100+ of the Toughest Interview Questions Law Firm Ask Attorneys and Law Students and How to Answer Them

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Summary: Make sure you’re prepared for any question a law firm might throw at you by reading through this comprehensive list of questions and answers.

When you’re interviewing with a law firm, you always need to be prepared to answer any question they throw at you. Here, you’ll find a list of the most common law firm interview questions. Many of the questions may overlap in certain aspects, but the key to acing your law firm job interview is to be ready and to answer each question in a clear, concise, and specific manner.

Interview Questions to Ask a Lawyer

Prepare by carefully thinking through possible answers to questions they may be asked in advance is highly recommended. It’s often suggested that physically writing out your answers and practicing them by speaking them out loud is also an excellent strategy. The goal is not to memorize answers by rote but rather for you to become so conversant and comfortable with your answers that no question will rattle you during the interview. Ideally, your answers should roll effortlessly off your tongue as they'd expect from a seasoned trial attorney.

The following interview questions for attorneys are organized according to the following categories. Click to go directly to a specific section:
Self-Descriptive Questions
Strengths, Weaknesses, and Professional Attributes
Career Path and Goals
Job Qualifications and Suitability for the Position
Personality, Values, and Views on Law
Specific Accomplishments
Law School Experience
Outside Interests and Hobbies

Lawyer Interview Questions: Self-Description:

These are open-ended questions that ask you to describe or characterize yourself. In a law firm interview the interviewer will be interested in the substance of what you say. Through this, they will get a feel for what kind of person you are. The interviewer will also be interested in how and why you give the answers you give. The best answers will be short, simple, and articulate. At best, your answers will reveal the necessary qualities they're looking for based on the particular characteristics, traits, or experiences you choose to discuss over others.

Tell me about yourself.
How would your friends/co-workers describe you?
How would you describe yourself as a person?
What is important to you in life?
Who is your hero/heroine?
Why did you choose your undergraduate major?
How have you changed in the last five years?
What experiences most influenced your career choice?
What constitutes success in your mind?
Do you see yourself as a litigator or transactional lawyer? Why?
What do I need to know about you that's not on your resume?
Questions about Your Strengths, Weaknesses, and Professional Attributes:

These typical law firm interview questions are designed to illuminate your strengths and weaknesses in ways relevant to the employer. For your strengths, be honest and confident; don't be boastful or arrogant. The law firm is looking to fill a position that requires certain skills and you'll want them to know straight away that those are indeed the skills you have.

Why would a law firm hire a litigator who's not fully confident in their writing ability, for example? When it comes to weaknesses, you should be forthright - but be mindful - that you can almost always "spin" a "weakness" into a "positive." You can do this by demonstrating a willingness to acknowledge that weakness, how hard you've worked to overcome it, or even better, how you've learned to use it to your advantage.

What are your weaknesses?
What are your strengths?
What's the biggest mistake you've ever made?
How do you get the best out of people?
How do you go about handling difficult people?
How would you go about building a trusting relationship with a client?
How do you work under pressure?
How strong are your writing skills?
What sort of management skills do you have?
Would make you a good trial advocate?

Questions about Your Career Path and Goals:

Law firm job interview questions can reach as far back as the beginnings of your desire to pursue law. This can include anything along your career path right up to the present - including high school, college, law school, past jobs, and past professions. The interviewer wants to see a logical progression in your career arc so they feel confident that you've the mindset and experience necessary to do the job and be a part of the legal profession. The interviewer may also want to see that you're a "goals-minded" person with an overarching career plan. Lawyers with plans and goals are considered assets to law firms, as opposed to those who may seem to drift aimlessly through jobs and life without a structured or reasoned plan.

For these law office interview questions, imagine your answers as a story with a beginning, middle, and end, even if you feel there's much more story to come.

Why did you choose law?
Why did you go to law school? Have your goals changed since then?
How has your education and experience prepared you for the practice of law?
Why did you choose to work at these specific organizations on your resume?
What did you particularly like/dislike about that work?
Why did you leave your prior jobs?
What did you do between college and law school?
Why did you decide to switch from your previous field to law?
What goals have you set for yourself? How are you planning to achieve them?
What are your short/long term career goals?
Where do you see yourself in 5 (or 10) years?
In what ways do you see yourself needing further development in order for you to be fully effective in your career?

Questions about Your Job Qualifications and Suitability for the Position:
This list of legal interview questions is designed to assess whether you’re qualified for the position being offered and whether you’re suitable for the firm offering it. Your answers should demonstrate an understanding of the nature of the job, that you can do the work, and are interested in the relevant area of law. This is your opportunity to show how you’d approach the job as opposed to pursuing the job simply because it's available.

As you address questions in your interview, it's also an opportunity to demonstrate to the interviewer that you've done your research on the firm and have a good basis for wanting to be there. In your answers you can extoll on the firm's great reputation in the field and how it attracts the best clients with high quality of work. You can even mention your interest in the firm because it's located where you want to live. Whatever your reasons, have something prepared. You want your interviewer to understand that - due to your experience, background, expertise, personal goals, and commitment--there's simply no better candidate for the position and the firm.

How would you describe your ideal job?
What kinds of things give you the most satisfaction in your work?
What do you know about our organization?
Why do you want to work at our office?
Why do you want to work in our office, as opposed to other offices that do similar work?
What do you like most about this firm/practice group/organization?
Which of our legal practice areas and/or areas of interest are you most interested in?
Why are you looking at this area of specialization?
How did you become interested in X practice area/subject matter?
How much experience have you had in your field of interest?
What fields interest you other than the one you are in?
Why our practice setting? Why our issues?
What is your geographical preference? What ties do you have to our area?
What qualifications do you have that will make you successful at this job?
What sets you apart from other candidates?
Why should we select you over all the other candidates?
What can you bring to this organization?
What would you look forward to most in this job?
What would be the greatest drawback of this job be for you?
What do you think will be the hardest part of this job for you?
What kind of training or supervision are you looking for in a job?
What criteria are you using to evaluate the employer for which you hope to work?
What is your ultimate career goal? How does this job fit into those goals?
Why did you come to us through an agency?
What are you expecting from this firm in the future?
What sort of salary are you expecting?
If offered the position, how long do you plan to stay at this company?
What challenges are you looking for in this position?
How do you feel about long working hours?
What other law firms have you applied to, and why?
Why did you decide to switch from private sector to public interest work?
How much experience have you had with public interest organizations?

Questions about Your Personality, Values, and Views on Law:

These interview questions are designed to assess your personality, values, and views on the law to ensure that you're a good fit for the kind of work they do and the unique environment of the firm for which you're interviewing. Some questions will be directed at whether you're a team player--important for any law firm. Others are designed to assess your politics, awareness of current events, and the quality of other "lawyering"
skills such as analytical thinking, debating skills, advocacy, and commitment to a cause.

What qualities do you think a good lawyer should have?

What two or three things are most important to you in a job?

Are you a team player or do you prefer to work on your own?

Do you like working by yourself?

What type of people do you work with best or would have trouble working with?

How are you prepared to work with clients/colleagues who are different from you?

In what environment do you work best?

How do you get things done?

How do you deal with stress?

Describe how you would handle a disagreement between you and your supervisor about the direction a case should take.

What do you feel are things that help a person become successful?

How do you feel about accountability versus reconciliation?

How do you feel about representing alleged child abusers?

Is there any crime you would have trouble defending?

How do you feel when defense of the First Amendment conflicts with other rights?

If you weren't in law school, what would you be doing?

Tell me about a recent Supreme Court case you disagreed with and why.

If you were a court, how would you rule on the following issue...?

How committed are you to service for the underrepresented?

What interest do you have in service to the public generally?

What was an interesting legal issue you dealt with in your job last summer?

If you had a completely free choice, which law would you like to change and why?

In your view, what are the major problems/opportunities facing the legal industry?

Why don't you want to be a counselor at law?
Questions about Your Law School Experience:

As part of the hiring process, the type of common law firm interview questions you'll encounter may include those about your law school experience. Depending on the type of position you're applying for, whether you're facing requisite small law firm interview questions, law internship questions, legal intern questions, or legal job interview questions for law students--all will ask you to speak about your law school experience.

Until you've gained some experience in practice for some years, you won't have much to evaluate but your law school accomplishments.

Consider the following questions to help prepare:
What do/did you like most about law school? What do/did you find most challenging?
What was your favorite class in law school? Why?
Who was your favorite professor in law school? Why?
Tell me about your hardest law school exam question.
What extracurricular activities have you participated in during law school?
What was the issue you argued in Moot Court? What was the argument on the other side?
What clinical work have you done in law school?
Tell me about your participation on the journal, in your externship, your clinical program, or your research project.
Tell me about your thesis/journal article.
Do you think your grades are a good indication of your academic achievement? Are they an indication of your ability to do a good job at this organization?
Have you enjoyed law school?

Questions about Outside Interests and Hobbies:

Of all of the interview questions you'll be given and return, don't dismiss questions about hobbies or personal interests as either unimportant or superfluous. Your answers will reveal a lot about you. Sometimes these questions are used as icebreakers and sometimes they're used to assess whether a candidate is a well-rounded person with interests outside of work. But beware--while on one hand law firms want to hire people who have balance and texture in their lives, on the other (and often more important), law firms want to hire people who'll do the work asked of them, assimilate into their particular law firm culture, and for the most part leave their outside interests and hobbies at the door. The way to handle these questions is to show that you're a rounded and interesting person while also one who has their priorities straight. Don't let the interviewer believe there's anything in your life that'll keep you from being a team player or extremely productive.

What are your outside interests?
What are your hobbies?
How do you spend your free time?
What is the latest non-legal book you've read?
What is something interesting that's not on your resume?
Tell me about your interest in rock climbing, course on Islamic law, etc.
Would your social life infringe on your work commitment?