



Career Development Office Interview Skills Workshop Outline

What is an Interview?

An interview is an in-depth conversation about an applicant's fitness for the applied-for position. Whether formal or informal, interviews generally occur at the employer's place of business, while others can take place virtually (Skype, FaceTime, HireVue, etc.), telephonically, or remotely, at a job fair, during an On-Campus Interview Program, or even at a restaurant.

Who is chosen to interview?

In the modern age of recruitment, there are often dozens, if not hundreds, of applicants for any given posted position. Interviews are, by necessity, granted after an employer has had an opportunity to review the applicants' respective qualifications, and to those whom the employer believes could successfully fill the position. Consider the interview as "making the first cut." Being invited to interview is a strong indication that an applicant's profile projects the skills and experience sought by the employer.

When should I arrive?

An interviewee should arrive no more than 15, but no less than seven to 10 minutes before the interview. Arriving too early can create awkwardness where a person is sitting in the office lobby for an inordinate amount of time, and too late can make a person appear disorganized and disinterested, while increasing the applicant's stress. A good tip is to drive by the interview location the day or night before to secure an optimal route and visualize the destination.

What should I wear to the interview?

The legal profession is conservative, and as a general rule, interviewees should dress accordingly. **The interview is not the time to make fashion statements, adhere to or create current trends, or draw attention in a way that does not advance your candidacy!** Charcoal grey and navy-blue suits are always appropriate, along with white or light blue dress shirts and blouses. Pinstripes can be avoided altogether at this stage.

Ladies can wear skirt suits or pantsuits and black pumps with minimal, conservative jewelry, makeup, and if desired, fingernail polish. Also, pantyhose is considered conservative, so err on the side of caution. Here are a few articles with some different, contemporary perspectives on interview dress - <https://mmlafleur.com/mdash/lawyer-interview-outfits>; <https://mmlafleur.com/mdash/what-to-wear-to-the-interview-law>; and <https://www.thebalance.com/what-to-wear-and-bring-to-your-legal-job-interview-2164495>.

Gentleman should wear a suit that matches (same material and color for the coat and pants). No cufflinks, necklaces, or earrings, as these can distract. Shoes need to be polished, and socks should be monochromatic and match the color of the suit – **NO WHITE SOCKS OR BARE ANKLES!** Wear a conservative tie that complements the outfit, but does not distract.

****A good tip when deciding what to wear is visit the company website, view pictures of the people who already work there, and use their dress as a guideline.****

What should I bring to the interview?

A clean, leather padfolio is a great interview companion. It not only has pockets to hold extra copies of your application materials (resumes, cover letters, writing samples, transcripts, etc.) and business cards collected during the visit, but also often has paper on which you can take notes during the interview.

Is there a standard interview format?

No. Interviews are as diverse as the people who conduct them and carry varying degrees of significance. As stated above, some interviews are quite informal, often serving as a means of confirming an applicant's interest in a position prior to tendering an offer. Others can be rigidly formal, if not Draconian, delving deeply into an applicant's professional and personal histories, perhaps presenting challenging, thought-provoking questions that are seemingly unrelated to the position. Some websites, like Glassdoor.com for instance, may have a small sampling of employer-specific interview questions submitted by recent interviewees, and can serve as a reference for preparation. Remember: The interview is a two-way street, so while you are being interviewed, you have the opportunity to interview the employer, as well. Be diligent, ask questions, and ensure that if offered a position, you would not be compromising anything by accepting.

Who will be in the interview room?

This is also dependent upon a variety of factors, including the size of the organization, the importance and length of the position, and the hiring manager or committee. Generally, when informed of the interview, the candidate will be told of the people who will conduct the interview. If that information is not conveyed, it is acceptable to simply ask.

What do I do after the interview is over?

First, thank everyone for his or her time and consideration. Next, obtain the names of all the people with whom you interviewed, because each one should receive a **personalized** Thank You Letter. Generally, Thank You Letters briefly thank, once again, the interviewer for the opportunity afforded you to interview and be considered, recaps some aspect of the interview, reiterates why you feel you are a great candidate, and reaffirms your interest in the position. Now, the Thank You Letter can also rehabilitate an area of the interview that did not go so well, provide an *ex post facto* answer to an unanswered question, or resolve an outstanding issue related to your candidacy. ***Please do not hesitate to consult with the Career Development Office for assistance.***

What do I say?

The essence of the interview is to satisfy an employer's curiosity as to how the interviewee will fit within the organizational structure as an individual and employee. How this is done will be outlined below:

1. **Master your "theme"** – Your theme, or thesis, is a one-sentence declaration of what you have to offer to the employer in the context of the position. Think of a condensed "elevator speech" that succinctly distills for the employer how you are an excellent candidate. This theme will recur throughout the interview in greater detail, but when announced at the outset, it sets the tone for the remainder of the interview.

The best time to introduce your theme is when the interviewer asks, "Tell me about yourself?"

which is probably *the* most asked interview question. While seemingly open-ended and inquisitive about personal history, the “tell me about yourself” question is anything but. What interviewers really want to hear is who you are ***in the context of the position***. That is why theming, stating your thesis, will resolve that question from the beginning, and throughout the remainder of the interview, the information you provide will simply bolster your original proposition.

Examples of theme/thesis statements:

- a. *“The combination of my passion for the pursuit of justice and extensive background as a legal intern at a human rights firm provides me with the intangible and tangible tools for immediate and continued success in this position.”*
- b. *“Being a jazz musician, I am adept at improvisation, collaboration, and innovation, and I am excited about this opportunity to translate these skills in the legal field in this capacity.”*
- c. *“During my years as a teacher, I developed critical skills in the types of assessment, communication, preparation, and organization that will make me an asset to your firm.”*

While the answer to “tell me about yourself” will need to be more expansive than just the theme/thesis, having a thoughtful beginning will make the rest much less difficult.

Be mindful that there are those employers who actually want biographical information when they ask, “tell me about yourself,” and while there is no “perfect” answer to this question, the strategy above should still be effective.

Examples of basic theme/thesis statement bolstering:

- a. *“In the seven years that I served as a legal intern, I participated in all phases of litigation, especially discovery, which has prepared me for most of the essential functions of this position. Beyond that, I am an active member of the Criminal Law Section of the Georgia State Bar, and this position would be a natural and logical step in my progression toward a career in criminal law.*
- b. *“From my research, your office has created an atmosphere where I can address challenges from a unique perspective, find creative solutions to complex issues, work as a member of a team to further the interests of the firm, and produce consistent, focused, and exemplary work product. While I am developing my skill profile in the field law, I am confident that my core skills will transfer and allow me to quickly reward your investment in my potential.*
- c. *“I have tremendous people skills, and interacting with people from a wide array of ages, backgrounds, and levels of comprehension is something I enjoy. Assisting your firm’s family law clients is something for which I feel I am uniquely prepared, as I have the emotional intelligence to compassionately and responsibly communicate information, act on the clients’ behalves, and otherwise advance their interests.*

Combining an effective, pointed, attention-holding theme with comprehensive, topical, palatable

support will make a positive impression on the interviewer(s) and advance your candidacy.

2. Conquer “trap” questions. Trap questions attempt to elicit an emotional response from an interviewee. Often, trap questions seek to determine the “worst” of something, or a comparison, whether of the interviewee and other candidates or previous and current employers.

Examples of “trap” questions:

- a. *“Who was your worst supervisor/professor and why?”*
- b. *“Tell me why you are better than the other candidates who have applied?”*
- c. *“Compare this firm to your previous firm and tell me which you would rather work for?”*

While certainly not an exhaustive list, each question entices an interviewee to respond in a way that reflects negatively on someone or something, and that is the “trap” portion. The basic premise is that if you speak negatively of someone or something else during the interview, you will likely speak negatively of the prospective employer at some point. Also, it demonstrates a lack of awareness where, though natural, an interviewee will break decorum and devolve into overly casual conversation. Think of the interview as an audition, and never break character while in the presence of the interviewer! Staying professional is how you will be expected to comport yourself if offered the position, and it begins with the interview.

Examples of “trap” question answers:

- a. *From my perspective as an employee/student, it is my responsibility to adapt to the managerial/teaching style of the supervisor/manager, and not necessarily the reverse. Though I have had managers/professors whose managerial/teaching styles did not match my particular learning style, I approached the situation as a challenge and expanded my ability learn and produce under a different style nonetheless.*
- b. *I am sure if they have made it to the interview phase, the others who have applied for this position are outstanding candidates. What makes me unique are [example: my extensive background with personal injury law and deep ties to this community and commensurate desire to practice here make me a good fit with this firm for the short- and long-term.*
- c. *I am appreciative of all the opportunities I have been afforded. At the time I worked for my previous position, I began at a lower experiential level. With the practical experience I gained there, and the natural expiration of the position, I am eager for a position like this that will allow me to build on what I learned with higher functionality, responsibility, and potential for addition growth. This position offers what I seek.*

The bottom line is to speak well of all of your past employers, co-workers, professors, and the like. Additionally, make trap questions about what *you* can do, not what others cannot or did not.

3. Communicate your organization fit. Another popular, oft-asked question in interviews is, “**why should we hire you?**” The answer to this question should resolve in the mind of the interviewer that the interviewee knows enough about the organization to relate in detail how he or she would neatly fit both personally and professionally. Here, you have the opportunity to

demonstrate your knowledge of the surrounding area, how this position satisfies a genuine personal interest, and how your past experience has prepared you for future success.

Answering “**why should we hire you?**” can be done using the Three As: **Area**, **Affinity**, and **Ability**.

- a. **Area: *Why do you want to be in the geographic area in which the job is located?***
For example, if the job is in a small, rural town, be prepared to describe why you would want to relocate from a metropolitan area. Phrases like “slower pace,” “strong sense of community,” and “freedom from distractions so the job can be my main focus,” help to ease the employer’s fears that will not be able to assimilate and will leave as soon as another opportunity presents itself. If the job is in another state, be prepared to discuss what about that state, in general, and city, in particular, excites you. This may include cost of living, school systems (if you have children), outdoor activities, natural and man-made attractions, historical sites, and the like. Obviously, avoid citing bars, nightclubs, gentlemen’s clubs, and other potential venues that some may deem offensive or indicative of immaturity or lack of character.
- b. **Affinity: *Why do you want to do this job?*** An “affinity” is, in essence, a natural liking of something. This is important in the employment context because people who have an affinity for what they do are more likely to be happy, fulfilled, innovative, motivated, and productive. Conversely, those who lack an affinity for what they do are more likely to stagnate, perform poorly, and leave for another opportunity (probably *any* opportunity) when one became available. This affinity is especially important in public sector positions where people who have a demonstrable “heart” for public service are highly desired.
- c. **Ability: *Can you do the job?*** Describe how what you have done in your past positions has prepared you for the position at hand. Do not be dismayed if there is a deficit of “legal” experience in your background! Through your description, highlight those transferable skills you gained from those positions and project how they will be a benefit to you in the desired role. Conversely, if you do have legal experience, then definitely indicate how that has prepared you to competently fulfill the essential components of the position.

Examples of answering “why should we hire you” using the Three A’s:

- a. *First, Atlanta in an international city with a rich history and culture that is enhanced by the diversity of its citizenry. The City of Atlanta has a demonstrated commitment to all Atlantans, regardless of their immigration status, and that is very appealing to me.*

Second, immigration law is my passion, and I cannot think of any other way to spend my career than fighting for the rights and dignity of Atlanta’s immigrant community.

And third, being a legal professional, I am well-versed in many, if not most, of the procedures that are required to acquire, begin, and complete work on cases. I am a flexible, competent, and hardworking component to any organization, and I look forward to opportunities to contribute here.

- b. *I am a Georgia native, and with Atlanta being the premier city of not just Georgia but the South, it represents a world of opportunities and possibilities for me in a familiar surrounding.*

I have always been fascinated by criminal cases. I have a passion for justice, and working to ensure that indigent people accused of crimes have the same quality of legal defense as those with means is an ideal I believe in. Also, the number of moving parts along with the significant impact that the smallest detail can have on a case are in line with my abilities to prepare and organize, and affinity for legal research.

Having worked for a criminal defense firm, I have familiarity with the criminal justice system from the advocacy side, and have already performed many of the key responsibilities of this position, and which should facilitate a smooth transition into this role.

4. Demonstrate your knowledge of the employer's mission and values: Another popular question is, **“Why do you want to work here?”** This is your opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge of the organization and its mission statement (mainly found in the public sector), practice areas, successes, personnel, other unique characteristics that define them. The best way to ascertain this information is visit the website of the organization. Read the “About Us” section, biographies of the individuals who have them, blogs, and any other portion that provides insight into what the organization values. Then, evaluate what among that information connects with you and incorporate that into your interview preparation.

Examples of answering “why do you want to work here?”

- a. *Your firm has been serving the Greater Atlanta area with distinction for almost 20 years, and throughout the course of my research your firm's name consistently populated my search results. After looking further, I was impressed at the depth of experience possessed by your attorneys and staff, and intrigued by the nuanced areas of immigration law that your firm practices, in addition to its community service initiatives. In addition to my regular duties, participating in your annual school supply drive would be something I greatly look forward to.*
- b. *Your mission statement's commitments to justice, advocacy for the indigent, and professionalism all align with my personal values. Additionally, I had a few brief interactions with members of your staff when they visited my law school, and their obvious love for what they do really inspired me to follow a similar path. I hope to gain from them and the other Assistant Public Defenders the type of experience, guidance, and zeal that would help me become advocate for justice this community deserves.*

While there are more questions that will arise in an interview, being able to answer the ones above will make answering questions not included in this exercise much easier. We invite everyone here to stop by our office on the Sixth Floor and practice with us because we are confident these techniques work and will give you great confidence going into your interviews!