

PUBLIC SECTOR INTERVIEWING WITH CONFIDENCE:

Even if you have little to no public sector work experience!

The Big Secret? Public interest employers want to feel that you have a deep understanding of our office, how hard our job can be, and still want to work for us. Remember this with every answer you give – even the hypothetical questions you may get.

TIP #1: **Review our website and focus on our mission and the language we use to explain our goals.** Know how the office is broken down into groups/units/zones/bureaus. Look for any information about our interview process, what we say about our work day, etc.

TIP #2: **If you want a really great interview, you need to talk to people**

- **Who?** First, Career Services and then either a lawyer in our office, a lawyer in the same field, or a classmate who worked in our office.
- **How do you find this person?** Ask career services for an alum to call, attend a job fair or panel discussion that we will be at, talk to your friends at school to see if anyone has an aunt or a second-cousin-twice-removed you can speak with.
- **What do you ask?**
 - **About the office:** What's the mission of the organization and how does it differ from other similar offices? What's the most satisfying/hardest thing about working there? For new attorneys, what is the breakdown of time spent in the courtroom, client interaction, research and writing?
 - **Interview questions:** Do they ask hypothetical questions? Mock opening/closing/cross? Behavioral interview "tell me about a time" questions? If they ask hypothetical questions, what are the most important things to remember when answering?
 - **General advice:** What are the three most important qualities for an attorney in your office? What do you wish you had known when interviewing in this field of practice? Is there anything you should do to prepare for the interview?

TIP #3: **Be convincing in the interview when you don't have directly relevant experience**

- **Explain why you want to do our work:** Do you have a personal connection? A class, clinic, or courtroom observation that made you decide this was the career for you? Do not be bound by the experiences listed by your resume.
- **Analogize the experience on your resume to what you know our job is:** often client contact, dealing with highly emotional issues, courtroom or public speaking are all relevant.
- **Connections!** If you talked with someone in our organization, mention how that made you want to work for us.
- **Eye contact and body language are important** to show us you mean what you say.
- **Future involvement:** If your experience and classes aren't in line with our work, (and only if true) talk about future classes or internships that you plan to take and how those experiences will help you in our field.

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TIP #4: How to handle a hypothetical question

- **There is usually no “right” answer, BUT** there are answers that are more in line with how we want our attorneys to process unexpected issues - show that you already think that way.
- **How do you do this?** Remember our mission, what makes our organization unique, and answer accordingly. Are we a progressive government office or a more hard lined office? For criminal defense/legal services offices, figuring out how to protect the client is key.
- **What if the interviewer pushes back on your answer?** Listen to see if they are trying to be helpful softball or if they are trying to check your ability to stand your ground.

TIP #5: How to handle an impromptu opening/cross/closing

- **Know through research that the question is coming** and, if you have no experience, talk to your school’s trial advocacy or mock trial professor and read a trial ad study guide to learn the format.
- **Practice in advance:** ideally with a friend who does mock trial or took trial advocacy.
- **Outline:** Make an outline of the most important things to address, organize them in the order you want, and check them off as you answer.
- **Hide your nerves:** We all have them, but try not to show them.

TIP #6: How to handle a “tell me about a time” behavioral interview question

- **Go through your job history in advance of the interview and come up with examples** of successes in each of your jobs (even from when you worked at McDonald’s in high school).
- **Anticipate the topics:** Questions often involve time management, working well with others, and dealing with difficult people.
- **When answering:** Think back through the examples you thought of in advance to find the one that is most applicable and puts you in a good light.
- **General format of Answer:** Answer by explaining (1) the problem, (2) your goal, (3) your actions, and (4) the positive result.

Additional Suggestions/Resources

Volunteer: Even if you have not spent a summer or semester in a particular office, look into whether you can spend a winter break or spring break either in the office or a similar office. If that doesn’t work, go to court and observe your target employer’s attorneys in the courtroom. These experiences will add to your ability to persuade us that you want to work in our field.

Online Resources: From Harvard Law School - Information about the kinds of questions you may get, including general questions, hypothetical questions, and behavioral interview questions -

<https://hls.harvard.edu/dept/opia/job-search-toolkit/interviewing-and-following-up/questions-you-should-be-prepared-to-answer/#hlsnav-overview>

“The Criminal Hypothetical and Other Unique Aspects of the Criminal Law Interview Process” by Nicole Vikan and Jory Fisher - <https://www.law.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Crim-Hypos.pdf>

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