

ACING THE INTERVIEW: Part I

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Disclaimer: The following information is only meant for guidance and is not to be construed as exhaustive for the purpose of preparing for an interview. You are highly encouraged to go beyond this during your preparation.

If you are about to appear for interview, it is normal to feel anxious. But with the right amount of preparation and guidance, you can definitely clear that interview. This guide will give you a roadmap of how interviews are conducted and what is expected of you. After reading this guide, I am sure you will feel much more confident while appearing for your interviews.

HR QUESTIONS

Interviews are generally conducted by a partner and an HR personnel on the panel. Interviews are usually a combination of HR and Technical questions. I believe it's approximately a 60-40 split. In this part, we will deal with HR questions.

Recruiters know that as fresh law graduates, you don't know much about the practical aspects of the law, which is why they usually don't ask too technical questions. But what is expected of you is a clear and coherent answer when they ask you HR questions. This is why it is extremely important to be well prepared for the HR questions when appearing for an interview. While HR questions are usually asked at the beginning of an interview, they can also be tossed in the middle or at the end of the interview. Some common HR questions that you should prepare for are –

1. Tell me a bit about yourself.
2. Tell me something that is not there in your CV.
3. Why do you want to pursue law?
4. Why not litigation/ Why commercial law? [or vice-versa]
5. What inspired you to pursue corporate law?

6. Why do you wish to work with our law firm?
7. Why would you pick this firm over others you have interned at / Why would pick a small law firm over other big law firms?

8. Tell us about your biggest strengths and weaknesses.
9. Tell us about one major accomplishment that you are proud of.
10. Tell us about a mistake you made and what you learnt from it.
11. How would your co-workers describe you?
12. Where do you see yourself in the next 5 years?

I would strongly recommend that you have an answer prepared for every question on this list.

Note: Questions asked in the interview may be slightly rephrased. Furthermore, this list of questions is not exhaustive, but these are the basic questions you must prepare for.

HOW TO ANSWER

I'm sure most of you already know about these questions and may have prepared answers for the same. It is equally important to understand what the HR is looking for to be able to answer these questions well. The answers to your HR questions should reflect who you are as person, which is why **I cannot tell you what to answer, but can only guide you on how to think when framing your answers.**

Tell me a bit about yourself.

A lot of us struggle while answering this question - how should I describe myself? What should I mention in my answer? Should I talk about my interests and hobbies? How long should my answer be?

This question is an open-ended question, and is deliberately framed as an unstructured question. The interviewer wants to see if you can give a concise answer in a structured manner. Try to answer this in 3-5 mins. Remember, this is not the time to talk about your hobbies or what you would do in your free time (unless they have specifically asked you).

While there is no perfect answer to this question, the best practice is to present a brief introduction about yourself, keep it law-related and then go on to demonstrate the soft skills that you have acquired over the years. Be succinct in your answer, use the job description to prepare, and tie your story to the firm's needs.

LFR Tip: Go through the firm website and brochure. Do they highlight any particular soft skills the firm is looking for in a candidate? Weave those qualities into your answer, while also

demonstrating occasions where you have used those skills.

Why do you want to pursue law?

For some of you, answering this question may be quite straightforward. Maybe you grew up in a family of lawyers, and you naturally gravitated towards it, or you witnessed some injustice in life which convinced you to pursue law. For the rest of you, it may not be that easy. You could give a cliched reason for pursuing law (e.g. watched Suits/ Boston Legal etc.), or you could give a reason which shows you are commercially aware and you know what business deals are happening around you. Either way, whatever reason you give, make sure you have enough knowledge about it to convince the recruiter that it is actually the reason why you chose to pursue law in the first place.

LFR Tip: Do not give a vague reason. Be prepared to be further questioned about it if you do.

Why commercial law? Why not litigation?

This is a common question thrown at students to see if they really understand what they are getting into. The best way to answer this question is to briefly talk about your interest in the commercial law. You can do this either by talking about any papers or articles you have published, or simply pointing to the work experiences you have gained while pursuing various internships at firms.

LFR Tip: If you are asked why commercial law, don't talk about your interest in constitutional law or family law. If you do that, your interview will end right there.

Why do you wish to work with our law firm?

The answer to this question allows you to demonstrate how much you have researched about the firm. When researching about the firm, look at its practice areas, their firm culture, any initiatives undertaken by the firm etc. Read up on any recent deals the firm has done that you find interesting. Mostly importantly, explain what is it about the firm that motivates you to apply for their firm.

LFR Tip: Try not to mention that the firm was ranked the best in some poll or rankings, as rankings change every year. Try not to name one or two partners at the firm as your reason for applying. There is a slight chance the interviewer may not take it well.

Tip: If you can replace the name of the firm with another firm when stating your answer and

it still makes sense, the answer is not good enough. Your answer for this question has to be firm specific – things that are unique to that particular firm.

Tell us about your biggest strengths and weaknesses.

Strengths:

The best way to answer this is to describe a relevant experience. Talk about a strength which will possibly benefit you in the role you are applying for. e.g. team work, time management skills etc. Don't just state these skills, also demonstrate these soft skills by giving specific examples or instances where you learnt or demonstrated these skills. The examples do not have to be within the context of a law firm internship, they can also be from your experience in various societies or committees.

Weakness:

Firstly, don't try to pass off a strength as a weakness. The interviewers can see right through it. Avoid saying things like, "My biggest weakness is I work too hard."

Secondly, while stating your weakness, ensure that it is not a skill that is very important for the law firm job. Do not say things like, "I am bad at time management/ meeting deadlines". Try to use a weakness that is not too relevant for a law firm job.

Where do you see yourself in the next 5 years?

While I don't think this question will be asked during the pandemic as most of us are unsure what the future holds, this has been a common question in the past. The recruiter is simply trying to figure out whether it is worth spending resources to train you, or will it just be a waste of time as you will leave the firm shortly after joining.

LFR Bonus Tip:

Understand that if you have been shortlisted for an interview, it means the recruiter has seen some potential in you and is inclined towards hiring you. Overall, the whole point of an HR round is figuring out whether you are the right candidate for the job and whether your values align with the interests of the firm. If you want to stand out, your answers should reflect who you are as a person and why your qualities make you the perfect candidate for the job.