

Questions Employers Often Ask

1. Self-evaluation

- ▶ Tell me about yourself.
- ▶ What do I need to know about you that's not on your resume?
- ▶ What's 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/joining the peace corp)?
- ▶ Why did you transfer to YLS from _____ (prior law school)?
- ▶ How would your _____ (small group/friends/teachers/former employers/family members) describe you?
- ▶ In what ways do you see yourself needing further development in order for you to be fully effective in your career?
- ▶ In what kind of working environment are you most comfortable?
- ▶ Do you consider yourself a team player? Why?
- ▶ What are your personal standards of success and when have you met or exceeded them?
- ▶ How would you feel about representing an unpopular client (e.g., a serial murderer, terrorist, tobacco company, foreign client defending its policy of not hiring women or religious minorities or defending against alleged human rights violations)?
- ▶ What aspects of a job do you consider most important?
- ▶ What do you want out of your summer experience?
- ▶ 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? How did it affect you?
- ▶ What are your non-academic interests?
- ▶ What non-academic achievement are you most proud of and why?

2. Law School Experience

- ▶ Why did you decide to attend law school? Why this law school?
- ▶ If you were the Dean of the Law School, what changes would you make?
- ▶ What law school subjects have you liked best? Least? Why?
- ▶ What have you learned from participating on journals or in clinical programs?
- ▶ What are you writing about for your SAW or Substantial Paper?
- ▶ Give me an example of a written legal project that you're proud of.
- ▶ Are your grades good indicators of your academic abilities?
- ▶ What was your most rewarding academic experience?
- ▶ What has been the most challenging part of law school for you?
- ▶ What do you think about Professor "X," Judge "Y," Dean "Z?" (Proceed with caution here. The interviewer could have loved a professor you did not enjoy.) Avoid saying negative things in an interview.

3. Work Experience

- ▶ What professional abilities should we know about?
- ▶ How have your prior positions helped prepare you for a legal career?
- ▶ Describe the most interesting project that you worked on last summer/last year. What about it was so appealing to you?
- ▶ What was an interesting legal issue you dealt with in your job last summer?
- ▶ Did you receive an offer from your prior summer employer? If not, why?

4. Interest in 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 a law firm?
- ▶ What is your geographical preference? What ties do you have to our area?
- ▶ How do you think you can make a contribution to our practice or organization?
- ▶ In what particular area(s) of practice are you most interested?
- ▶ Do you see yourself as a litigator or transactional lawyer? Why?
- ▶ Do you have any outstanding job offers? If so, where? Why are you looking again?

5. Behavioral Questions

- ▶ Describe a difficult problem that you have had to deal with 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.
- ▶ 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?

Questions to Ask Employers

1. Questions Geared Toward Private Firms

a. Firm Structure/Organization

- ▶ Is any department responsible for the lion's share of the firm's business? (*i.e.*, Does the litigation department primarily service clients of corporate partners, or vice versa?)
- ▶ Is the firm's success tied to many clients or to a few? How has the firm been affected by the recent economic and political climate?
- ▶ How significantly has the number of the firm's partners and associates grown in the past 15 years? How many new associates have been hired annually over the past several years? 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?
- ▶ What are the plans for the firm's future? 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? Is a merger imminent?

- ▶ Can you explain the firm's management structure? Can you share information about women in leadership positions within the firm?
- ▶ How independent are each of the firm's offices? If interested, can summer associates spend part of the summer at another office?
- ▶ What changes do you see on the horizon for your firm? Do you anticipate changes in billing structures, partnership track or partnership decisions, policies relating to pro bono, diversity hiring, practice areas?

b. Firm Policies

- ▶ 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, work load, and evaluation purposes?
- ▶ What emphasis is placed on getting new business and how does this affect compensation? What are the compensation systems for associates and partners?
- ▶ What steps has the firm taken to promote greater diversity?
- ▶ Does the firm have any lawyers who work less than full-time? How does the firm define part-time? How does it view this prospect among lawyers who already have a track record at the firm? Have any part-time associates become partners? Are there any part-time partners?
- ▶ 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?
- ▶ What is the firm policy governing maternity and paternity leaves? What effect, if any, does taking a leave have on the lawyer's prospects at the firm?
- ▶ (If the firm represents foreign clients or has foreign office) How are attorneys selected for posting to foreign offices? Is such posting highly competitive? What effect does an attorney's decision to accept or decline such a posting have on his or her career at the firm?

c. Associate Life

- ▶ What types of associates succeed at your firm and why?
- ▶ Does your firm have an associates committee? If so, can you describe their function?
- ▶ 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 major responsibility for cases or matters?
- ▶ To what extent are new associates involved in training programs?
- ▶ Is there a mentoring program designed to assist associates in learning how to generate business?
- ▶ Does your firm offer alternative work schedules to associates? If so, are those options available to both men and women?
- ▶ For the most recent associates you know who left the firm, where did they go?

d. Summer Associate Life

- ▶ Describe a few typical projects done by summer associates.
- ▶ Do summer associates participate in working on pro bono issues? If so, what type(s) of issues did they work on last summer?
- ▶ 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 works?

e. Partnership

- ▶ What is the partnership structure?
- ▶ How is performance judged and by whom?
- ▶ What are the criteria for advancement and partnership?
- ▶ Has the firm promoted attorneys to partner who have taken advantage of alternative work schedules?
- ▶ How long is the partnership track?
- ▶ 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? What kinds of work have you done since you started working for the employer? Describe a “typical” day at work.
- ▶ What one word would you use to describe your firm?
- ▶ What kinds of assignments do junior associates handle for you regularly?
- ▶ What’s the most interesting matter you’ve worked on in the past six months?
- ▶ Does the bulk of your work come from your own department, or is your work more often in support of other departments?
- ▶ What attracted you to the firm and your particular practice?
- ▶ If you could change anything about the firm, what would you change?
- ▶ Is there anything you wish you had known about your firm before starting work?
- ▶ What do you consider the most important qualities in your new associates?
- ▶ What do you think differentiates your firms from other firms in your market?
- ▶ What advice can you give me as I start my career?

g. The Economy and the Firm

- ▶ Tell me about the health of your firm.
- ▶ What changes do you expect to see in the firm over the next five years?
- ▶ With the shifting economy, has the firm’s strategy shifted in any ways?
- ▶ What practice areas do you anticipate growing in the next few years?
- ▶ 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. Questions Geared Toward 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?
- ▶ 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 particular attorneys?
- ▶ If you could change the organization, what would you change? Do not ask the head of an organization this question—presumably he or she *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 in any forum? What would you say contributed most to that success?
- ▶ I have read the cases mentioned in descriptive materials from this office. Are there other materials that would give me a better understanding of the organization?

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?

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