

# THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

**STRATEGIES & TECHNIQUES FOR  
SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEWING**

**NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW  
Boston, Massachusetts  
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# The Interviewing Process

## INTRODUCTION

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You applied for a job and were selected for an interview. *How do you prepare? What should you expect? How do you impress the employer? How do you assess if this is the right job for you?* Hopefully, after reading this Handbook, you will be able to answer these questions and tackle the interview process with confidence.

**What is the purpose of an interview?** If you are offered an interview, the employer has already determined that you have met the threshold requirements for the position to which you are applying. The interviewer's objective is to assess: (1) whether you are the most qualified applicant for the position, and (2) whether you would "fit"<sup>1</sup> into a particular work environment. Thus, you must persuade the interviewer that you are the applicant most qualified and best suited for the position, as well as to assess whether the position meets your professional and personal goals.

Although employers use some objective criteria to evaluate applicants,<sup>2</sup> the interview process is not primarily objective. Given generally equal qualifications, employers typically make offers to applicants whom they like best and those with whom they would most like to associate professionally.

## PREPARING FOR AN INTERVIEW

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The key to successful interviewing is *thorough preparation*. Thorough preparation involves both *self-assessment* and *research*. Self-assessment means *understanding yourself* so that you can effectively articulate your goals (personal and professional) and your skills. Research in this context means learning about the employer so that you understand the employer's needs and objectives.

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<sup>1</sup> "Fit" does not mean that you must be exactly like the individuals employed at the firm/organization, but that your personality and work style blend well with the staff and culture of the work environment.

<sup>2</sup> **Appendices A -D** contain interview evaluation forms used by law firms, public defender's offices and district attorney's offices. These evaluation forms will give you a general idea of some of the criteria these types of employers use when evaluating applicants.

## **Assessing Your Preferences, Values, Interests and Skills**

In order to determine if a particular employment opportunity will be a good fit for you, you must have a clear understanding of your *goals*, preferred *work style*, the type of *environment* in which you feel comfortable working, the *values* you consider important in your work, the *type of work* in which you are interested, and your *strengths* and *weaknesses*.

In addition, many of the questions which you are asked in an interview will focus on your preferences, values, interests and skills. Therefore, to present yourself effectively in an interview, you must be able to articulate your personal and professional goals, why you are interested in the employer and its work, and why you are qualified for the position for which you are interviewing.

Self-assessment involves reflecting upon your past experiences and exploring your personal and professional goals. The Career Services Resource Room contains materials on self-assessment, and self-assessment workshops are offered regularly through the University's Career Center which law students can sign up to attend. In addition, the Career Services and Co-op staffs are available to meet with you individually to help you clarify your personal and professional goals.

## **Developing A Personal Marketing Plan**

An interview provides you with an opportunity to demonstrate to the employer that you are the best applicant for the position. However, depending upon the nature of the interview (e.g., a *screening* interview), you may only have a limited amount of time to sell yourself to the interviewer. It is essential, therefore, that you develop a marketing strategy which will enable you to effectively "put your best foot forward" within the given time constraints.

You will present yourself most effectively to an employer if you use the interview to tell the employer why, based on your skills and experiences, you are the best applicant for the position. Before the interview, you should go through your background and highlight your major relevant accomplishments and transferable skills. Be prepared to deal with any negative aspects of your application, such as poor course or co-op evaluations or major gaps in your professional backgrounds. Practice stating the points you want to make about yourself to the interviewer, whether or not they specifically ask about these things.

The interview is a *discussion*, not an oral presentation where you are allotted a certain amount of uninterrupted time to present your case. ***Do not assume that the interviewer will ask you questions to elicit the information that is most important for you to communicate.*** An interviewer's questions, depending on his/her focus, can either facilitate or impede your efforts to communicate why you are the best applicant for the position. You need to learn to ask and answer questions in a *purposeful* way, so that you use your questions and answers to communicate important information about yourself.

For example, consider the difference between two different responses to the following question asked of an applicant interviewing for a summer associate position with a large firm:

**"Why do you want to work for this firm/organization?"**

**Answer #1** – I am interested in working for your firm because my goal is to work at a large firm after I graduate from law school.

**Answer #2** – I am particularly interested in your firm because I hope to become a litigator and your firm has a very well established litigation department. In addition, I am extremely interested in products' liability work and your firm has litigated a number of extremely complex and significant cases in this area.

Answer #1 tells the interviewer very little about the applicant, and most importantly, does not tell him/her why the applicant is well suited for the position. In addition, the applicant has not indicated why he/she wants to work for that particular firm as opposed to any large firm. In contrast, Answer #2 tells the interviewer about the applicant's professional goals and interests, and demonstrates to the interviewer that the applicant has researched the firm and has thought about the kind of work he/she wants to do and the type of employer for which he/she wants to work.

Answering questions is not the only way to communicate important information to the employer. The questions you ask, if asked purposefully, can also be a means of communicating important information to the employer. Try to remember to tell the interviewer something about yourself when you are asking a question. Consider the difference between the following two questions:

**Question #1** – On what types of cases will I have the opportunity to work this summer?

**Question #2** – I am very interested in employment discrimination and I know that your organization litigates many employment cases. Would I have the opportunity to work on any of these cases this summer?

Question #2 does more than just ask a question. It provides the interviewer with information about the applicant and demonstrates to him/her that the applicant has researched the organization.

Knowing what information you want to communicate and learning how to successfully communicate the information will enable you to use the interview time most effectively and to persuade the employer that you are the best applicant for the position. Be aware of your demeanor and make sure that you convey your message with enthusiasm and confidence.

## **Researching Employers**

*Before* you interview with an employer, you must do your research so that you understand the nature of the employer's work and the qualities and skills which it seeks in an applicant. Researching an

employer thoroughly will enable you to feel more confident and at ease during the interview. By obtaining general information about an employer's practice, policies, philosophies and clients, you will be able to ask educated questions during the interview. Moreover, an interviewer will be impressed by your knowledge of and interest in the employer.

Although you will learn a great deal about an employer in the course of an interview, the interview should not be used for the purpose of obtaining *basic* information. Basic information consists of facts about the employer that you can learn from reading an employer's brochure or webpage. Instead, you should use the interview to supplement your basic knowledge of an employer and to obtain the additional information you will need to evaluate the employment opportunity. Just as employers screen resumes and interview only a select number of applicants, you too should carefully review materials on employers and target those whose goals are similar to yours.

### **Sources of Information on Legal Employers**

#### **? Print Resources**

The Career Services/Co-op Resource Room and the Law Library contain a variety of resources, which can assist you in obtaining information about legal employers. The Career Services section contains hundreds of resources on legal employers and the legal profession, including books on interviewing; "insider guides" to particular employers; lists of NUSL graduates organized by employer; firm resumes, annual reports and office brochures; and newsletters and periodicals on the legal profession.

Copies of the Resource List (which describes the career services resources contained in the Resource Room) can be picked up in the Resource Room or downloaded @ [www.slaw.neu.edu/career/pdf/reslist.pdf](http://www.slaw.neu.edu/career/pdf/reslist.pdf).

The co-op section of the Resource Room contains information and job descriptions on over 1,000 employers who participate or have participated in the Co-op Program. In addition, copies of the Student Quality Questionnaires, which describe students' co-op experiences with employers, are available for review in the co-op section of the Resource Room.

For information on what employer resources are available through the law library, consult the law library's catalog (NULIS) @ [www.slaw.neu.edu/library/resource.htm](http://www.slaw.neu.edu/library/resource.htm).

#### **? Westlaw and Lexis**

A wealth of information on legal employers is available on line through WESTLAW and LEXIS. Both of these vendors have career databases, which allow you to view many of the major print resources on-line (e.g., *Martindale Hubbel*, *Federal Yellow Book*, *Directory of Corporate Counsel*).

They both also have extensive on-line databases that are not available in print (West Legal Directory-WLD), as well as databases of newspapers and periodicals. The latter can provide information about cases, which an employer has litigated, new mergers and partnerships, lawsuits involving a particular company, or opinions that a particular judge has written.

## ? **The Internet**

There is no limit to the amount of information you can obtain through the internet. Many directories and legal newspapers can be viewed on-line ([www.nalpdirectory.com](http://www.nalpdirectory.com) and [www.lweekly.com](http://www.lweekly.com)), and virtually every employer has its own website which has general information about its practice, a directory of attorneys, job openings in the organization, and other useful information.

There are also listserves to which you can subscribe. These listserves can be a good way to learn about a particular area of the law, an employer, or general career-related issues for new attorneys. The Career Services website can link you to over 200 legal/ law-related websites. This is a good place to start if you don't know the relevant legal career sites or if you don't know a particular employer's website. The direct URL to the Career Services "internet sites for job hunters" page is: <http://www.atsweb.neu.edu/links-pages/>.

## ? **Human Resources**

In addition to the above references resources, talking with people who are knowledgeable about a particular employer is often one of the most effective ways to obtain information. Students who have worked for an employer on co-op, and graduates or other individuals who work or have worked for the employer, can provide you with some of the most useful information. In addition, professors, law school administrators, lawyers and other individuals who are employed in the legal or business community can often provide you with information on an employer's reputation in the professional community.

Do not be reluctant to contact NUSL graduates, former and current employees, or other contacts you may have. The Career Service Office's *Handbook on Networking and Informational Interviewing* provides useful nuts-'n-bolts advice on speaking with individuals for the purpose of obtaining career-related information. The Handbook can be picked up in the Resource Room or downloaded @ <http://www.slaw.neu.edu/career/networkingpub.html>.

## ? **Specific Resources**

Useful resources to help you prepare for an interview with a specific type of employer are as follows:



### ***Judge or Court***

- Consult the *Almanac of the Federal Judiciary* (in print and on Westlaw) and *The American Bench* for biographical information on judges.
- Consult the Office's *Judicial Clerkship Handbook* to find the names of Northeastern graduates who have clerked for a particular judge or court. Read the "Clerkship Evaluations" that Northeastern graduates have completed about their post-graduate clerkship experiences. Do the same with the "Co-op Quality Questionnaires" from students who have done a co-op with a particular judge.
- Read published opinions on Westlaw and Lexis written by a specific judge.

### ***Law Firm***

- Look at the firm's NALP forms and Workplace Questionnaire by logging on to [www.nalpdirectory.com](http://www.nalpdirectory.com) or view the *NALP Directory of Legal Employers* in print in the Resource Room.
- View *Martindale-Hubbell* on Westlaw or in print to identify the partners and associates at the firm and its practice areas. Also on Westlaw is *West Legal Directory* (WLD). This database offers information on practice areas of firms as well as representative clients and attorney biographies.
- Visit [www.findlaw.com](http://www.findlaw.com) which provides links to a law firm directory, career advisor, *Insider's Guide*, *JD Jungle* and *Greedy Associates Newsletter*.
- Review firm resumes and brochures in the Career Services file cabinets and firms' Quality Questionnaires in the Co-op section of the Resource Room.

### ***Government Agency***

- Visit the government agency's website directly.
- Check out the brochures and recruitment materials in the "government" file cabinets in the Resource Room.
- Read *U.S. Government on the Web*, a comprehensive guide for navigating the government's presence on the web. It provides options for conducting a search: use of search engines, approaching government by its branches or a particular body, browsing "one-stop" shopping sites, or searching for a type of information resource or selected subject.
- Visit <http://www.statelocalgov.net/index.cfm>, state and local government on the internet, a directory of links to government sponsored and controlled resources on the internet.

### ***Public Interest Organization***

- Go to [www.pslawnet.org](http://www.pslawnet.org) and/or [www.idealists.org](http://www.idealists.org) for links and information on hundreds of public interest organizations.
- Read the *Harvard Public Interest Job Search Guide* located in the Resource Room.

- Check out the brochures, annual reports and newsletters in the “public interest” file cabinets in the Resource Room.
- Search the article files in Lexis and Westlaw for public interest organizations and practitioners, which have been in the news.

### ***Corporation***

- Consult the *Directory of Corporate Counsel and the Corporate Yellow Book*, on-line through Westlaw and in print in the Resource Room.
- Check out the Corporation brochures and company annual reports in the “Corporations” file cabinets in the Resource Room.
- Visit [www.vaultreports.com](http://www.vaultreports.com) for information on hundreds of companies searchable by geographic area and industry.
- Utilize the company databases on Westlaw to research publicly traded companies.

## **ANATOMY OF AN INTERVIEW**

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An employment interview generally consists of a greeting and introduction, a discussion and a closing.

### **The Greeting and Introduction**

An interviewer will often begin the interview with "small talk" to relax you (the applicant) and to establish rapport. The interviewer may ask you if you had any trouble finding his/her office or comment on the weather or world events. Often at the beginning of a second interview, the interviewer will describe the interview or hiring process. For example, the interviewer may tell you with whom you will be meeting, how long the process will take, and when a decision regarding your application will be made.

It is during the initial greeting and introduction that rapport is established and that the interviewer develops first (and lasting) impressions of you. Studies have shown that interviewers often make their decisions regarding applicants within the first few minutes of the interview. Therefore, it is important that your greeting and initial comments demonstrate your confidence and enthusiasm.

To do so, you should greet the interviewer with a firm (but not overbearing) handshake and appear enthusiastic. A firm handshake conveys the impression that you are confident, while a weak handshake indicates that you are nervous or unsure of yourself. Positive rapport between you and the interviewer will also be more effectively established if you respond positively to the interviewer's comments. Since the interviewer is trying to help you relax, he/she will become uncomfortable if you

remain quiet and nervous. If you respond in a negative way (such as describing the difficulty you had in finding the office or getting to the interview), the interviewer is likely to develop a negative initial impression of you.

**Remember, your handshake and your first few comments often significantly affect the impression which you make on the interviewer.**

### **The Discussion**

The discussion portion of the interview should be viewed as a *strategic conversation*. The interviewer will ask you questions related to your resume, background, personality, interests, values and career goals. He/she will ask you why you want to work for the firm/organization, and will want to know what special skills, interests and experiences you can bring to the position. You must articulate your strengths and demonstrate that you are qualified for the position and would fit in well in the firm/organization. You must do so through your responses to the interviewer's questions and through the questions which you pose to the interviewer.

Although the interviewer controls the *structure* of the interview, you should assume control over the *content* of the discussion. In other words, you should ensure that you are not only answering the interviewer's questions, but also communicating to the interviewer the information about yourself which you feel is essential that he/she knows.

In order to do so, you should decide, *in advance of the interview*, what positive points you would like to convey during the interview and determine how to most effectively convey these points as discussed earlier in the section entitled, "Developing A Personal Marketing Plan." Ideally, the interview should flow naturally like a conversation. The more you are prepared for and at ease during the interview, the more likely it is that the interview will feel like a purposeful conversation rather than an inquisition.

### **The Closing**

The interview is normally terminated by the interviewer, and you should be aware of the cues that indicate that the interview is coming to an end. This is the time to ask questions about any important issues that might not have been addressed during the discussion. It is also an opportunity to summarize your strengths and to communicate important information, which was not previously discussed. Make sure that you end the interview by reaffirming your interest in the position (if indeed you are still interested).

If you do not know what the next step in the hiring process is and when you can expect to hear from the employer, be sure to find out this information at the end of the final interview or in your closing meeting with the hiring partner or recruitment coordinator.

### **Additional Pointers**

- *Be on time for the interview.* It may be useful to arrive a little early to organize your thoughts and observe the employer's surroundings.
- *Dress appropriately.* Even though many workplaces have become more casual, you should err on the conservative when dressing for an interview – Men should wear a suit and tie; women should wear a suit (skirt or pants) or dress with blazer.
- *Shake hands firmly* when you greet the interviewer – not fishy or too hard.
- *Express your personality* – remember, employers are looking for applicants with whom they would enjoy working.
- *Bring extras* – extra copies of your resume, writing sample, transcript and list of references – to the interview.
- *Treat the receptionist, secretary and other support staff courteously* - employers frequently ask their staff for their opinions/impressions of applicants.
- *Be prepared to discuss everything on your resume* -employers frequently will ask you to provide details about matters on which you have worked, and are often interested in the specific facts of various cases. It is critical that you reread any materials you have written to refresh your memory before the interview.
- *Convey an enthusiastic, confident, and positive attitude.*
- *Be aware of your body language* during the interview. Maintain erect posture. Avoid nervous fidgeting. Maintain direct eye contact.
- *Thank the interviewer* for his/her time and reiterate your interest in the position at the end of the interview.
- . . . and *don't worry* if you have some interview “jitters”! That’s perfectly normal!

### **INTERVIEW STYLES AND QUESTIONS**

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Every interviewer and interview is different. The individual personalities of the interviewers with whom you meet will determine the nature of the interviews. While it is impossible to identify all of the different interview styles which you might encounter, you are likely to be interviewed by an interviewer who uses either a *directive* or *non-directive* approach.

An interviewer who uses a *directive* approach will ask you *specific direct questions*. These questions are often factual questions about your background and experience. In such an interview, you will feel as if the interviewer is collecting facts and that the interviewer is asking you the same set of "standard" questions which he/she is asking each candidate.

Sometimes this type of interviewer will ask you *hypothetical or substantive questions about the law*. Often the hypothetical question will involve a moral dilemma or require you to make a difficult choice. Your response will give the interviewer insight into your values and your ability to solve problems. When this happens, the interviewer is usually more interested in how you react to the question and develop your response than in the specific answer you give. Therefore, it is essential that you take your time to respond to the question, think through your answer carefully and answer the question in a logical and thoughtful manner. Your goal is to demonstrate to the interviewer that you approach a problem calmly and have the ability to solve it in a logical systematic way.

A variation on this style is the *stress interview* in which the interviewer challenges you by asking difficult questions or purposely making you feel uncomfortable. In this type of interview, the interviewer's objective is to see how you react under pressure.

In a *non-directive interview*, the interviewer does not pose a series of formal questions, but instead conducts the interview like an *informal conversation*. In this type of interview, the interviewer will often discuss topics generally and ask broad rather than specific questions. This style of interviewing may give you the feeling that the interviewer is not really "getting down to business" or focusing. To effectively handle this type of interview situation, it is essential that you find a way to strategically communicate important information about yourself to the interviewer during the course of the conversation.

Most interviewers will use a combination of these different styles, so you should think about how you would handle each different type of interview situation. You may also occasionally be interviewed by several interviewers at once or with a group of other applicants. You also need to consider how you would handle these types of situations.

In addition, you may also encounter an interviewer who is inexperienced in or uncomfortable with conducting interviews. When this occurs, it is important that you assist the interviewer by ensuring that the conversation flows and by providing the interviewer with the information he/she needs to evaluate you, even if he/she is having difficulty asking questions to elicit such information.

Just as there are different types of interview styles, there are different types of *interview questions*. These may include *open-ended*<sup>3</sup>, *direct*, *hypothetical*, and *factual questions*. Unfortunately, you may also be asked personal questions and questions about areas into which it is unlawful for an employer to inquire (e.g., age, marital status, sexual orientation, ethnic origin). You should consider how you would respond if you are asked these types of questions. To be adequately prepared to answer any type of question, you should spend time before the interview preparing your responses to questions which you are likely to be asked. When preparing your responses, keep in mind what information is particularly important to the employer and consider how the employer would evaluate your responses.

Although it is impossible to anticipate every question that could be posed to you in an interview, there are many "standard" questions which applicants are frequently asked in an interview. **Appendix E** contains a list of questions interviewers frequently ask. It is recommended that you practice responding to each of these questions before you begin interviewing. You should also think of other questions that an interviewer might ask you, based on your own unique background and experiences, and prepare answers to those questions as well.

**Remember there is no single correct answer to a question posed during an interview. If you have spent time thoroughly assessing your personal and professional goals, researching the employer, and developing a personal marketing plan, you will be prepared to effectively answer most interview questions.**

Although the employer spends most of his/her time asking you questions, it is not only appropriate, but also expected that you will ask the interviewer pertinent, well thought-out questions. If you do not ask questions and obtain information about the employer and the position, you will be unable to thoroughly evaluate the employment opportunity and the interviewer may conclude that you are not inquisitive, thoughtful or enthusiastic.

Your questions should be genuine and appropriately tailored to the specific employer with whom you are interviewing. Even if one interviewer has answered most of your questions, it is always interesting to see if other interviewers will answer the same question(s) in a consistent fashion. In **Appendix F** you will find a list of sample questions to help you formulate your own questions. These questions are "standard", so make sure that you also ask some different and more imaginative questions.

**Caveat:** Questions about salary and benefits should not be asked until after you receive an offer of employment. These types of questions when asked during the interview can give the interviewer the impression that the applicant is more interested in the salary and benefits than in the type of work

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<sup>3</sup>Open-ended questions are questions that cannot be answered with a "yes" or "no" or one specific fact. An example of an open-ended question is, "Tell me about yourself."

he/she would perform in the position. In addition, specific questions about working hours, minimum billable hour requirements, or other related topics, need to be avoided until after you receive an offer, or asked very tactfully so that you do not give the interviewer the impression that you are reluctant to make a substantial time commitment to the job.

Most out-of-town employers do not pay traveling/interviewing expenses. However, large law firms generally pay some interviewing expenses (including travel and accommodations) for applicants who are called back for second interviews.

## **INTERVIEWING FOR DIFFERENT TYPES OF POSITIONS**

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During law school, you may be interviewing for a number of different types of positions: co-op, summer associate, judicial clerkship, fellowship, and other post-graduate positions. Employers use different hiring criteria depending upon the type of position they are seeking to fill. The criteria which an employer uses when hiring a student for three-month co-op may differ from the criteria it uses when hiring a student for a longer-term post-graduate position.

### **Interviews For Co-op Positions**

The interview process for co-op positions is a streamlined version of the interview process for post-graduate positions. Co-op employers generally interview applicants once. Those located in the greater Boston area usually conduct in-person interviews, and those located outside the greater Boston area typically conduct telephone interviews. Co-op interviews vary in length, but are generally shorter and less in-depth than interviews for post-graduate positions. A co-op interview may last from ten to fifteen minutes or as long as an hour.

The specific questions posed by interviewers and applicants during a co-op interview are, for the most part, the same as those asked during an interview for a post-graduate position. The short-term nature of the co-op employment relationship and the expectations of both students and employers, however, affect the focus of the co-op interview process. Employers often interview and select students to work as legal interns whom they would not interview or select for post-graduate positions. In assessing and interviewing co-op applicants, employers are primarily interested in identifying interns who have the requisite skills, expertise, or background to satisfy short-term needs.

Similarly, students may not be interested in starting or building a career with a specific employer, but may be interested in working as a co-op intern for that employer in order to achieve more short-term goals. These goals might include refining research and writing skills, gaining experience working

directly with clients, advocating in court, and earning a certain salary. Again, in approaching and preparing for the interview, students may focus more on these short-term objectives.<sup>4</sup>

Another distinguishing characteristic of the co-op interview process is that, with the exception of the summer quarter, employers participating in the Co-op Program are committed to hiring only Northeastern students. Since these employers are generally familiar with the program and NUSL's evaluation system, they do not need to be "sold on the school." This does not mean that the co-op process is not a highly competitive one – it is! You are competing against classmates who have extremely varied and interesting backgrounds and experiences. However, the pool of applicants seeking co-op internships is generally smaller than the pool of applicants seeking post-graduate employment.

As noted earlier, employers located outside the greater Boston area usually use **telephone interviews** to select co-op students. If you are selected for an interview by an out-of-town employer who conducts telephone interviews, you should call the employer to schedule a telephone interview. ***Be forewarned*** – many employers will actually want to interview you when you make the initial scheduling call. Therefore, you should be prepared to conduct an interview when you return the employer's call. However, if you are not prepared, explain that you are calling simply to schedule a mutually convenient time for a telephone interview and postpone the interview until the scheduled time. One way to do this is to explain to the employer that you cannot conduct the interview until a later time because you are on your way to a class.

There are both advantages and disadvantages to being interviewed by telephone. One advantage is that you do not have to dress up for the interview. Also, you can have your materials in front of you, such as a copy of your resume, a description of the position, notes on what you would like to highlight about yourself, and/or a list of questions you might want to ask. A major disadvantage is that you cannot pick up any visual cues – you cannot see someone nod, smile, yawn, frown or drift. As a result, it may be more difficult for you and the interviewer to get a sense of one another and to establish rapport.

In a telephone interview, you have only your voice through which to convey interest, enthusiasm, and professionalism. Since the impression you are conveying is so dependent on what your voice and statements convey, you must pay particular attention to the *tone* and *volume* of your voice and your *inflection* –

- Speak clearly into the telephone!
- Do not be too casual or too informal!
- Do not ramble!

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<sup>4</sup> **Caveat:** Notwithstanding such a focus, students should also be prepared to answer questions about their long-term goals and plans. See the section on "Assessing Your Preferences, Value, Interests And Skills." Employers generally ask these types of questions as a way of finding out more about applicants.



- Ask and answer questions articulately and concisely!

Remember, since telephone interviews preclude your getting a personal sense of the employer and work environment, you may need to ask different questions than you would during an in-person interview in order to thoroughly assess the co-op position. Remember to think about the differences between in-person and telephone interviews, and adjust your interview style accordingly.

### **Interviews For Summer Associate and Post-Graduate Positions with Law Firms**

Although you receive “co-op credit” for summer associate positions, they are different from other co-ops, even those performed during the summer quarter. Employers who have formal summer associate programs hire the majority of their first year associates from these "recruitment" programs. Therefore, unlike other co-op quarters when an employer may or may not evaluate a student for post-graduate employment, the employer's primary objective during the summer associate program is to evaluate each summer associate in terms of whether he/she would be successful as a first year associate. As a result, the interview for a summer associate position is very much like an interview for a post-graduate position.

For both summer associate and many post-graduate positions, employers generally conduct brief "screening" interviews either on-campus or at their offices and then ask those applicants in whom they are interested to visit their offices for a second interview.

#### **? Screening Interviews**

"Screening" interviews are brief, usually 20 - 30 minutes in length. The employer's objective in the interview is to learn more about you and your achievements, to assess how well you would fit into a particular work environment and to evaluate your ability to perform the responsibilities of a particular type of position. Remember, employers who have pre-screened your resume and selected you for a screening interview have already determined from your resume that you have some or all of the necessary skills and experience needed for the position.

#### **? Second Interviews or Office Visits**

If you receive an invitation for a second interview, it generally means that you have met the basic hiring criteria and that the interviewer who conducted the screening interview felt that you would fit well into the culture of his/her firm/organization. The second interview involves visiting the firm/organization to meet with several other attorneys, some of whom are likely to be members of the Hiring Committee. The second interview process is more in-depth than the screening process. It usually consists of a series

of interviews and the entire process may last several hours. Sometimes, part of the second interview process includes being taken out to lunch by members of the firm.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps the hardest aspect of the second interview process is its length and the fact that you will meet with several individuals, one right after another. You will need to talk about yourself and your background with each person with whom you meet, and you are likely to be asked some of the same questions by many different interviewers. You must respond fully to each interviewer's questions as if it were the first time you answered each question.

In addition, you need to impress each of the interviewers with whom you meet. Thus, you should be sure to ask each interviewer several questions. Do not assume that you do not need to ask some interviewers questions merely because you asked other interviewers questions. Each interviewer with whom you meet will discuss his/her perceptions of you with the Hiring Committee (and/or write a written evaluation of you) and recommend whether or not you should be hired. This process can be very exhausting. However, it is critical that you remain enthusiastic and alert throughout the entire interview process and that you treat each interview individually.

A second interview will provide you with an opportunity to obtain additional information about the firm/organization and to assess the work atmosphere as well as the people who work there. It is essential that you use the interview process as an opportunity to do so.

**Remember: You should be evaluating the employer and the employment opportunity just as critically as the employer is evaluating you.**

### **Interviews with Public Interest Organizations**

Interviewing for public interest positions requires self-assessment, conducting research on the organization, and being able to articulate why you are the best candidate for the position(s) for which you are applying. The main difference between interviewing for a public interest and law firm position is that a public interest employer will ask you many questions to assess the level of your commitment to the organization's work and your passion for the issues on which you will be working.

You must understand the mission of the organization and the clients it serves or the issues it seeks to protect, and be able to draw on your past experiences (i.e., co-op, clinicals, volunteer/pro bono work) which demonstrate that you have the ability and skills to do such work. It is not uncommon for applicants to be interviewed by several people at once or in succession. Candidates will usually be

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<sup>5</sup> **Caveat:** Going out to lunch with members of the firm, although less formal than other interview situations, is still an interview, and in most cases your lunch companions will evaluate you and report their impressions to the Hiring Committee. Mind your manners! Don't drink alcohol!

asked to return to the office for a second and /or third round of interviews. Finalists will usually meet with the Executive Director before an offer of employment is extended.

Confidence, enthusiasm, adaptability, ability to relate to diverse groups of people, and a commitment to social justice are important attributes to convey when interviewing for public interest positions.

## **Interviews For Public Defender/District Attorney positions**

Interviews for public defender or assistant district attorney positions can be quite stressful. Because the daily work of public defenders and assistant district attorneys requires a significant amount of adversarial trial work, interviews for these positions frequently require candidates to respond to hypothetical situations that could occur in an adversarial courtroom proceeding.

Interviewees are evaluated on their reasoning and oral advocacy skills in situations without the benefit of preparation. Interviewers are looking for candidates who can demonstrate sound judgement and who can think on their feet. Second interviews commonly consist of a panel and can last several hours. In such situations, it is important to pace yourself and to respond to all of the panel members, not just the individual who posed the questions.

Candidates may be asked specific substantive questions about criminal law, or the interview may address ethical issues that may arise in the criminal justice system. Applicants who have done a co-op at a public defender or district attorney's office may be asked to replicate an oral argument they used in an internship. Most likely, however, candidates will be asked to respond to legal and other issues arising from a set of fact patterns.

For example, the candidates may be given ten minutes to review a copy of a police report. At the Public Defender's Office, candidates might be required to "interview" the client. At the District Attorney's Office, the student might be required to "interview" the victim. A typical next step would be to ask the interviewee to argue a pretrial motion such as a bail hearing before a "judge." The applicant might be asked to "cross-examine" a witness such as a police officer. In all these instances, interviewers are looking for a candidate's ability to quickly spot legal issues and discuss them.

## **AFTER THE INTERVIEW**

After an interview it is helpful to record your impressions of the employer and the position and to note whether you need to submit any additional materials, such as a writing sample or transcript. You may also wish to write a letter thanking the interviewer for his/her time and reiterating your interest in the position.

An effective thank you letter serves two primary purposes: First, it thanks the employer for taking the time to interview you, and second, it reiterates your qualifications for and interest in the position. Writing a thank you letter should not be perfunctory, but should be viewed as an additional opportunity to promote yourself to an employer.

It is not always required<sup>6</sup> or even necessary to write a thank you letter after an interview. For example, thank you letters are not necessary after an initial screening interview (e.g., on-campus interviews). However, you are strongly encouraged to write a thank you letter after informational interviews, second and/or final interviews.

If the employer did not indicate when you will be contacted regarding the status of your application, or has not contacted you once that time period or date has passed, it is appropriate to call or e-mail the interviewer two to three weeks after the interview. After a second interview, most employers will send you a letter or call you regarding your application. However, after screening interviews, many employers contact only those applicants who they wish to invite to their offices for second interviews.

## RECEIVING OFFERS AND NEGOTIATING TERMS OF EMPLOYMENT <sup>7</sup>

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When an employer offers you a position, it is usually by letter or telephone within a reasonable time after the final round of the interview process. When an offer is made, it usually is not expected that an answer be given immediately.<sup>8</sup>

If you are unsure whether you want to accept an offer or if you are waiting to hear from other employers, thank the employer for the offer and ask when he/she needs to know your decision, and then indicate that you will reply to the employer within the timeframe given. If you need additional information from the employer prior to making a decision, ask the employer if you can call or meet with other individuals within the firm/organization. You may also find it useful to speak with attorneys from other firms/organizations, professors, the Career Services and Co-op staff, or friends and family about an employment opportunity.

Deciding whether to accept a particular position is an important and often difficult decision. Take the time to weigh all the variables. **Appendix H** contains a list of questions to which you should know the answers before you accept an offer of employment. The answers to these questions, input from others, your own perceptions and your "gut" feelings will assist you in making your decision. **Appendix H** will also help you evaluate the employment offers you receive.

**Remember: When you accept an offer of employment, you are making a commitment to an employer that you will be joining its firm/organization.**

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<sup>6</sup> Note that thank you letters after interviews for co-op positions are not expected. In cases where they might be appropriate, they are not permitted until AFTER offers have been made. See the *Co-op Handbook* for details.

<sup>7</sup> **This section is NOT APPLICABLE to the co-op process.** See the *Co-op Handbook* and/or co-op staff for proper co-op protocol.

<sup>8</sup> **Appendix G** contains The National Association For Law Placement's Standards For the Timing of Offers and Acceptances. These standards apply to offers and acceptances from NALP employer members, most of whom are the larger law firms.

An employer will take your acceptance seriously and will expect you to honor your commitment. Therefore, you should never accept a position if you do not sincerely intend to work for that employer.

Withdrawing your acceptance at a later date should only be done in exceptional circumstances. If you have accepted an offer and you are considering withdrawing it, seek the advice of the Career Services staff before doing so. If you have an active application with more than one employer and accept a position, it is your responsibility to advise each of the other employers that you have accepted another position.

## **HOW TO HANDLE REJECTION**

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**Receiving rejection letters is an expected part of the recruitment process . . .but** there is a difference in knowing this intellectually and experiencing and reacting to it emotionally.

An employer's reason for choosing another applicant may have nothing to do with you or your performance during the interview. There are a number of variables that may affect an employer's hiring decisions. Quite frequently, employers have a limited number of positions and receive resumes from several hundred qualified applicants. A rejection may simply mean that you were the "runner up" instead of the finalist, so you should try not to take rejections too personally. If, however, you have received feedback which indicates that you need to improve your interviewing skills, or have a sense that you need to do so, please seek the assistance of the Career Services or Co-op staff who will be happy to meet with you individually to discuss and critique your interviewing skills.

**Interviewing for employment is time-consuming and can be an exhausting process.** It is essential to maintain a sense of humor and retain your self-esteem throughout the process. It is also extremely important to remember that you will not be right for every position and likewise, every position will not be right for you. Therefore, some rejections may be "blessings in disguise."

## **CONCLUSION**

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We are confident that your interviewing skills will improve once you understand the purpose of an interview and how critical it is to be *thoroughly prepared*. You will gain interview experience through the co-op process and you should reflect on prior successful and unsuccessful interview experiences so that you can learn from them.

We cannot stress how important it is to know yourself and why you are interested in a particular position before you go on the interview. Remember, your goal is to identify those employment opportunities which are right for you and persuade those employers that you are the right applicant for them.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **LAW FIRM INTERVIEW EVALUATION FORM**

**Applicant:**

**Position:**

**School/JD:**

#### **Factors for Evaluation:**

**(Rating Scale 1-4: 1 = Excellent; 2 = Above Average; 3 = Average; 4 = Below Average)**

Ability to Articulate/Responsiveness:

Poise/Self-Confidence:

Maturity/Thoughtfulness:

Dedication/Sense of Responsibility:

Creativity/Initiative:

Enthusiasm:

Academic Achievement/Intelligence:

Ability to work with others:

Genuineness:

Activities/Interests:

Value of Prior Work Experience:

Commitment to Geographical Area:

Commitment to Practice:

#### **Practice Interests:**

#### **Comments (on Ability, Motivation, Personal Qualities):**

**Circle One:**    Yes    No    Unsure

## APPENDIX B

### Law Firm In-Office Interview Form

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant: \_\_\_\_\_

Summer ☐    Permanent ☐

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Please answer the questions below as completely as possible, using examples from the interview.

**1.) INTELLECTUAL AND LEGAL ABILITY.** Based on the interview, how would you assess the candidate's intellectual and legal ability? Consider the following factors, among others: academic record, demonstrated practical legal skills, intelligence, perceptiveness, articulateness, leadership ability, common sense.

**2.) PERSONAL AND INTERPERSONAL QUALITIES.** Based on the interview, how would you assess the candidate's personal and interpersonal qualities? Consider the following factors, among others: general communication skills, confidence, poise, congeniality, assertiveness, sense of humor, well roundedness, ability to work with others.

**3.) OTHER INFORMATION.** Please note any other information obtained in the interview which might be useful in evaluating the applicant. Include any information you may have about the applicant's specific interest in [firm], other employment alternatives, and interest in specific areas of law.

#### **4.) OVERALL ASSESSMENT.**

Intellectual and Legal Ability:

Personality/Attitude:

Exceptional    ☐  
Strong        ☐  
Adequate     ☐  
Inadequate   ☐

Exceptional    ☐  
Good           ☐  
Adequate       ☐  
Inadequate     ☐

#### **5.) DO YOU RECOMMEND THAT WE OFFER EMPLOYMENT TO THE APPLICANT?**

☐ YES

☐ NO



[ ] MAYBE, because I have the following reservations:

## APPENDIX C

### **Public Defender Assessment Form**

Name of Person Interviewed:

Name of Interviewer Completing Form:

Date of Interview:

I. Overall Assessment (please check one and add comments)

\_\_\_ Recommend for hire with no reservations

Comments:

\_\_\_ Strong candidate

-but would like to explore further regarding the following areas:

- -but may need development in following areas:

\_\_\_ Should continue to consider, but have specific reservations regarding:

\_\_\_ Cannot recommend for hiring because of following reservations:

## Public Defender Assessment Form (page2)

## II. Specific Areas of Assessment

Please provide comments relative to at least 3-5 of the following areas which were either covered in your interview of the applicant, which otherwise merit comment, or which were notable (either positively or negatively) in your review of the applicant's written materials:

1. commitment to representation of indigent defendants
2. relevant life experience
3. relevant legal experience including courtroom work, client interaction, investigation
4. common sense
5. verbal skills, poise, ability to be a forceful advocate
6. ability to do legal analysis
7. ability to do factual analysis
8. writing ability
9. ability to work independently and as part of a team
10. ability to accept supervision and training
11. work ethic
12. understanding of dynamics of attorney-client relationship including how to build that relationship, how to work with "difficult" clients, and the attorney's role in assisting the client to make decisions
13. negotiation skills
14. ability to deal with sometimes difficult people (i.e., judges, prosecutors, witnesses, probation officers, clerks, etc.)
15. experience with expert witnesses and expert witness issues
16. understanding of ethical obligations

[illegible]

**APPENDIX D**

**DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE INTERVIEW EVALUATION FORM**

{ } Office  
{ } Campus

**First Interview**

Applicant's  
Name\_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer\_\_\_\_\_Date\_\_\_\_\_

Comments\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**EVALUATION**

On a scale of one to ten, ten being the highest, evaluate the candidate as to the following:

Demeanor\_\_\_\_\_Ability to think on feet\_\_\_\_\_

Common Sense\_\_\_\_\_Ability to relate to community\_\_\_\_\_

Confidence\_\_\_\_\_Aggressiveness\_\_\_\_\_

Appearance\_\_\_\_\_Ethical Judgment\_\_\_\_\_

Legal Knowledge\_\_\_\_\_Interest in the job\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **Exceptional**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Second Interview Warranted**

\_\_\_\_\_No Second Interview  
**APPENDIX E**

**QUESTIONS FREQUENTLY ASKED BY INTERVIEWERS**

**Personal/Self-Assessment**

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why did you decide to go to law school?
- What qualifications do you have that make you feel you would be a successful lawyer?
- What are your short/long-term career goals? How do you plan to achieve them?
- What are your major strengths? Weaknesses?
- What would your prior employers/references say about you?
- Tell me about the two or three accomplishments of which you are most proud?
- What adjectives/words would your friends use to describe you.
- How do you spend your spare time? What are your hobbies?
- What is the most recent non-legal book you have read?

**Education**

- How would you describe your academic performance in college?
- Why did you decide to go to Northeastern?
- Would you explain the Co-op Program?
- Can you explain the grading system at Northeastern?
- How would you evaluate your academic performance in law school? How would you compare yourself to others in your class?
- Which courses do you like the best? Least? Why?

- Tell me about being a Teaching Assistant for Legal Practice? Teaching Facilitator for Law Culture and Difference? Research Assistant for Professor X?
- In what type of moot court competition did you compete? How well did you do?
- What extracurricular activities did you participate in while in college? Law school?
- What have you found most challenging about law school?

### **Employment-Related<sup>9</sup>**

- Why did you switch careers from teaching/engineering/etc. to law?
- Tell me about your co-ops.
- Which co-op experience or job have you enjoyed the most? The least? Why?
- Do you work well under pressure? Give an example.
- Describe your work style.
- How much responsibility do you like in a job?
- How much independence and flexibility do you like in a job?
- Do you like doing research? Writing? Working with clients?
- What areas of the law interest you the most?
- Are there any particular types of cases or issues on which you would like to work? On which you would feel uncomfortable working?
- What do you want to know about our firm/organization/agency?
- Why are you interested in working for us?
- What qualities/skills do you have that you think make you particularly qualified for this position?
- With what other firms/organizations/agencies have you been interviewing?
- Where do you see yourself in five years? Ten years?

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<sup>9</sup>While many of these questions may be asked by all types of employers, some are more commonly asked by private firms and others by public interest/public sector employers. Public Defender and D.A.'s offices often include hypotheticals in the interview process. These hypotheticals generally involve ethical/moral issues.

- Are you willing to travel? Relocate?
- What are your ties to this community?
- What is your experience working with diverse populations? Working with low-income individuals? The disabled?
- What motivates you to do this type of work? What is your commitment to this work?
- What are your salary expectations?
- Whom can we call for a reference?

## **APPENDIX F**

### **QUESTIONS TO ASK INTERVIEWERS**

- What type of work will I be doing immediately?
- What type of criteria will be used to assess my performance?
- Can you tell me more about how I will be trained and supervised?
- How would you describe the work atmosphere – collegial? Busy? Formal/informal?
- What are you looking for in an associate/staff attorney?
- How long will it be before I will be responsible for my own caseload? What is the average caseload?
- How long will it be before I can go to court?
- How do you decide which cases to accept?
- How is your firm/organization/agency affected by changes in the economy?
- Does your firm/organization have a five-year plan?
- What is the management structure of your firm/organization?
- What do you feel is unique about your firm/organization?
- Why did you choose to work at this firm/organization/agency?
- What type of pro bono work does the firm do?
- In what kinds of professional organizations are the firm's/organization's lawyers involved?
- Does the organization provide any type of loan repayment assistance?
- Can you tell me a little about what it is like to practice/live in this community?
- When will I know of your decision?

## **APPENDIX G**

### **V: GENERAL STANDARDS FOR THE TIMING OF OFFERS AND DECISIONS**

To promote fair and ethical practices for the interviewing and decision-making Process, NALP offers the following standards for the timing of offers and decisions:

#### **A. General Provisions**

1. All offers to law students should remain open for at least two weeks After the date made unless the offers are made pursuant to Paragraphs B and C below, in which case the later response date Should apply.
2. Law students should reaffirm offers governed by Paragraphs B and C Below within thirty days from the date of the offer letter. Employers may retract any offer that is not reaffirmed by the student.
3. Students are expected to accept or release offers or negotiate an extension of the response date by the applicable deadline.
4. After October 15, a student should not hold open more than four offers of employment simultaneously, and after November 1, a student should not hold open more than three offers simultaneously, including offers received as a result of previous summer employment. For each offer received that places a student over the offer limit, the student should, within one week of receipt of the excess offer, release an offer.
5. Second and third year students may, with the consent of the employer, extend one offer beyond December 1.
6. Employers should promptly report offers and decisions through NALPOfrs.
7. Employers having a total of 25 attorneys or fewer in all offices may be exempted from Paragraphs B and C below but should leave offers open for a minimum of two weeks.
8. Employers offering part-time or temporary positions for the school term may be exempted from the requirements of Paragraphs B and C below.
9. Violations of these guidelines should be reported to the student's career services office.

#### **B. Full-Time Employment Provisions**

1. Employers offering full-time positions following graduation to law students not previously employed by them should leave those offers open at least until December 1.
2. Employers making offers before September 15 of the student's third year for full-time positions following graduation to law students



- previously employed by them during any preceding summer should leave those offers open at least until November 1. Upon request by the student, an employer should extend this date until December 1 upon receipt of assurances from the student that he or she is holding and will hold no more than one other offer during the extension period.
3. Employers making offers on or after September 15 of the student's third year for full-time employment following graduation to law students previously employed by them during any preceding summer should leave those offers open at least until December 1.

#### C. Summer Employment Provisions for Second and Third Year Students

1. Employers offering summer positions in the fall to law students not previously employed by them should leave those offers open at least until December 1.
2. Employers making offers before September 15 for a second summer clerkship to law students previously employed by them during any preceding summer should leave those offers open at least until November 1. Upon request by the student, an employer should extend this date until December 1 upon receipt of assurances from the student that he or she is holding and will hold no more than one other offer during the extension period.
3. Employers making offers on or after September 15 for a second summer clerkship to law students previously employed by them during any preceding summer should leave those offers open at least until December 1.

#### D. Summer Employment Provisions for First Year Students

1. Law schools should not offer career services to first-semester first year law students prior to November 1 except in the case of part-time students who may be given assistance in seeking positions during the school term.
2. Prospective employers and first year law students should not initiate contact with one another and employers should not interview or make offers to first year students before December 1.
3. All offers to first year students for summer employment should remain open for at least two weeks after the date made.

## **APPENDIX H**

### **HOW TO EVALUATE AN EMPLOYER OR EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY**

#### **Assess what is most important to you**

##### **The work:**

- Is the work in your area of interest?
- Is the work compatible with your values?
- Is there enough variety?
- Is there a chance to develop broad expertise?
- Is it intellectually challenging?
- As much responsibility as you would like?
- Do you have control over your work?
- Is there client contact?
- What transferable skills would you gain?

##### **Training and Supervision:**

- Will there be regular constructive feedback?
- Is there in-house training? Other training opportunities?
- Will there be opportunities to work with more senior lawyers? Partners?
- What are career advancement opportunities?
- On what basis is admission to partnership determined?
- What does partnership entail?

##### **Workplace Environment:**

- Is the work environment congenial?
- Do people seem to enjoy working there?
- Is there a lot of staff turnover? Where do people go from there?
- Are there reasonable expectations re: billable hours? Work hours?
- Is the workplace diverse?
- How are people supported/not supported when working with difficult clients? On difficult issues?
- How is good work recognized? Rewarded?
- What is the physical space like?
- Is the support staff content? Is there adequate support?

- Is there adequate technology?
- Are there part-time work options?
- Is there diversity?

**Employer Reputation/Management:**

- What is the reputation of the employer in the legal community?
- What is the management structure of the firm/organization?
- Do more junior people participate in the decision-making?
- Do people work independently or in teams?
- Does the firm/organization engage in long-range planning?
- How is the firm affected by changes in the business cycle?
- Is the firm's success tied to the success of many clients or a few?

**Salary:**

- Is the starting salary competitive?
- Is there reasonable potential for increases in salary?
- Are raises automatic?
- Are there merit raises?
- Is there a loan repayment plan?
- Is there compensation for bringing in new business?
- What are the other benefits – medical? Dental? Life insurance? Disability? Profit-sharing? Bar expense reimbursement? Tuition reimbursement? Paid memberships in bar associations? Health club?

**Quality of Life:**

- Geographic location (cost of living, weather, culture, recreation)
- Impact on partner's career
- Impact on family