



Indiana University

Maurer School of Law

Career Services Office – Interviewing Guide

Congratulations! Hopefully you are reviewing this guide because you have already prepared a professional resume and cover letter and have now secured an interview. Getting to the interview phase in a job search is a great accomplishment, but preparing for an interview is critically important and should be given at least as much time and effort as you spent on your application materials.

This guide will give you examples of common interview questions, including behavior-based interview prompts, and will give you questions to consider asking during an interview.

Just as you took the time to write a personalized cover letter for each job you applied to, you will also need to do firm/organization/company specific preparation for your upcoming interview and be up-to-date on news in the industry you are planning to enter. Review this guide and make a list of your accomplishments, challenges, goals, and experiences, and then call the Career Services Office to schedule an individual mock interview to practice your interview skills and try out your answers.

General questions/prompts:

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why did you go to law school?
- What motivates you?
- How do you define success?
- What two or three things are most important to you in a job?
- Where do you see yourself in five years?
- What is your greatest strength?
- What is your greatest weakness?
- What do you do in your free time?
- What type of leader are you?
- What has been your greatest accomplishment?
- How would your professors (or former boss, or classmates, etc.) describe you?
- What, on your resume, are you most proud of?
- Tell me something about yourself that is not on your resume.
- What has been your favorite class in law school? Least favorite?
- What do you know about our organization? Why do you want to work for us?
- Why are you interested in this (geographic) area?
- Who else are you interviewing with?
- Why should I hire you?
- If you weren't going to be a lawyer, what would you be?
- Did you get an offer from your summer employer? If not, why not?
- Why is there a gap on your resume?
- What do you expect from a supervisor?
- What have you learned from participation in extracurricular activities?
- Do you know what area of practice you want to go into?
- In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable?
- What qualities should a successful lawyer possess?

Behavior-Based Interview Questions

Behavior-based interview questions are ones that require you to tell the employer how you have behaved in past situations. Interviewers ask these questions because learning how you have behaved in the past is a good indicator of how you will behave in future situations. It can often give more information than if the interviewer was to simply ask "what would you do if..." questions, as the tendency for many people would be to give the interviewer the answer we think they want to hear. While you should provide examples for most every answer you give during an interview, behavior-based questions *force* you to give examples. This should be seen as a positive for you, as being able to tell your stories will make you more memorable to the employer. In preparing for an interview, it is very important that you to reflect back on experiences you have had to use as examples. Below are some behavior-based interview questions/prompts, divided into sections based on the skills they likely aim to identify.

Behavior-based questions/prompts:

Ambition

- Describe a project or idea that was implemented primarily because of your efforts. What was your role? What was the outcome?
- Tell me about an important goal you set in your past. What efforts did you make to accomplish the goal? Did you reach it?
- Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty to get a job done.
- Tell me about the last time you undertook a project that demanded a lot of initiative.
- What was the most competitive work situation you have experienced? How did you handle it?
- Tell me about the riskiest decision you have made? What was the outcome of that decision?

Analytical Thinking

- Tell me about a time when you had to analyze information and make a recommendation. What kind of thought process did you go through? What was your reasoning behind your decision?

Communication

- Describe a situation where you felt you had not communicated very well. How did you correct the situation?
- Describe for me the most significant written document, report, or presentation you have had to complete.
- Tell me about a time when you had to explain a complex technical problem to a person who does not understand technical jargon. What approach did you use to make the information clear to that person?
- Tell me about a recent experience you had making a speech or presentation. How did you prepare for it? What obstacles did you face? How did you handle them?
- Tell me about a time when you and your current or previous supervisor disagreed but you still found a way to get your point across.
- How do you go about establishing rapport with a customer/client/colleague? What have you done to gain their confidence?
- Tell me about a recent situation in which you had to deal with a very upset client or co-worker.
- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.

Coping

- Describe a time in which you were faced with problems or stresses which tested your coping skills. What did you do?
- Tell me about a time when you were placed under extreme pressure and how you handled it.
- Tell me about a time when a project you planned did not go according to plan.

Decision-Making

- Describe an important decision you have made regarding a task or project at work. What factors influenced your decision? How much time did you take to make the decision? What was the result?
- We have all made poor decisions at one point or another. Tell me about a time you made a poor decision. What happened?
- Tell me about a time when you had to defend a decision you made, even though other important people were opposed to your decision.
- What has been the most difficult decision you have had to make in the past six months?
- Give me an example of a time when you had to be quick in coming to a decision.

Initiative

- Give some instances in which you anticipated problems and were able to influence a new direction.
- Tell me about a project you generated that went beyond your job description.
- Describe something you have done during law school that goes beyond standard expectations?
- Give me an example of when you took a risk to achieve a goal. What was the outcome?

Interpersonal Skills

- Describe a recent unpopular decision you made and what the result was.
- Tell me about the most difficult or frustrating individual you've ever had to work with, and how you managed to work with them.
- What have you done in the past to contribute toward a teamwork environment?
- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.

Innovation

- Describe a situation when you demonstrated initiative and took action without waiting for direction. What was the outcome?
- Tell me about a time when you came up with a creative solution to a problem in your past work.
- Describe something you have implemented at work. What were the steps you took?

Organization

- Describe a time when you had to make a difficult choice between your personal and professional life.
- Tell me about a time when your schedule was suddenly interrupted? What did you do?
- How do you organize your life/time? How do you determine priorities in scheduling your time?

Teamwork

- Describe a team experience you found disappointing. What could you have done to prevent it?
- Describe the most rewarding experience you have had working on a team.
- Tell me about a time when you successfully led a group.
- Tell me about a time when you worked on a team but were not the team leader.

When answering behavior-based questions, you should use the PAR technique (sometimes known as STAR).

Problem (or Situation/Task)	Describe the problem you faced and the result that you needed to accomplish. You must describe a specific event or situation, not a generalized description of what you have done in the past. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand. This situation can be from a previous job, from a volunteer experience, or any relevant event.
Action you took	Describe the action you took and be sure to keep the focus on you. Even if you are discussing a group project or effort, describe what you did -- not the efforts of the team. Don't tell what you might do, tell what you did.
Results you achieved	What happened? How did the event end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn?

Off-the wall questions:

- If you found out you had only 24 hours to live, how would you spend them?
- If you had to describe yourself as a type of animal/car/cartoon character/etc., what would you be and why?
- If you could have any super power, what would you choose?
- Why are manhole covers round?
- What would the person who likes you least in the world say about you?
- My license plate says "TRIALS" - what would yours say?
- Your resume says that you speak French. Let's conduct this interview in French. (Be sure you can back up the level of language competency you claim on your resume!)
- If you were writing your own personal ad, how would you describe yourself?
- What was your best MacGyver moment?
- If you were a brick in a wall, which brick would you be and why?
- Who is your favorite comedian?
- Tell me a joke that is neither sexist nor racist.
- Pick a recent U.S. Supreme Court decision and tell me about it.
- Besides the people and quality of our practice, why ELSE do you want to work here?

Questions you should consider ASKING the interviewer:

Almost all interviews end with the employer saying "do you have any questions for me?". The right answer to this question is 'Yes'! Be sure to ask questions that relate to research you have done on the organization and/or that follow up on some things you have already learned during your interview. Never ask a question that could have been answered with adequate preparation for your interview. Also, employers look at the guides out there with suggested interview questions, so be sure to be original in what you ask. Some samples are here:

- Is there a structured training program for new lawyers?
- How do you determine what type of work a new lawyer is assigned?
- How is the work of a new lawyer supervised? Is there a formal review process?
- Is continuing legal education encouraged and supported by your firm?
- How many years, on average, does it take to become a partner?
- How does the firm feel about *pro bono* work?
- What do you like best about working for this firm?