

## ANSWERING COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Different interviewers have different styles, so it's hard to predict what kinds of questions you will be asked when you interview. Preparing for a wide variety of questions is the best way to head into any interview confident that you will be able to answer any question that comes your way.

**Practice Your Answers Out Loud:** As you read through the questions below, stop to consider how you would answer each one – and then verbalize those answers out loud. You will find that “knowing what you think you will say” and actually saying it are two different things. Practicing answers aloud will ensure that your answers are well organized, concise, and articulate. It may take you several tries to get your answer to come out best. You do not want to go into an interview with pat, preplanned answers or you risk sounding scripted – but you do want to go into an interview confident that you will be able to talk about your skills and experience in an engaging and articulate way.

- A. **Why should we hire you?** This is the question behind every question you will be asked. Make sure that your answers express your interest in the practice of law and the particular employer you are interviewing with. Prepare to give the interviewer concrete examples of your strengths, skills or and experience. Saying that you have “strong leadership skills” doesn’t really tell a potential employer anything, but discussing a group, program or project that you have led does. Make sure that your answers reflect the characteristics employers are looking for – good judgment, problem solving skills, dedication, strong work ethic, legal writing and reasoning skills, the ability to work independently, the ability to get along with others, and plain old common sense.
- B. **Tell me something about yourself.** Employers are looking for a 60 second focused, concise statement that showcases your experience, career progress, major accomplishments, some of your best traits, and casts you in a positive light. A good answer includes some personal information (especially if it ties you to the geographic location of the employer or practice area) and your professional goals. For example: “I’m a transplant to Chicago, but I’m here for good. I was born and raised in Cincinnati, but I came to Chicago for undergrad, and worked as a consultant here for four years in PriceWaterhouseCoopers’s tax group. My wife teaches 3rd grade at St. Athanasius in Evanston, so we live in Evanston now. I’m MJ Candidate at Loyola, and I’m really enjoying it, especially my business law class. I’m interested in building on the experience I gained at PriceWaterhouseCoopers as a senior consultant. That’s one of the reasons I’m so interested in XYZ Company – I’ve heard great things about your tax group.”
- C. **Why are you interested in our firm/organization?** Research the firm by going to the website and searching the internet and be able to articulate specifically what about the organization that interests you. Look for facts: specific practice areas, successes, clients, (successful completion of the merger between Client A and Client B).
- D. **Why are you interested in this geographic area?** Do you have any ties to this community? If students have lived/worked in the area, this is easy. For students with no ties to the area, you should refer to ties to the east coast; experience in large urban areas; visits to the city; interest in living & working in a large city/small town; extra points if they have talked to classmates/friends who have lived and worked in the area and can give details about events/places/neighborhoods.

- E. **What can I tell you about the firm?** Applicants should have a list of 5-7 good questions just in case the first question from the employer is this one. Lead with something you know about the firm, e.g., “I know that you recently added an Intellectual Property group. What led to that decision?” This shows that you were interested enough in the employer to do some research to prepare for the interview.
- F. **Why did you decide to get your MJ degree?** Employers are looking for answers that makes sense, that add up, that show you have good judgment. They do not want to hear that you decided to get your MJ because you didn’t know what else to do with your life.
- G. **Where do you see yourself in five years?** Interviewers want to know this because they want a better understanding of your overall goals for yourself and how the job is a part of that. That matters to them because they want to hire someone who will be excited about the job and where it will lead them, whether that's to a higher-level position or just increased accomplishment or satisfaction. They want to know that you're not just applying for jobs randomly and taking whatever you can get, because if you are, you're more likely to get bored or leave as soon as something else comes along. By showing your interviewer how the job fits in with your overall goals, you can show that you'll be excited to do the work and aren't likely to leave prematurely. Here is one example of a good answer: "In five years, I'd love to have increased my skill level enough that I'm able to train others how to do this work. I love this work, and I've found that I really enjoy mentoring colleagues, so I'd be thrilled to be able to combine the two—continuing to work in a role like this one, but with a training or mentoring component to it."
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## BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING QUESTIONS

Behavioral interviews are based on the premise that a person's past performance on the job is the best predictor of future performance. When a company uses behavioral interviewing they want to know how you act and react in certain circumstances. They also want you to give specific "real life" examples of how you behaved in situations relating to the questions. Although it is difficult to predict which behavioral questions an employer might ask, below are examples of typical behavioral questions you may encounter:

1. **Tell me about a situation from past job that required you to exercise judgment.** Employers are interested in hearing about how you approach problem-solving and whether your approach is logical and analytical. There is no “right” answer. To prepare for this question, think about a situation that you have faced in your past that required thinking logically through an issue.
2. **Tell me about your last big mistake.** How did you handle it? Discuss the mistake and the steps you took to overcome and learn from it.
3. **What is your biggest weakness?** Employers are looking for a fairly minor weakness that won’t interfere with your job performance and is correctable. Perhaps, less than stellar public speaking skills – some jobs don’t require a lot of public speaking so this can be a somewhat safe weakness.
4. **Have you been on a committee or had a work-related situation in which you were asked to accomplish a task with insufficient guidance? How did you proceed?** This is an opportunity for students to show process-how they ask for guidance, how they get the information they need, and maturity-their ability to admit that they need help.

5. **All of us have had times in our lives in which we felt unmotivated, or encountered problems which seemed insurmountable. Describe such a situation and explain how you dealt with it.** This question goes to the heart of professionalism-how do we maintain high personal and professional standards day-in and day-out, even when inspiration and motivation are lacking. Look for evidence of structure, e.g., (1) Getting up in the morning, showering, getting dressed-physically preparing for work/study as if one was motivated, rather than waiting for inspiration to strike; (2) Sitting down at the desk with books open and beginning the motions of studying knowing that habit can replace inspiration.
6. **Describe a situation where you failed to reach a goal?** Interviewers try to determine how you deal with adversity and see if you have a need to win every time. Identify a situation where you had to adjust your sights and, if possible, go back to succeed at a later date. Succeeding, however, is not as important as your demonstration of an ability to deal with tough times and make adjustments.
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## **ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS YOU COULD BE ASKED**

### **Skills & Strengths**

- How will you contribute to our organization?
- Are you a better public speaker or writer?
- What do you think will be your chief strength as a lawyer?
- What do you think will be your primary weakness as a lawyer?
- Tell me about your writing sample.

### **Past Work Experience**

- Tell me what you did before you came to Loyola University School of Law?
- Walk me through your resume – what are the highlights of your career to date?
- Tell me about [any job on your resume]. What did you do? What did you learn? What did you like most about the job? What did you like least?
- How would your previous supervisors describe you?
- Of all the jobs you've held, which was your favorite and why?
- Tell me about a time you went above and beyond the call of duty in a job.
- Tell me about a time you voluntarily took on a leadership role in a job.
- What type of work have you found most satisfying?
- Tell me about a challenge you faced in one of your past jobs and how you overcame it.
- Have you ever had to deal with a difficult client or supervisor? How did you handle the situation?

### **Work Style**

- What motivates you?
- How would you describe your work style?
- Do you prefer working independently or as part of a team?
- Give me an example of a time you worked on a team, and how well you think it worked.
- Are you a leader or a follower when asked to work as part of a team?
- What kind of a boss do you prefer?

- Define leadership.
- Define cooperation.
- Do you consider yourself competitive?

### **Personal**

- What was the last good book you read?
- What is your favorite movie?
- How do you keep aware of current events?
- Do you have any hobbies?
- What do you do for fun/to let off steam/in your spare time?
- What accomplishments in your life are you proudest of?
- Who are your heroes?
- What is your greatest strength?
- What is your greatest weakness?

### **Random Questions**

- Tell me something about yourself that is not on your resume.
- If you could be any type of animal/car/cookie, what would you be?
- If you won the lottery tomorrow, what would you do?
- If you could have lunch with any three people, living or dead, who would they be and why?

## **QUESTIONS TO ASK EMPLOYERS**

- Could you explain your organizational structure?
- What do you most enjoy about your work with this organization / company / agency?
- Could you describe your company's management style and the type of employee who fits well with it?
- What are some of the skills and abilities necessary for someone to succeed in this job?
- What is the organization's policy on providing seminars, workshops, and training so employees can keep up their skills or acquire new ones?
- What kind of work can I expect to be doing the first year?
- How and by whom will my performance be reviewed? Are there specific criteria upon which I would be evaluated? And how frequently is formal and informal review given to new employees?
- How much guidance or assistance is made available to individuals in developing career goals?
- I read on the company / organization / agency website that employees have recently done presentations at XX conference. Is that a typical opportunity in the job for which I am interviewing? Are there specific professional organizations employees have been encouraged to join?