HOW TO INTERVIEW WELL

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Before the Interview

• **Know Your Resume.** Be prepared for the interviewer to ask you questions about items on your resume (previous employment, college or masters thesis, law review comment, organizations) and have a brief yet succinct response about each item. Try to think of three or four things you want the interviewer to know about you that aren’t easily reflected on your resume. To the extent possible, explain why your previous though varied experience will make you a good lawyer.

• **Research the Organization in Advance.** Check out the organization’s website. Search for newspaper articles about big cases. If there’s a prominent figure (former senator, etc.) there, you should know it.¹

• **Have Questions Ready.** Have two or three questions prepared that you will ask the interviewer. Tailor the questions to the person’s seniority, position, and length of time with organization.

  Primary practice areas? Vision for the organization? What would your role be as a junior lawyer? To what degree are associates responsible for generating new business? Can you tell me something about the types of clients the organization has? Does the firm have formal training and/or mentoring programs? What are you looking for in a new lawyer? What are the greatest challenges you, the organization, your unit, or practice group face? What’s the best thing about working here? How did you decide to work here?

• **Questions You Should NOT Ask.** Salary? Minimum billables? Vacation? Travel?

• **Questions They Will Ask.** Why should we hire you? Why are you interested in working here? In public interest interviews they are interested in you articulating how committed you are to their type of work.² Why are you interested in living here? What

¹ Also read a newspaper or news magazine not just for the big cases but to show some awareness of the world, sports, financial information, politics, etc.—the things that we lose touch with when we’re immersed in our own little law world.

² To paraphrase a friend who has spent her entire career in public interest: Expect passion and drive questions. Be balanced and honest without going all Oprah on them—“my dad beat my mom so I want to do domestic violence” is a bit much for the employer to hear.
qualities do you possess that will make you a good lawyer? What has been best/worst subject/professor in law school so far and why? What are your short and long term goals? What are your strengths/weaknesses? Why do you want to be a lawyer? How would you address this legal issue (fill in hypothetical)? What do you do in your free time? What do you like to read that's not law related?

**At the Interview**

- **Dress Conservatively.** Regardless of what the lawyers in the organization usually wear, *you* should wear a dark suit with a solid colored shirt (preferably white or pastel). No muscle shirts or plunging necklines. Little jewelry and makeup. No scents. If you don’t have a nice suit, buy one. If you need help, let me know.

- **Arrive Early.** If you plan to arrive 15 minutes early, you’re almost assured not to be late, no matter what traffic jams or other disasters besiege you.

- **Bring a portfolio.** Bring a portfolio (a leather or “pleather” folder) with a pad of paper, a pocket for keeping extra copies of your resume and references, and a writing utensil. Use the pad to take notes during your interview. Don’t try to be a stenographer; just jot down key points and notes for follow-up.

- **Smile, Shake Hands, and Make Eye Contact.**

- **Be Alert, Attentive, and Interested.** Listen (rather than pretend to listen while formulating what you want to say next). Laugh at their jokes. Let your body language and voice inflection show how interested you are in working for that organization and with that interviewer. Answer the question that is asked. Have a double espresso if needed.

- **Be Sure to Talk.** If the interviewer spends the whole time talking, she will have nothing more to say about you than you look good on paper and you physically are presentable. That may be all she needs to know to offer you a job but try to talk about 30-40% of the time.

Also expect and why questions about why you are interested in women rights as opposed to environment as opposed to animal rights. Also, prepare for questions about expectations and satisfaction. Politics are front and center. Be prepared to comment on challenges presented by judges or administrations that are hostile, while staying focused and in control of your emotions and passion for the cause.

3 Somehow avoid answers such as, “My chief weakness is that I’m a perfectionist [or detail-oriented or ...].” For many in the law, these traits are strengths and such a response seems less than genuine.
• **Avoid Short/Long Answers.** Mix it up. The best interview is like a good conversation. Varied lengths of responses help keep the interviewer interested.

• **Be Flexible.** Show flexibility in areas of law in which you’re interested unless you know that you would rather dig ditches than not work in a particular practice area.

• **Be Positive and Enthusiastic.** Focus on your accomplishments and successes. Be enthusiastic about law school and what you’ve enjoyed about it and gained from the experience. Take care not to be defensive. Though lawyering is adversarial, this process is not.

• **Be honest. Be real.**

**After the Interview**

• **Follow-Up.** Send letters within 24 hours of the interview. Write to everyone who interviewed you or helped you. Can be basically a form letter with some personalization if possible. Send on same paper as your resume.