



LEGAL AID ONTARIO
AIDE JURIDIQUE ONTARIO

PREPARING FOR AN INTERVIEW



Tips, Tools and Resources for Candidates

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INTRODUCTION

The job interview is your opportunity to present your experience, skills, knowledge and background and to convince an interview panel that you are the best candidate for the job.

However, the job interview process can be mystifying. Candidates are often anxious about the process, and not certain how best to prepare for the interview. Questions can seem vague, and it's sometimes difficult to comprehend what response the interview panel is looking for.

So many times, candidates leave interviews only to second guess their responses or presentation, or upon consideration think "If only I had answered a different way...".

The best approach is to be as prepared as you can be for the interview, and to understand as much about the hiring process as possible. This toolkit has been developed to help job applicants be as comfortable as possible with the process, and to give their best performance at the interview.

For your assistance, this kit provides some helpful ***tips*** about how to prepare for an interview, and how to present yourself in an interview situation.

We hope you will find the information presented in this kit useful.

THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

What to Expect

An interview at Legal Aid Ontario (LAO) is a fairly formal process with a predictable, structured format.

1. *The Invitation:*

When you are invited to the interview, you will be told the time and date and location for the interview, and how long it is expected to take, as well as the names and titles of the people who will form the interview panel. You will be advised if there is to be a written test and if so, how long it will take.

When you get the invitation, you should take the opportunity to request any information that may be available about the position you have applied for, including a copy of the job posting, if you hadn't already saved it.

2. *The Interview:*

At LAO, the interview panel is generally composed of between 2-4 people, including the manager of the position you have applied for. Other members might be a representative from the HR Department, other managers, or stakeholders who may have an interest in the outcome of the competition.

There will be a series of questions designed to explore your skills, experience and knowledge as they relate to the position you applied for, and to gauge your potential to take on the new role. Normally, the panel members will rotate asking you the questions. The interview panel will be writing down your responses so that they are able to refer to them later in assessing the results of the competition. Don't be thrown off by the fact they are writing. They have to document their assessment of each candidate. Don't wait for them to finish what they are writing – keep talking.

Each question is given a weight according to how relevant the skills, knowledge or experience being sought is to the position. Each candidate is asked the same set of questions, and scored using the same rating scheme.

After the panel has posed all the questions, the panel will ask you whether you have any questions.

The interview will wrap up by advising you of next steps and when you can expect to hear back about a decision.

3. *The Aftermath*

Occasionally, a second interview will be conducted with those candidates scoring highest in the first interview. In such an event, you may be interviewed by a different selection panel, although the manager of the position you applied for will likely still Chair the panel. You will be asked a new series of questions, often focusing on particularly important skills or challenges of the position.

4. *The Result*

After all the candidates have been interviewed, and all other employment related information collected through reference checks, the interview panel will rate and rank the candidates, using the predetermined scoring scheme.

Reference checks are a way for the interview panel to confirm what you have told them and to ask additional information about you. Use the names of current and former supervisors and other individuals who are able to provide qualitative information about your employment history. You may be asked to complete a reference check consent form.

If you are successful in the reference-checking stage, you will receive a job offer, both verbally and in writing, usually from the manager of the position you applied for.

If you are unsuccessful in the competition, you will be advised, either verbally or in writing, either by the manager of the position or by a representative from the HR department.

Types of Questions

In an interview, you should expect different kinds of questions. These include:

- **General questions** – The panel may ask for information about your work history, skills or knowledge
- **Technical questions** – The type of question seeks to test your knowledge of programs, policies, procedures which are related to the position.
- **Scenario questions** – These questions present you with a hypothetical situation and ask you to suggest a solution. Scenario questions are designed to test your analytical and reasoning abilities, your resourcefulness and your creativity.
- **Behavioural questions** – This type of question asks you to draw on your past experience to give an example of how you demonstrated a specific skill. These kinds of questions are also sometimes referred to as “competency-based”. These questions are specific, and challenge the candidate to provide concrete examples of their achievements in different types of situations.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Preparation tips

Preparation is the key to success in an interview. By being thoroughly prepared:

- ✓ you will be able to present yourself to the panel in the best light possible
- ✓ you will be ready to present the best examples of your experience and skills
- ✓ you will have more confidence, an important ingredient in a successful interview

The Position

- Research the job and its requirements as much as possible
- Carefully review the job description and the job ad. Make particular note of the “Qualifications” section of the job ad. These qualifications, along with the other job responsibilities and requirements noted in the ad, will most likely form the basis for the questions you will be asked at the interview.
- Make sure you have an understanding of the key challenges of the position. If you have any questions about the job requirements or responsibilities, don’t hesitate to contact the manager of the position for clarification.
- If the position you are being interviewed is a Staff Lawyer position, it is part of LAO’s Lawyer Workforce Strategy. Be sure to familiarize yourself with its objectives and be prepared to speak about the reason why you would be a fit for the LWS.

Your Skills and Experience

The key to preparing for structured interviews is to focus on your personal experience, achievements, special skills, and how you acquired them. Many interview questions are designed to capture what you have actually accomplished, what your involvement was, how you acted, and what the outcome was.

- Remind yourself of your skills, knowledge, work history and previous experience, and then think about how your qualifications relate to the requirements of the position
 - Think about the job responsibilities and qualifications, and think of some specific examples of how you demonstrated the required skills/experience in the past.

Preparing for the Questions

- Once you have reviewed your skills and experience and written up your examples, develop some mock questions related to the qualifications of the position.
- You may be asked an opening question about your skills and experience and what strengths you bring to the job. To prepare, read the job ad and job profile and develop four or five points which link your strengths/experience to the position. The panel will have read your resume, so try not to just repeat what’s in it. This is an opportunity to market your capabilities and demonstrate your understanding of the job.
- Behavioural questions focus on examples of past behaviour, asking you to draw on your past experience to give an example of how you demonstrated a specific skill. Use the PAR system as a cue to remind you how to respond to these types of questions:

- ✓ P - The Problem: describe the problem situation. Set the stage for the response by describing the problem/issue/opportunity/challenge. Explain what needed to be fixed, and why.
- ✓ A – The Action: describe what you did in response. Be clear about your role, and why you took the action you did. Use “I” rather than “we”.
- ✓ R – The Result: describe the outcome, being as measurable as possible. Tell the panel the result of your action. If the outcome was not successful, describe the lessons you learned as a result, and what you would do differently the next time.

For more information on how you can prepare for a Lawyer Workforce Strategy interview, please see: <http://www.legalaid.on.ca/en/careers/interested.asp>

AT THE INTERVIEW

Making a Good Impression

It is important to make a good first impression with the interview panel, and to establish a feeling of rapport. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Try to smile and appear at ease. An interview is a stressful situation, and you may have to make a conscious effort to avoid looking nervous. A mock interview can help you get better at this
- Greet everyone on the panel with a firm handshake
- Maintain eye contact as much as possible with the person asking you the question
- Speak up – don’t make the panel have to strain to hear your responses, and try not to speak too fast.
- Feel free to bring water with you to the interview, or to request a glass of water before beginning.
- Dress appropriately and professionally, but comfortably.
- Be early for your interview if possible. Never be late.

Interview Tips

- The key to performing well in structured interviews is to focus on your personal experience, achievements, special skills, and how you acquired them. Many interview questions are designed to capture what you have actually accomplished, what your involvement was, how you acted, and what the outcome was
- As the panel is interested in what you personally did, try to use the word “I”, as opposed to “we”. If what you did was part of a team effort, explain what your role was on the team. While credit should be given to the team, you should focus your answer on your value-added contributions
- Listen carefully to the questions. Many candidates try to anticipate the full question, and respond without comprehending what is actually being asked. Ask to have the question repeated or ask for clarification if necessary

- It is quite acceptable to bring notes into the interview to refer to as you respond to questions. Your notes should be memory cues only, however; you should never read a prepared response to the panel.
- It is also acceptable to bring a pen and notepad into the interview. Feel free to jot down the questions if that would help to keep you focused. Feel free to take a moment to jot down some key points you want to make in responding to each question.
- Don't rush to respond to the question. Reflect briefly on the question, and about which example is best and how to phrase your response.
- Be positive, but always honest. Don't apologize for a lack of experience – it is not your role to point out your shortcomings. Focus on the experience you do have, and how it relates to the job requirements.
- If you draw a blank for a particular question, ask the panel if you might return to the question at the end of the interview. Try not to dwell on “missing” an answer; focus on the next question being asked and on providing a focused response.
- In order to answer the panel's questions in a way that will put you in the best light, you need to present your skills and experience that relate to the position:
 - Use concrete examples to demonstrate your skills
 - Tell the panel a story about when you used the skills
 - Use measurable results if possible to describe the situation
 - Tell the panel how a project or assignment turned out. Even if the result was not entirely positive, you can talk about lessons learned, or things you would do differently next time.
- If you are not sure you have provided the interview panel with the information they were looking for, ask them. Check whether you answered the question they asked, or whether they need additional information upon which to assess your response

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Evaluating Your Performance

Even if you don't end up getting the position, an interview is a great opportunity to learn about the recruitment process and to perfect your interview skills for the next time. Here are some tips for evaluating your performance at an interview:

- Immediately after the interview, take notes on what questions you were asked and how you responded
- Think about whether you used the best possible examples to illustrate your responses. Did you set the context clearly? Did you talk about your role in the situation? Did you describe the outcome?
- If you feel you weren't clear in your response, or didn't provide the best example possible, think about what you would say next time.