

Telephone interviews: tips for lawyers

For the sake of convenience and practicality – for example, when applying for a position overseas – it often makes sense for law firms to conduct the first stage interview over the telephone. Although this may seem a less “formal” way of assessing candidates, in many respects a telephone interview involves higher-level communication skills as your capacity for expression is limited (e.g. body language.) It is therefore important to prepare well as you would for any other interview format.

Here are our suggestions for passing this crucial but potentially tricky stage in the process.

Practice

- **Try to think of competencies and attributes** which law firms might question you on – internet research can help, but this could include:
 - problem-solving
 - attention to detail, holding yourself to a high professional standard
 - interpersonal and communication skills, including teamwork and client liaison
 - commerciality and business acumen
 - motivation and passion for your area of law
- **Write down some examples** of when you have demonstrated the above, and try to provide a variety of scenarios instead of relying on the same experiences each time.
- **Practice with a friend or family member**, even if only to test the reception in the place where you’ll be taking the call.

Pre-interview preparation

- **Allow plenty of time.** Typically a telephone interview will last approximately 30 minutes, but they can go on longer than the allotted time or the interviewer could be running early / late.
- **Find a quiet, private place** to receive the call so you aren’t disturbed by others, and make sure to remove any potential distractions.
- **Know who will be calling you** and find out more about their background.
- **Presentation is still important** – if you are at home, it might help you feel more prepared if you dress smartly and sit at a table / desk instead of on the sofa. Good posture will have an effect on your speech.
- **Print off anything you might need** such as your CV, any research about the firm / department and questions you wish to ask at the end. This information should be brief and clearly presented so you don’t end up rifling through piles of paper!
- **Keep a pen and paper handy** so you don’t forget to ask any questions or include ideas that crop up mid-conversation.

On the call: do...

- **...speak in a calm, considered manner** and ensure the interviewer has finished speaking before you respond. Slow, deliberate speech can lend additional impact and gravitas, plus it gives the other party time to think about the substance of your answer.
- **...keep your answers concise** and avoid rambling. A telephone interview takes place in a shorter time frame, but the face-to-face interview will allow you to go into more detail. The interviewer will ask if they would like you to explain further.
- **...make references to your pre-interview research**, but keep them relevant to what is being asked – avoid reeling off information.
- **...be grateful** for the time your interviewer has invested in the conversation.

And don't...

- **...give generic answers** – make sure you demonstrate why you want to work for this firm specifically and why this would constitute a logical move for you.
- **...feel obligated to fill the silence** if there is a pause after you've finished speaking. The interviewer is probably making notes.
- **...forget to smile!** The interviewer might not be able to see your facial expression, but it will come across in your speech and enhance the delivery of your answers.

Questions to ask

Remember, an interview is also the firm's chance to prove themselves to you! Your questions should convey your ability, as well as your enthusiasm for the firm and role.

Here are some good examples of questions to ask at the end of your telephone interview:

- *What is a typical day like for an associate within [firm / department]?*
- *Can you tell me about an interesting case or transaction you've worked on recently?*
- *How do you feel the practice will develop over the next five years?*
- *What is your approach to associate evaluation, training and development at [firm]?*

Contact

Please contact Division Head, Jason Horobin at Origin Legal International on +44 0207 096 1681 or email jason.horobin@originlegal.co.uk for further advice.

References / further reading

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<http://abovethelaw.com/2015/07/7-simple-steps-for-a-successful-phone-interview/?rf=1>

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Telephone interview tips: dos and don'ts – *REED* <https://www.reed.co.uk/career-advice/telephone-interview-tips-dos-and-donts/>

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