



11 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO MASTER IN YOUR LEGAL INTERVIEW



WHERE LAW FIRMS COME
TO RECRUIT LEGAL TALENT

Interviews are a crucial part of the candidate selection process.

On average, only [2% of the candidates](#) who apply for a job get through to this crucial stage, with employer then interviewing an average of 6 legal candidates for every vacancy they advertise.

If you're fortunate enough to get through to interview invitation stage, whether it's via video conference, a telephone conversation, or in-person, it's essential to ensure you're properly prepared.

If you're already engaged with a specialist recruitment agency like [Clayton Legal](#) to aid your job search, you will automatically have an immediate edge over others in the process, You'll be able to work with your agency to gather information about the company you're going to be interviewing with and develop a deeper knowledge of what they're looking for in a candidate. Plus their specialist consultants can also give you tips and insights on how to improve your interview techniques, from dressing correctly to preparing competency-based answers – all designed with the specific employer in mind.

How to Prepare for your Interview

Preparation is everything if you want a successful outcome to the interview – even if that is an invitation to the next stage in the process.

The more planning you do, the better equipped you'll be to handle any questions your interviewer might ask. With that in mind, start by taking a closer look at the job description for the role you have applied for.

Highlight any specific keywords in the description which may indicate the kind of “competencies” your interviewer prioritises. For instance, you might notice your employer is looking for:

- Excellent communication skills
- The ability to work in a team
- An intuitive and independent approach to work
- Experience with certain case management software or tools

Ideally, you'll have already highlighted these key components before you applied for the job, so you can tailor your CV to what you know your hiring manager is looking for. Your CV should highlight the specific skills and experiences relevant to this role – and it is quite commonplace to therefore have various ‘versions’ of your CV for each role you apply for.

Around [47% of candidates](#) who fail job interviews do so because they don't have enough preliminary information about the company they've applied to work with. Don't underestimate the value of doing your homework.

You can also gather additional information about the company by looking online and from the recruitment consultant you are working with. Remember, they are titled ‘Consultant’ for a reason – and part of the service on offer is to work closely with you on interview preparation and furnishing you with a deeper knowledge of the firm, their interview techniques, the personnel likely to be involved, and any current business news that is worth knowing.

Most law firms will have websites where they highlight important information about their business goals, company culture, and values. Make a note of anything you consider to be valuable during your homework. For instance:

- What is the mission statement of the company?
 - What has the business accomplished recently?
 - Where does the company say it's heading? What is the longer-term vision?
 - Which characteristics are highlighted in employee “About” profiles?
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Collecting information from social media profiles and even job review websites like Glassdoor may be helpful here too. Getting an overall, holistic view of their digital footprint will tell you a lot about their brand and how they wish to be conveyed to customers (and future hires like yourself).

Making the Right First Impression

With your research about the firm in question, your next step will be planning for the impression you want to make at the interview.

Go back to the company's website or social media pages and look at how employees tend to dress. You'll need to mimic this style in your job interview. Professional attire is best if you're not certain what dress code the company follows, although some law firms do adopt a more casual approach these days.

If you're attending the interview in person, think about all factors that might influence what someone remembers about you.

Taking extra steps to increase your confidence for the interview can help too, for instance:

- Take extra care with your appearance, so you know you look your best.
- Make sure your clothes fit well and look flattering.
- Practice some self-affirmation and positive talk before the interview.

If your interview is via video, don't assume you shouldn't work as hard on your appearance. Video interviews aren't an opportunity for you to attend a meeting in casual clothing. You still need to dress the part.

According to the [Wall Street Journal](#), around 70% of hiring managers would avoid offering a job to candidates who turn up to an interview in the wrong attire. 22% of hiring managers have rejected applicants based on their appearance in an interview.

For the strongest possible approach to your interview, consider practising common questions ahead of time. You don't necessarily need to memorise answers, but having a selection of well-thought-out responses pre-prepared is essential.

The interview style may vary from a casual conversation to a competency-based question and answer process.

So you are fully prepared, below is a reminder of how competency-based interviews work.



What is a Competency-Based Interview?

These interviews provide your those hiring with greater insight into how well you can demonstrate specific competencies needed for your role.

Competency-based questions don't have to be as complicated as they seem. To demonstrate your skills in an interview, you should already be drawing attention to evidence of things you've accomplished in the past. Competency-based interviews ask you to present examples of how you've used specific knowledge and skills to:

- Meet deadlines.
- Overcome challenges.
- Work collaboratively.
- Complete projects.

The best way to prepare is to look at the kind of questions you're likely to face in an interview for the firm, then prepare several responses using examples from your past. For instance, some of the questions you might hear in a competency-based interview will look at skills like:

- Communication: Tell us about a scenario where your communication skills helped resolve a problem. Draw attention to both your verbal and written communication skills here, as well as your ability to listen and understand others.
 - Conflict management: Tell us about a time when you had to deal with a complicated conflict in your previous firm. Highlight what the conflict was about and how you came up with a resolution and implemented it for your team.
 - Creativity: Describe a project or situation where you felt a conventional approach wasn't suitable. How did you use your creativity? Explain why you had to think outside of the box and how you implemented your new idea.
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- Leadership: Tell us about a situation where you had to lead or guide another group of associates. Discuss every aspect of your leadership role, from the challenges you faced and how you overcame them to how you delegated certain tasks.
- Teamwork: Describe a situation where you behaved as part of a team? Highlight your position in the team and how you worked with other people. Discuss the challenges you faced and the outcomes of your work.

11 Interview Questions to Master in your Legal Interview

Hiring managers choose their interview questions carefully to help separate the most suitable candidates from those who don't have what it takes or aren't the right 'fit' for the firm.

Each law firm will have its list of "essential" questions, but some are more common than others. Not every interviewer asks questions in a logical order. Some may move through your CV or the job description, while others are quite random in the way they ask.

However, being prepared with answers in the way we suggest will help you navigate any interview scenario that comes your way.

Questions to practice include:

1. Tell me about yourself?

It may sound like an old-school-style opening, but it is still a popular question that interviewers start with. It is a recognised way to calm down interview nerves, surprisingly, on both sides, i.e. you and the interviewer and leads to different questions later on.

Logically this is an easy question to answer provided you have a context. Though your recruitment consultant will have talked about you to the hiring manager, the key goal of the interview is for the hiring company to get to know you and assess if you will be a good fit for the role and organisational culture.

It's a great opportunity to demonstrate that you can communicate clearly and effectively, connect with and react to other humans, and present yourself professionally.

This question isn't about communicating who your favourite football team is or the breed of dog you have. The information you share here is about your work journey.

A good flow would be:

What you are currently doing, the breadth of your responsibilities and what you are involved with. Follow this by talking through your past roles and what prompted you to move. If you are only early on in your legal career, you might talk about your route to qualification, your training contract and the practice areas and experience that you really enjoyed.

Finally, share your ambitions, how you want your career to develop and why you are now applying to that firm as the next step. Unconsciously, the interviewer allows you to demonstrate that you are the logical hire for them to make.

2. Where do you see yourself in five years?

Most law firms today want to hire people with compatible visions to their own. If you've done your research and looked at their ethos and mission statement for example, you should be able to communicate how your goals align with theirs.

For instance, if the firm in question communicates about growth and expansion into other practice areas or regions, you might want to reference that in your interview to demonstrate that 1) you have done your research and 2) you have similar ambitions yourself and are invested in the journey to get there.

You may want to talk about your general career path here too – what position at the firm you hope to have in this period, and the steps you would take to get there. This may involve discussing potential courses or training requirements, but it will undoubtedly leave the interviewer with the impression that you are interested in expanding your skills and knowledge, and that you're in this for the long run.

3. What are your biggest strengths and development areas?

This question is widely considered one of the most challenging interview questions.

When addressing your strengths, recall the job description and the research you did. What kind of characteristics, skills, or competencies did the company mention? Ideally, you'll want to match your strengths to the role's requirements.

The key here is to communicate your strength and how people experience its impact. If you are tenacious, give an example of how your tenacity delivered a result for your current or past firm. As you describe situations and scenarios like this, the interviewer can begin to connect your skill/trait or strength and how it will help their own business and customer base.

When outlining your weaknesses, don't just choose common options like "perfectionism". Think about the things you're actively taking steps to address. For instance, you may say a development need is that you don't have a certain legal qualification, but you're looking at the process to acquire it.



4. Why should I hire you?

Legal hiring managers are looking for evidence you're the best candidate for the job, so if this question appears, the response you give should highlight why you are ideal for the role.

Focus on the things which make you particularly impressive to your intended employer.

For instance, if your hiring manager mentioned the importance of punctuality in the job description, explain how you have never arrived late to work or a meeting or shift in your last role. Talk about the results you have delivered for your current or previous employer. Communicate the passions and unique skills which set you apart from the competition.

5. How have prior experiences prepared you for this role?

This question is an opportunity to match your previous professional experiences with the unique skills and characteristics your new employer is looking for.

Recall the job description for this role and what kind of things you'll be responsible for in your new legal position, then connect those responsibilities with projects or case loads you've managed in the past.

Whether you are asked this question or not, make sure that you communicate what you have delivered in previous roles, especially if they align with the role description for the job you are applying for.

6. Are you a team player?

This question might seem like a simple question with a simple answer. However, the reality is it's much more complex than you'd think. The answer isn't just "yes".

Your hiring manager is looking for authentic evidence you're a team player, complete with examples of how well you've worked with others in the past.



Discuss a recent project that relied heavily on teamwork and mention how your unique skills and ability to work with others led to success. You can also discuss how you might have handled conflict in your team in the past.

7. Have you ever had to deal with a workplace conflict?

Today's workplaces are filled with employees from various walks of life. There are around [five generations in any workplace](#) at present. It means there's a good chance you're going to have to tackle conflict at some point in your professional life.

Discuss how you've dealt with "minor" conflicts and disagreements in the past. It is your chance to show how you can appreciate and listen to the points of view of others.

If you are interviewing for a management role this question is more likely to be asked as the hiring firm will want to understand your management style, how you manage a harmonious, high performing team, and your traits as a leader in the business.

8. Why are you leaving your current job?

One of the golden rules of any great interview is: never bad-mouth another employer. Saying bad things about your current manager will make you look childish or petty. Top tip: don't complain about previous work colleagues; it's unnecessary and never puts you across in a good light. Instead, explain how this new role seems to fit your goals and skills perfectly, once again drawing attention to what makes you ideal for the position.

Be honest if your reason for moving is a lack of opportunity, development or flexibility. Your [recruitment consultant](#) will put you forward for the opportunities you have said you wanted, so be honest with your hiring manager.

If you're currently unemployed, you can discuss how you've been looking for a new legal opportunity to work with a law firm where you can thrive.

9. Tell me about something you are proud of achieving in your work life?

When a hiring manager asks you what you're most proud of, they're listening to your answer and then making the connections from there to understand what you enjoy and where you can add value to their organisation.

Logically then, this is an additional opportunity to share your accomplishments.

10. Give me an example of how you identified and solved a problem in your current role?

Employers want to employ people who can be proactive and solve problems. This question can show the interviewer how you apply your problem-solving and critical thinking skills to overcome challenges and achieve success. Use an example from a past experience that highlights your thinking process; what you did, how you solved the problem and what the result was.

11. Why do you want to work here?

Your new employer is looking for a legal professional who is committed to learning, growing, and thriving within their business. They want to know you're passionate about not just the job you're applying for, but the company too.

With this in mind, use the information you collected when researching the company to highlight everything you like about the business. Discuss your values and how they align well with the vision or mission of the organisation.

You can let your passion shine through when answering these questions – just ensure you keep focused on the role and career development it offers, and not on hygiene factors such as pay and benefits. It's not appropriate to discuss these at such a juncture in the interview.

Answering Interview Questions, the Right Way

Often, when it comes to standing out in an interview for a legal position, it's important to think about not just what you say but how you say it.

We've already discussed the importance of preparing for your interview by practising beforehand. Try asking a friend or family member to go through the above questions with you to create some potential responses.

We've also looked at the importance of making the right impression from a visual perspective, with the right outfit and appearance. Another way to make sure you're responding to interview questions correctly is to manage your body language.

Body language accounts for anywhere over 50% of all communication, so don't underestimate it. Some points to think about include:

- Handshakes: Firm, practised handshakes are excellent but may be inappropriate in a post-pandemic world. Don't reach for a handshake until the hiring manager does.
- Posture: Always be always of your posture. Keep your spine straight, shoulders back, and chin lifted. Don't cross your arms or legs, as this can make you seem guarded.
- Fidgeting: Be aware of what you're doing with your hands. Don't wring your fingers or tap them. Keep your hands laid on the desk or your lap.
- Eye contact: Too little eye contact gives an appearance of nervousness, while too much is creepy. Make regular eye contact, and ensure you smile to give off friendly vibes.
- Responsiveness: Nod and acknowledge the other person in the interview as often as possible; this shows you're engaged in the conversation.

Other Quick Points for Preparation

Remember to consider the importance of video etiquette too.

Post pandemic many law firms have made remote interviews a more permanent feature of their interview process – particularly if the role itself is remote. If you have an interview via video, make sure you know how to use the software in advance and practice everything from putting yourself on mute to changing your background.

Think about the lighting in your video too and consider how easy it is to see and hear you. The right video experience should feel just as natural as an in-person meeting.

Another point to remember is your CV. The CV and cover letter you issued when applying for this role are what caught the hiring manager's attention in the first place.

When applying to a role, customise your CV and cover letter to the specific competencies and skills asked for in the job description. When you're actually at the interview, you can then draw attention back to the things you highlighted on your CV.



Questions to Ask Your Interviewer

Before we bring this report to a close, we have some additional points to consider.

The crucial questions to prepare for your interview isn't relegated just to the questions your interviewer asks you. Asking certain questions yourself can also be extremely useful. Try to come up with at least four or five questions to ask your interviewer to show your enthusiasm and passion for the role, such as:

- What could I do to impress you in the first 1-3 months? This is an excellent question to ask in a job interview because it shows employers you are eager to contribute to the firm. It's also a chance to see what kind of factors your employer will use to evaluate your performance in this early stage.
 - Are there progression opportunities for the role? Enquiring about opportunities for training shows your interviewer you're serious about a future with the firm. You don't want to be stuck in a dead-end role either, so it makes sense to ensure you can see additional opportunities with this business.
 - Where is the law firm headed in the next five years? This is a great question about the goals and missions the business is pursuing right now. You'll be able to get an insight into the values of the business and what kind of job security you're going to be dealing with too. You may also get a heads-up about upcoming projects.
 - Can you describe the culture of the law firm? The company culture will be an important factor in how comfortable you feel in your new legal role. Asking this question will give you a sense of where you're going to fit into your new position. It's also a chance to hear about some of the values that form the basis of its approach to work.
 - What do you like about your job? Everyone loves an opportunity to talk about themselves. Asking your hiring manager this question gives you a chance to build a relationship with them. It's also a great way to get an inside look at what life in the business is actually like. You can even discover how the interviewer progressed to the position they have today.
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Other popular questions involve asking about the team you're going to be working with or how your performance will be evaluated over time (such as with annual reviews).

Don't make the mistake of asking about your salary or benefits, as this makes it seem as though your interests in the business are only financial.

Remember, preparing for an interview for your new legal role can feel exhausting and stressful, but it's much easier when you have the right support.

[A specialist recruiter for the legal sector](#) will be able to give you initial support in finding suitable (and often exclusive) opportunities and liaise with the various firms in making those initial applications. When you're finally over that first hurdle and being invited for interviews, your consultants can offer further support in helping you with research and preparation to ensure you walk through the door (or appear on the screen) feeling confident and in control.

If you're considering the next steps in your legal career, and you're not sure where to get started – please do get in touch. We can talk confidentially and openly about the market, your practice area and region as well as the opportunities available – and how to ace the interview of course.

CLAYTON LEGAL

We understand that while talent is your greatest asset -it can also be your scarcest resource -which is why you need a recruitment partner with the market expertise, insight and network to deliver the right people at the right time.

Clayton Legal has been partnering with law firms across the country since 1999 and during that time has built up an enviable reputation for trust and reliability.

We provide an experienced and credible voice in the market by being able to demonstrate a detailed knowledge of the legal sector's talent agenda. Talent is all about people and just like you, our consultants are true experts in their field with a real drive for excellence that informs everything they do.

From Partners and Associates through to Solicitors, junior fee-earning positions and support staff, Clayton Legal is the only name you'll ever need -and what's more -we are nice people to do business with!

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