

Hiring Process

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Top 10 Tips for Acing Summer Associate Interviews

BY JOSHUA AMSEL
AND JACKIE COHEN

As the summer associate hiring process has become increasingly competitive, law students are constantly looking for ways to stand out and set themselves apart from their peers. One of the most important components of the recruiting process is the interview. As longstanding members and the current co-chairs of Weil, Gotshal & Manges' Professional Hiring and Steering Committee, we have conducted hundreds of interviews, both on-campus and in our offices, with law students who are eager to make an indelible impression. In this article, we will share the top tips for students when preparing for their law firm interviews, as well as

JOSHUA AMSEL is a partner in the securities litigation practice of Weil, Gotshal & Manges. JACKIE COHEN is a partner in the mergers and acquisitions practice. They are the co-chairs of Weil's Professional Hiring and Steering Committee.



mistakes we regularly see that can easily be avoided.

Be Genuine and Authentic

We cannot emphasize enough that you should be sincere, genuine and authentic throughout the interviewing process. First, we want to get to know *you*, not someone you *think* we should hire. And you want to find a firm that jibes with your true self. You will hear many firms talk

about “fit” and “culture,” and this is for good reason. In our experience, associates’ long-term happiness directly correlates to how well they enjoy the personality and culture of their chosen firms. By allowing us to get to know you during the interview process, we can get a sense of whether you will be a good fit with our culture. More importantly, the interview is a golden opportunity for you to meet different firms,



see what they are all about (i.e., what makes them tick), and start to decide which are and which are not the right fit for you.

You Don't Have to Know Everything

We hope that students understand that, during interviews, we are not trying to stump you with tricky legal questions or otherwise test your substantive legal knowledge; rather, the point of our interviewing process is to find out more about you and how you think and see the world. It is perfectly fine to be unsure about what type of law you ultimately want to practice (that is often the best way to be going into the summer associate experience, where you will typically get to “try out” a host of different practice areas), so do not feel pressured to have it all figured out. Simply go into the interview knowing what, as a general matter, interests you, and then go from there.

Do Your Research

It is important to have a solid understanding of the firm with which you are interviewing and how it fits with your goals and interests. When researching a firm, find a few key points with which you can connect on an individual level. For example, have you done work for a non-profit for which the firm also does pro bono work? Showing a personal interest in or connection

to a firm proves—or at least gives a very clear impression—you have done your research and are a candidate to be taken seriously.

Further, it is very important to have an accurate understanding of the areas in which the firm practices (as well as the relative strength of those practices) and whether they are ones of potential interest to you. An obvious and costly error would be to tell your interviewer that you are interested in pursuing a career in a practice area in which the interviewer's firm does not practice. We have seen it happen!

We also suggest researching the person or people with whom you will be interviewing and finding a unique way to genuinely connect with them. But do not go overboard. It is great to mention a shared alma mater or work for a shared client, or to note your joint interest in human rights. Refrain from regurgitating facts about your interviewers only to demonstrate that you did your research. The best interviews are the ones that proceed naturally.

Practice and Prepare

Your law school provides you with many tools to prepare for interviews, both on-campus and with various law firm and other alumni contacts. Take advantage of those opportunities! Visit your Career Services office on campus to see what types of services they offer. As a first step, many Career Services offices

will be able to vet and improve your resume. Once your resume is finalized, take advantage of any mock interview programs and conduct your own mock interviews with friends. We suggest participating in several mock interviews, as these can be extremely helpful. Many are conducted by alumni, giving you additional opportunities to meet and make connections with law firms and other potential employers. Mock interviews are a good way to build up a comfort level and resolve any nervousness you may have about the process, in advance of the busy interview season, so that you can hit the ground running when the time comes. For example, through mock interviews, you will get comfortable talking about yourself, which often feels awkward at first, but gets easier and more natural over time. Determining your strengths and weaknesses, and how to best highlight those strengths, are crucial elements to acing the interview.

Know Your Resume and Speak Positively

As previously noted, talking about yourself may feel awkward at first, but it is important for you to be comfortable walking your interviewer through your resume and selling yourself along the way. Do keep in mind, when writing your resume, that what you put on paper should match what you plan to say

in an interview. Do not feel pressured to put down extracurricular activities just to pad your resume or to impress the reader with your worldliness; instead, be truthful. In an attempt to gain a better understanding of interviewees, we often ask what they like to do in their free time, and you would be shocked by how often the answer is something *other than* what is on the interviewee's resume. In short, draft your resume so that it accurately conveys who you are (where you have been, and what you are all about) and what interests you.

Additionally, what you did during your summer prior to interviewing is not necessarily weighted heavily, but make sure you can speak positively about the experience and have a few interesting anecdotes. Unfortunately, we have interviewed candidates who focus only on the negatives, explaining what they did not like about a particular employment experience or previous internship program, and negative comments never reflect favorably on an interviewee. When discussing a previous summer job, a class you took or a professor you had, always stay positive and focus on what you took away from the experience. Being negative simply does not leave a good impression.

Be Professional

When it comes to interviewing, you do not need to be stiff or

entirely "buttoned up," but you should always maintain a professional demeanor. Regardless of the demeanor of the interviewer, it is important not to be too relaxed or too comical. Remember, this is a job interview! You are not trying to make friends; you are trying to get hired. Further, it is essential to be kind and courteous to everyone you meet during the interview process. Whether you encounter a receptionist, associate, recruiting professional, partner or anyone else, you should treat everyone with the same respect and courtesy. We have

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heard of instances where a candidate we thought to be polite and respectful was not the same to others along the way, which will hurt your chances of receiving an offer.

While it should go without saying, we still see the need to stress the importance of dressing appropriately for your interview. You do not want anyone commenting on your interview outfit—good or bad. By nature, the legal industry is a conservative one, so keep that in mind when deciding what you are going to wear for your interview.

Business attire in classic colors is always a smart choice.

In addition, your body language often communicates more than you realize. It is important to maintain a level of engagement to convey to the interviewer that you are listening and care about what they are saying. It is true that, as lawyers, we love to talk, but we do not want to be speaking with someone who is entirely unresponsive. What we are saying is going to help you get a better sense of what we do here and if this is the place for you, so definitely pay attention.

Have Questions

It is important to always have questions ready for an interview. While "canned" questions get a bad rap, there are still important standard questions that can provide you with very valuable information. Questions such as "Why did you pick this firm and why do you stay here?" or "Why did you choose your practice area?" can be very informative. Do not shy away from using these types of questions. They are good to ask a partner or associate and will get you the information you need to better inform your decision about whether or not the firm will be a good fit for you.

Having a few questions in the back of your mind will also increase your confidence. Occasionally, there will be dead space to fill if

you interview with someone with whom you do not have a natural rapport. Prepared questions can fill these awkward silences should they arise. Further, having a few prepared questions at the ready allows you to thoughtfully listen to the answers to the question you just asked, instead of scrambling to come up with more questions, allowing you to fully engage with your interviewer in a more meaningful way.

However, do not ask questions for which answers are readily available. For example, a firm's general practice areas and office locations are listed on the firm's website, so asking that question during an interview can make the interviewer feel that you are not well-prepared, or are not genuinely interested in the firm. You should also avoid questions that are too casual or entirely unrelated to the interview.

We will always leave a couple of minutes for questions at the end of an interview because we feel it is an extremely important part of the interview, so, again, always have a couple questions ready. There is always more to find out about. In fact, questions like "Why did you choose this firm?" could (and probably should) be asked of every single person you encounter, as each answer will be different and all will give you insight when it comes to making your own decision at the

end of the day. Finally, keep in mind that you do not always need to wait until the end of the interview to ask your questions. Instead of us asking you all the questions, if you have a question about something we are talking about, ask it. This allows for a dialogue, as opposed to a one-way conversation.

Be Comfortable Talking About Yourself

Being comfortable talking about yourself is important for anyone participating in the interview process. We know that having multiple interviews back-to-back can be difficult and exhausting, and you may get tired of talking about yourself. It may seem like you have told your personal story a million times, but remember, each new person with whom you speak is hearing your story for the first time. Regardless of whether it is the first interview of the day or the very last, remain energized and engaged so that you convey your interest and excitement to everyone you meet.

Consider Your Thank You Note Carefully

We recommend carefully considering whether to proceed with a thank you note after an interview. We do not feel it is detrimental to your candidacy if you do not send a thank you note. And a poorly written, inaccurate note can definitely

work against you. But if you nevertheless proceed with writing and sending one, be sure to personalize it. Your interviewers will know if you send essentially the same note to everyone with whom you have met at the firm.

Do Not Let Rejection Get You Down

Throughout our time here and in many other hiring situations, there are often more people to whom we would like to make an offer than we are able. Our decision to extend an offer to one person over another can depend on so many different factors. If you do not receive an offer and are able to get constructive feedback, that can be helpful for future interviews. In addition, maintaining relationships could also bear fruit in the future—you never know when you might cross paths with your interviewers again.

Overall, the old adage that approaching this process like a marathon rather than a sprint certainly applies here. While there are many steps throughout the summer associate interview process, we hope you keep these tips in mind so you can clearly and decisively put your best foot forward. Best of luck!