Prepare for job interviews as carefully as you would prepare your oral argument for Moot Court. Research the organization, think about your skills and abilities, prepare anecdotes to illustrate your experience, and develop your delivery.

An interview is not an inquisition, but ideally a conversation. Establish a rapport with your interviewer and project an air of self-confidence. The interview is an opportunity to learn more about the organization, its culture, the job, and your prospective colleagues. It will help you decide whether you fit with the organization and would be happy there.

Interviewers are evaluating you on the basis of three general criteria:

- **Can Do:** Do you have the ability to do the job?
- **Will Do:** Will you be motivated to do an excellent job?
- **Fit:** Will you fit into the organization’s culture?

While ability and motivation are critical, “fit” is paramount, so try to establish a rapport with your interviewer. If the interviewer likes you and can imagine working well with you daily, you are more likely to be hired. You must be excited about the position, so research the organization and be prepared to articulate why you are enthusiastic!

Interviewing is a skill you can practice and develop. If your answers are irrelevant or long-winded you’ll lose the interviewer, so take time to organize your thoughts before answering questions. It’s fine to ask an interviewer to repeat or clarify a question. It is far better to clarify than to answer a question not asked.

Speak succinctly about your attributes. Practice on friends, with attorney-counselors in the Career Office or with a local attorney through our Mock Interview Program. Learn to sell your strongest points in 15–30 second pitches. Do your homework, and when the interview occurs, you’ll shine.

**Remember the following points when you prepare for interviews:**

**Know what to expect.** Screening interviews usually last about 20-30 minutes with one interviewer, but you may be screened by more than one person. On campus or job fair interviewing spaces may not be entirely private, so you may hear nearby conversations or feel self-conscious about your own. Being prepared will help you to focus and resist distractions. When interviewing at an employer’s office, your interviewer may be
interrupted by phones or colleagues. Use those moments to relax and gather your thoughts.

**Research the employer.** Visit the employer’s website, review summer evaluations by Hastings students, and talk to current and former employees. Use Lexis/Westlaw to learn about specific cases or deals. Seek information on the culture of the organization. This will help you tailor your answers to emphasize qualities and skills sought. It also will help you answer the crucial interview question: “Why do you want to work for us?”

**Review your resume and cover letter.** Interviews may take place long after you applied, so review your application materials to refresh your memory. Think about your skills and have anecdotes ready to illustrate them. Everything on your resume is fair game – so be ready to discuss any item in detail.

**Be ready to describe experiences and abilities that indicate you can do the job.** Put yourself in the employer’s shoes. What skills and experience are important for this job? Don’t be modest about your achievements. Employers view your ability to advocate on your own behalf as a good indication of your ability to advocate for clients.

**Use specific examples to illustrate your strengths** – think of one or two stories for each strength you wish to point out. Steer the conversation to these points when asked questions such as “Tell me about yourself” or “How do you like law school?”

**Be positive and enthusiastic about the work, the organization, and yourself.** If asked how you like law school, you could say, “What I like best is...” and describe things you enjoy. *Never complain* about previous employers, co-workers, or your experiences. Convey a genuine interest in the work of the organization.

**Demonstrate your best personal qualities in the interview.** Interviewers are evaluating how you interact, how eager you are to do the work, how you solve problems, and how poised you are. Much like choosing friends, the “chemistry” between you and the organization is an important consideration for both. At on-site interviews, be friendly and polite to everyone, from receptionists to senior partners. Employers often solicit support staff opinions of candidates brought into the office.

**Be yourself.** Resist the temptation to analyze what the interviewer wants and to make yourself over in that image; it will prevent you from being genuine.

**Listen carefully to the questions.** Be sure you understand what is being asked. Taking the time to frame a good answer indicates that you are confident and careful, both very good traits in a lawyer! In most interview situations, saying “That’s a great question! Let me think about it for a moment” is completely acceptable. For open ended questions, such as “Tell me about yourself,” bear in mind why you are there – to be evaluated for employment. Your response should reveal traits, characteristics and information relevant to the position you seek.
Keep your answers brief. Don’t ramble! Use our Mock Interview Program to practice with local attorneys, or schedule mock interviews with our career counselors. The more prepared you are, the less you’ll ramble. Being articulate is an important legal skill, even if you hope never to appear in court! Avoid colloquialisms and slang, as well as conversational “fillers” such as “um” and “you know.”

Help the conversation along. Rather than answering questions with a simple “yes” or “no,” give information to stimulate conversation or illustrate an important point. If asked whether you like legal research, make your answer a bridge to other relevant information, and further the conversation, by saying, “Yes, in fact my friends tease me because I treat research like a scavenger hunt and get all excited to find authority on point! But it paid off when I received the highest grade in LW&R. What research resources does your office use?”

Expect pressure questions. To test your composure, employers may ask aggressive questions such as, “Can you explain your grades?” The interviewer may not care about your grades, but wants to see how you handle stressful interactions. You could respond with a smile, “My grades are quite strong in courses relevant to my area of interest.” If there are questions you are nervous about, rehearse your answers in a mock interview, with friends, or at the Career Office.

Don’t be thrown by the chatty interviewer. Some interviewers believe the best way to ascertain whether someone is a true “fit” is to engage in casual conversation about hobbies, common experiences, etc. Resist the urge to redirect this conversation to your resume. At the end, you can say “It’s been so nice to speak with you, but before I go I’d like to highlight these experiences...” and then proceed to elaborate briefly.

Review your presentation and demeanor. First impressions count! Meet the interviewer’s eyes and smile when you shake hands. Your handshake should be firm and vigorous, not crushing. Dress professionally, with shined shoes, and be well-groomed. Your appearance should suggest someone who is attentive to details, and knows what dress and behavior are appropriate in a business setting. Don’t smoke in your interview clothes as they retain the smell. Avoid using perfumes or colognes.

Check body language. Sit up straight and meet your interviewer’s gaze. Lean a little forward to indicate interest. Allowing your eyes to wander around the room shows inattention. Fidgeting is distracting. If the interviewer checks her watch or looks around the room, you may have been talking too long. A crease in the forehead may indicate puzzlement – make sure you are being clear. Remember – non-verbal communication can be more important than the actual words spoken!

Prepare effective questions to ask the interviewer. Interviewers often ask whether you have questions. Demonstrate your interest by the questions you pose. Having no questions indicates a lack of interest on your part. Your queries should be pertinent to the employer, the interviewer, and the job, rather than about benefits or billable hour requirements. It’s often a good idea to ask the interviewer about her/his own experience
at the organization. Sample questions are included in the Career Office handout “Commonly Asked Interview Questions & Strategies to Answer Them.”

**Be on time – and be rested.** Verify how long it will take to travel to the interview location and build in extra time for delays. Arrive a few minutes early, check in with the receptionist, and use any waiting time to review your notes. In case of a traffic delay, call the interviewer from the road and explain. S/he can decide to reschedule, or to wait for you to arrive. Sufficient rest before an interview will help you to be alert and calm.

**End the interview on a positive note.** Ask about next steps in the hiring process to demonstrate that you are truly interested in the position. Your closing impression will be a lasting one, so briefly reiterate your interest and restate how your skills would be an asset to the organization. You may want to ask for each interviewer’s business card so you have the correct title and spelling for thank you notes.

**Make notes after the interview.** Take time after interviews to note your impressions, any important points you made or failed to make (you may later have a chance to make those points in a subsequent interview or in a letter), and anything you learned. There may be a time lag between screening and call-back interviews, so rely on your notes rather than your memory for names and other pertinent details.

**Thank you letters?** For brief on-campus screening interviews, nine out of ten interviewers say that thank you letters are not necessary. But for any other interview, ALWAYS write to thank the interviewer for her/his time. Mention something specific you discussed (to jog the memory) and express your continued interest in the position. Write and deliver these thank you letters or emails within 24-48 hours.

**Need more information?** Make an appointment with one of our career counselors to discuss interviewing or to conduct a mock interview. Each semester the Career Office also recruits local attorneys to conduct mock interviews through the Mock Interview Program. Take advantage of these opportunities to practice this important skill.