

Yale Law School Career Development Office

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS EMPLOYERS MAY ASK

1. Getting to Know You

- Tell me about yourself. What do I need to know about you that's not on your resume?
- What has been your biggest challenge in life? What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?
- What qualifications do you have that will help you be successful in law practice? What sets you apart from other candidates?
- Why did you choose law as a career? If you weren't in law school, what would you be doing?
- Why did you decide to attend law school after _____ (getting a PhD/working for an investment bank/working in the Peace Corps)?
- How would your _____ (small group/friends/teachers/former employers/family members/recommenders) describe you?
- What do you see yourself doing five years from now? What are your long-range career objectives?
- What was the last book that you read? What are your non-academic interests? What non-academic achievement are you most proud of and why?

2. Law School Experiences

- Why did you decide to attend YLS?
- If you were Dean of YLS, what changes would you make?
- What class(es) have you liked best? Least? Why? What do you think about Professor "X" or Dean "Z"?
- What is the topic of your SAW/Substantial Paper?
- Do your grades reflect your academic abilities?
- What has been your most rewarding academic experience? What has been the most challenging part of law school for you?
- How do you contribute to the YLS community outside of class?

3. Prior Work Experiences

- What have been your most and least enjoyable work experiences?
- Which prior experiences have best prepared you to succeed in the law?
- Why did you work for X organization? How did that work fit into your future goals?
- Describe the most interesting project you worked on at X position.
- In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable? Do you prefer to work individually or in a team?

4. Interest in Organization and Position

- What would you like to know about our organization?
- Why did you decide to interview with us? Where else are you interviewing?
- What factors are most important to you when selecting an employer? What do you want out of your summer experience?
- Your prior experiences don't convey an interest in our work, can you explain that?
- How will you contribute to the work of our organization/the needs of our clients?
- In what area(s) of practice are you most interested? Do you see yourself as a litigator or transactional lawyer?
- How would you feel about representing an unpopular client or a client whose values do not align with yours?
- What is your geographical preference? What ties do you have to our area?

5. Behavioral Questions

- Describe a difficult problem and how you have handled it.
- Discuss a recent experience when you had to work under pressure.
- Describe a situation where you work was criticized and how you handled it.
- Describe a situation where you had to convince someone of your viewpoint.
- Give an example of a situation where you used good judgment and logic.
- Discuss a situation where you had to make an unpopular decision.
- Tell me about a time when you agreed to work on too many projects and had to prioritize.
- Describe a group project where you were in charge and had to deal with a difficult team member.
- Describe a situation when you were unexpectedly put in a leadership role. What was the result or outcome?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO ASK EMPLOYERS

1. Private Firms

a. Firm Structure/Organization

- Is any department/practice area responsible for most of the firm's business?
- Is the firm's success tied to many clients or to a few? How has the firm been affected by the recent economic and/or political climate?
- Has the number of partners and/or associates changed in the past 15 years? How many new associates have been hired annually over the past several years?
- What practice areas have expanded in recent years? What areas do you foresee expanding in the future? In recent years, has the firm acquired important new clients?
- Can you explain the firm's management structure to me in greater detail?
- How independent are each of the firm's offices? If interested, can summer associates spend part of the summer at another office?
- How would you describe your firm's culture?
- What is the rate of associate turnover? In what types of practice are "alums" of your firm engaged? Where do people go when they leave here?

b. Firm Policies

- What are the compensation systems for associates and partners? What emphasis is placed on getting new business and how does this affect compensation?
- What is the average number of billable hours expected? What types of required activities are included/not included in billable hours? Is pro bono work included in billable hours?
- How active is the firm's pro bono program? What kinds of pro bono work do the attorneys handle? How is it treated for assignment, workload, and evaluation purposes?
- What is the firm policy governing parental leave? Does the firm currently have any lawyers who work less than full-time? Have any part-time associates become partners?
- (If the firm represents foreign clients or has foreign office:) How are attorneys selected for posting to foreign offices?
- What are the firm's policies on in-person, hybrid, and remote work?
- What steps has the firm taken to promote diversity?
- Do you anticipate changes in billing structures, partnership track or partnership decisions, policies relating to pro bono, DEI, practice areas?

c. Summer Associate Life

- Describe some typical projects given to summer associates.

- Do practice groups offer lunches and/or other opportunities to learn about their work and clients?
- Do summer associates participate in pro bono? If so, what type(s) of issues did they work on last summer?
- What criteria are used in evaluating summer associates? Explain the review process.
- Are offers extended by a particular department? Once you join a department, is there mobility?
- Does the summer program have a mentor system? Please describe.
- Does your summer program have an official start and end date? Are there a minimum/maximum number of weeks that a summer associate is expected to work?

d. Associate Life

- What types of associates succeed at your firm and why?
- Are new associates assigned to one department or rotated through several? How is their work determined, assigned, and evaluated? When does an associate become a specialist? Who decides and how?
- When does an associate generally have contact with clients and take on responsibility for matters?
- To what extent are new associates involved in training programs?
- What professional development opportunities exist for new associates? Is there a mentoring program designed to assist associates in learning how to generate business?

e. Partnership

- What is the partnership structure?
- What are the steps to partnership, what factors are considered in electing partners, and what qualities enable an associate to become partner?
- How is performance judged and by whom?
- How many partners have been elected in the last year?
- Can you describe the partnership compensation system?

f. Interviewer's Experience

- What matters are you involved in now? Describe a "typical" day at work. What's the most interesting matter you've worked on in the past six months?
- What attracted you to the firm and your practice? What do you think differentiates your firm from other firms in your market?
- If you could change anything about the firm, what would you change?
- What do you wish you had known about your firm before starting work?
- What do you consider the most important qualities in your new associates? What kinds of assignments do junior associates handle for you regularly?
- How much PTO do you take in a typical year? Have you taken PTO this year?
- What advice can you give me as I start my career?

g. The Economy and the Firm

- Tell me about the financial health of your firm.
- What changes do you expect to see in the firm over the next five years?
- What practice areas do you anticipate growing in the next few years?
- (If there has been an economic downturn:) What steps has the firm taken in reaction to the economic downturn? Have you noticed the downturn in your own work? In what ways?
- What do you anticipate the size of your summer program to be next year? How does that compare to last year?

2. Public Interest Employers

a. Employer Structure/Organization

- What kinds of clients, cases, or projects are most typical of your office?
- How does the current political and economic climate affect your organization?
- (For government agencies during a time of administration change): How, if at all, do you think your work may change by next summer/next year? Is there anything you are excited or worried about in your work? What has been your experience when leadership and priorities change in your department/office/section?
- How secure is your funding for the next two years? Who is involved in fundraising for your organization? Do sources of funding restrict the types of work your office may undertake?
- How do you evaluate and provide feedback to attorneys? How do attorneys advance?
- How long does the average attorney remain with the organization? What kinds of law practice are “alums” of your organization engaged in?
- (If the organization is involved in lobbying or advocacy as well as litigation of cases:) What is the percentage breakdown of time spent on the various activities? Who assigns matters to interns/new attorneys? Are certain areas or activities channeled to attorneys?
- If you could change the organization, what would you change? (Do not ask the head of an organization this question—presumably they can change it.)
- How does this organization interact with other organizations doing similar work?
- How does this office select its projects, clients, or cases?
- What would you say is the biggest success that your office has achieved? What would you say contributed most to that success?

b. Summer Intern/New Attorney Life

- How much responsibility is given to summer interns/new attorneys?
- Please describe a typical day (or week) for a summer intern.
- What is the organization’s history in hiring summer interns into permanent positions?
- What training is available for summer interns and new attorneys? How are new attorneys supervised?
- What is the biggest challenge your office now faces? How would you expect a summer intern or new attorney to be involved?