcher and writer. This past summer at the ACLU, I worked on several projects in which I researched and wrote sections of appellate briefs. You'll notice that my writing sample is a section of one of those briefs. . . .

Here's another one:

Q: What are your strengths?

A: First, I'd say I'm very organized. For the past two summers, I worked at my family's paint and wall covering store. The first summer, I was a general gopher - stocking shelves and running errands. Then, this summer, our bookkeeper had a baby in May and wanted to take the summer off. So she trained me to take over for her. I took inventory, ordered and paid for merchandise, oversaw commercial customer accounts and managed payroll. While this was a challenging job at first and Uncle Joe helped me a lot, by the end of the summer I really could handle it all on my own. I think that my natural ability to organize really helped me keep everything straight. It taught me a lot about what it takes to run a business, and it gave me a lot of confidence in my own abilities. As for a second strength . . .

c) Consider These Big Ideas

What is important to you and about you -- how does it fit in with this employer?

What are the successes in your life - how did they happen?

What are the failures - why did they occur, and what have you done to alleviate the problems?

Think of the worst question an interviewer could ask - and prepare for it.

d) See Yourself Through Your References' Eyes

By looking at yourself from the outside, you may find areas of strength that you should try to get across in the interview or areas of weakness that you should be ready to address if they are raised by the interviewer.

i) A faculty reference might be asked questions like

How are your legal research and writing skills?

How quickly do you understand new ideas?
How are your critical thinking skills?

Do you contribute in class?

Do you respect other students' contributions?

Do you take constructive criticism well?

ii) A employer reference might be asked questions like

Did you clash or work well with others?

What are your strengths and weaknesses?

What responsibilities did you have and how did you handle them?

What was your most significant accomplishment?

How did you react to criticism?

Are you mature?

Did you take initiative?

How are your communications skills?

E. Appearance

You are applying for a professional position; dress accordingly. Your appearance is an important part of the hiring process, so consider clothes an investment and buy at least one suit, shirt, pair of shoes, tie, etc. similar to those described below. No matter how well you prepare for the interview or deliver your interview responses, if your appearance is distracting or unprofessional, it will hurt your chances of getting the job.

Appearance is one of the most personal and thorniest of interview issues. If you have questions or concerns about any aspect of your appearance, do not hesitate to reach out to the Office. Stop by to get an opinion on a shirt and tie combination or call in to get some advice on shoes; the Office will do its best to help you look just right for your interview.

1) Women

Women should wear a dark colored conservative business suit. Make sure that the skirt is not too short; above the knee is not appropriate for a legal interview. While suits with slacks are attractive, fashionable, and comfortable, they are not appropriate for legal interviews; wait until you're in practice to wear your favorite pants suit! Dark pumps are best and make sure they are polished. Stay away from high heels; anything over one inch is not professional enough for a legal interview.
Women should also check the heels for scuffs. Nude or tan nylons are the most conservative complement to low pumps. Makeup should be minimal, and nail polish, if you wear any, should be clear. For jewelry, choose small earrings and eliminate bangle bracelets, large necklaces or other items which may distract the interviewer. If your hair is shoulder length or longer, consider a barrette or hair fastener to pull it back. But, stay away from scrunchies or hair clips; they are too casual.

2) Men

Men should wear a dark colored conservative business suit with a white or light colored shirt and conservative tie. Avoid shiny suit materials, strong pin stripes, double-breasted jackets or ties with large patterns or bright colors. Shoes should also be dark and should match the belt. Also, make sure your shoes are shined; scuffed or dirty shoes show a lack of attention to detail. Choose socks that are dark and solid because when you sit down and cross your legs, your socks may be very prominent in the interviewer's view. Make sure that the hair on your head and face has been recently trimmed and is conservatively short.

F. Demeanor

Present yourself in a confident, but not overbearing manner. You want to convey immediately the message that you are a candidate who should be taken seriously. A smile, firm (not bone-crushing) handshake, erect posture and eye contact present a positive image. During the interview, avoid distracting physical habits like twirling your hair, shaking your leg, tapping your fingers clicking your pen, or fidgeting with papers. Once you sit down, put your briefcase and/or purse and all folders, paper, etc. on the chair or floor next to you so that you won't be tempted to fidget with them. Watch for other non-verbal behaviors that may detract from your presentation like slumping in your chair or talking with your hand over your mouth. Also, avoid spoken ticks such as,"you know," "like," or "ah." Finally, stay away from slang and don't mumble.

Many of these habits are very hard to self-diagnose. We all know people who click their pens without knowing they are driving us to crazy! By practicing your interviewing skills with another person, he or she can point out what verbal or physical habits you have which may distract or annoy an interviewer. Better yet, through the Office, you can have a mock interview videotaped. There is no better cure for nervous habits than watching yourself do them on tape!

G. Responding to Questions

1) Prepare Your Answers

You can never be totally prepared for every question. However, being well-prepared for standard questions or questions particular to your circumstances will make the interview easier for you and more enlightening for the interviewer. Review the list of sample questions in the section that follows. Think about your responses. Then, have someone ask you the most difficult ones and speak your responses. For those you don't answer smoothly, keep practicing until your answer flows more easily. Of course, be careful not to over rehearse your answers so that they sound "canned" or memorized.
2) Avoid Negative Responses

a) Why Avoid Negativity?

You should avoid negativity at all times during an interview for three reasons:

- You don't know your audience. You may make a statement like, "I think that all solo practitioners are just lawyers who couldn't make it at big firms," to a lawyer whose father enjoyed his successful solo practice for 40 years.

- You are talking to a potential employer; so, speaking ill of past employers or employment experiences shows that you may sully this potential employer's name in the future. For example, an interviewer would not want to hear you complain that, "The lawyers at firm X, where I clerked last summer, seemed lazy and unethical."

- General negativity, even if not directed at a particular person or group, can simply rub off on you. You don't want the interviewer reporting back to his or her colleague, "She seemed like a bright woman, but she didn't have anything good to say about anyone. She was such a downer that I really didn't think I'd want to work with her."

b) How Do You Avoid Negativity?

If you've read ahead to the sample questions employers typically ask, you'll notice that some of the samples seem to require negative responses: e.g., "Why did you chose this law school"? or "What is one of your weaknesses"? or "Do you see any disadvantages in being a lawyer"?

How do you avoid responding negatively? First, recognize that most people make choices after examining the pros and the cons of their options. For example, when you were making the decision to come to W & L, you weighed all the good things and bad (though they were hard to find!) things about W & L and compared them with all the good things and bad things about other schools you considered attending. Obviously, the pros of W & L outweighed both the pros of other schools and the cons of W & L. So, in order avoid negativity, stick with the pros of W & L and stay away from the negatives of other schools. That way, you won't say bad things about other schools which could offend the interviewer if they have some connection with or affinity for the schools you turned down.

Second, try to turn negative responses into covertly positive ones. For example, the interviewer may ask you to describe a weakness. Find a weakness which is a strength in disguise: "I have to finish all of my work before I feel like I can relax," or "I am a perfectionist, so I can be really hard on myself. " While these may be real problems for you personally, these are really not negatives from an employer's perspective.
Finally, if you are put in a position in which you are forced to give a negative response, think carefully about your answer. For example, you may be asked to discuss the disadvantages of being a lawyer. Try to stay away from responses which may hurt your candidacy, and try to choose answers which are more universal. Discussing the increasing economic pressures on law firms may be preferable to lamenting that lawyers have little personal time to spend with their families.

3) Questions in Violation of our non-Discrimination Policy

You may be asked a question which you think indicates the employer may be making a hiring decision in violation of our non-discrimination policy. If you feel you have been asked a discriminatory question see either the Director or Associate Director as soon as possible.

4) Difficult Questions

You may be asked questions which you believe are baiting or inappropriate. Efforts may be made to anger you or discourage you. Silence may be used strategically. While these type of stressful interview techniques are not the norm and are certainly not condoned, you should be prepared for them.

Don't jump to conclusions. Perhaps the interviewer is inexperienced and doesn't realize the impact a particular question will have on you. Some interviewers may ask you a difficult question to gauge your response to a stressful situation. For example, if you are interviewing for a litigation position, the interviewer may loudly challenge your answers in an argumentative manner to see how you will respond to difficult opposing counsel, hostile witnesses or assertive judges.

The interviewer's motivation is not as important as your reaction. Above all, stay calm. Focus on saying something positive or humorous that makes you look as if you are in control of your emotions and not shocked or stressed by the question. If you feel you are being tested, try to ascertain what the interviewer is trying to test and respond appropriately. When you can, try to steer the conversation back into areas in which you feel comfortable. You will be less vulnerable if you are aware of the possibility of this problem.

H. Typical Questions Asked by Employers During Interviews

What are your long-range goals and objectives/when and why did you establish these goals/how are you preparing yourself to achieve them? What goals have you established for yourself for the next 5/10 years?

Why are you interested in this employer? Where else are you interviewing?

If you receive more than one offer, what criteria would you use to make a decision?

Why did you go to law school?

Why did you decide to go to W&L Law School? Were you admitted to other law schools? If so, why did you choose this one?
Do you see any disadvantages in being a lawyer?

Tell me about [experience on resume]. What was the most interesting [case, issue, problem, etc.] that you worked on there?

What are your grades? Explain the grading system at W&L.

Do you think your grades accurately indicate your academic achievement?

What stimulates you to do well in a job?

What do you really want to do in life? What would you have done if you hadn't gone to law school?

What is the most recent non-legal book you have read?

Tell me about yourself. What is unique about you?

How do you measure success?

What is your greatest strength/weakness?

What is the greatest obstacle you have had to overcome in your life? How did you do it?

What two or three things do you see as important in a job?

What are your hobbies/recreational activities?

Why should I hire you?

What qualifications that you possess will make you successful in the law?

In what ways can you contribute to our office?

What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction/why?

What courses do you like least/best in law school/why? Is there a parallel between your performance and your interest in a course?

What were your best subjects in college?

What was your favorite job/least favorite? Why?

Have you selected a specialty?

In what kind of environment are you most comfortable?
Tell me about your extracurricular activities? Are they worth the time you devote to them?

Why did you decide to seek a position with us?

What do you know about this us?

Do you have any geographical preference/why/ties - why did you select this city?

Do you have any questions I can answer? - Don’t say no. Refer to the Questions to ask the interviewer and be prepared to say something.

**I. Questions to Ask the Interviewer**

How does the employer determine what type of work is to be assigned?

How is the work supervised?

When does an associate/entry-level attorney get direct client contact and responsibility?

What kind of training program does the employer have?

What would the employer expect me to be doing in three years?

Does the employer require its new attorneys to specialize or does a new attorney rotate through different departments? Who decides which specialty? Are transfers permitted?

Does the firm expect an associate to bring in business? At what stage in career?

Would I spend the early period of legal career conducting research?

Do separate departments work together?

Describe the general atmosphere of the employer.

What are the employer’s growth plans?

What is the history of the employer? Has it been stable?

Does the employer have expertise in a certain area?

Does the firm have a broad client base or does it rely on a few major clients?

What are the employer’s policies toward pro bono work, community service and continuing legal education?

What are the criteria for advancement? How is admission to partnership decided? What does partnership include?
How does the employer feel about political involvement?

What is the specialty of the interviewer?

Is the practice of law what you thought it would be?

Why did the interviewer choose to work for this employer?

How long has the interviewer been with the employer? Did interviewer practice with another employer before joining this one?

What kind of cases/matters is the interviewer working on?

How many attorneys has the employer hired in recent years? How many are still with the employer?

Does the employer have a mentor program for summer associates? Do summer associates rotate?

Do summer associates have client contact? Do summer associates go to court?

Are offers extended by departments? If so, can one move to another department after starting to work for the employer?

What percentage of summer clerks receive offers?

Do new attorneys/summer clerks receive regular supervision and evaluations?

Please describe typical assignments for summer clerks.

Can you tell me about the legal community in _____________? Are firm members active in Bar Association activities?

What criteria will you use to evaluate my work?

What is the employer’s management structure?

If you are interested in a branch office, ask if attorneys in smaller branch offices are considered on a par with those in main office.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the employer?

**J. Questions Not to Ask an Employer at an Initial Interview**

What is the salary?

How hard does a new attorney have to work? Rather, use the phrase, "Describe the life of a summer associate/new attorney."

Are there mandatory social obligations for summer clerks or new attorneys?
K. ABA's List of Most Frequently Asked Questions

In a 1982 survey, 75 members of the ABA's Economics of Law Practice Section were asked to give a brief explanation of why they asked the questions they most frequently asked. The questions they listed and their reasons for posing the questions are as follows:

Q: What do you think you will do best/worst as a lawyer?
R: Often we are our own worst critics, and if an applicant believes he or she does something well/poorly he or she probably does.

Q: Why did you choose to attend law school?
R: To find out what the applicant's motivation was in choosing a legal career.

Q: What was your least favorite class in law school? Why?
R: To determine possible lack of interest and ability. Additionally, it tests an applicant's ability to present a reasoned explanation in response to what is virtually always a "surprise" question.

Q: What is your ultimate ambition?
R: To determine if the applicant's goals coincide with the firm's goals.

Q: What specific qualifications do you have for this position?
R: To determine level of expertise.

Q: What do you believe is a fair starting salary?
R: To determine if expectations are too high.

Q: What do you expect to be doing five years from now?
R: To determine level of ambition.

L. Thank You Letters

Finally, after your interview you may want to send a thank you note. There are differing schools of thought on their value. Some would encourage you to send a note after each interview to show your continued interest in the employer and position, to demonstrate your courteousness, and to keep you in the interviewer's
thoughts. However, others would tell you that a thank you letter is a bad idea since it will not change the interviewer's impressions of your interview and can potentially hurt your candidacy if there is an error in the letter. Also, many would argue that writing thank you letters is an inefficient use of your time during a busy interviewing season.

What seems uniformly agreed on is that you need not send a thank you note after an initial interview on campus. If you decide to send a thank you note after a call-back interview, you may want to send a letter to each person with whom you interviewed, or you can send just one letter to the lead interviewer or highest-ranking attorney with whom you met. With this approach, ask the person to whom you are writing to thank all the other interviewers on your behalf.

If you choose to write a note, it should be short and sent as soon after the interview as possible, preferably within 48 hours. Try to mention something you and the interviewer discussed to remind him or her of your conversation. Thank you letters may be in a business letter format or neatly handwritten on quality Washington and Lee University note cards. See the sample thank you letter (link on the previous page) for the business format.