



**Boston College Law School**  
**Office of Career Services**

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**CALLBACK INTERVIEWS**

**Office of Career Services**  
Fall 2009

## **THE CALLBACK INTERVIEW & HANDLING OFFERS FROM LARGE LAW FIRMS**

After the first round of interviews, the “callback interviews” begin. Your first interview might have occurred on-campus, at an off-campus job fair, or perhaps in the firm’s office. Second interviews almost always involve visiting the firm. Thus, the term “callback” is derived from the fact that the firm is “calling you back” to their office for another interview.

While the number of students that each firm will callback varies, typically a firm will invite back 10-30% of those students initially interviewed. If you receive a callback, the firm believes that you possess the ability to do their work, and are now looking to see if you “fit” into their firm culture. The callback interview provides an opportunity for you and the employer to learn more about each other. For you, it is an occasion not only to meet a number of people in the organization but also to assess the work environment: the physical surroundings, how people interact with each other, and the firm “culture.”

Nationally, about 46.6% of callbacks resulted in an offer for second-year students participating in Fall 2008 recruitment programs. This percentage was around 19.7% for third-year students, reflecting the fact that fewer offers are made to 3L students because of the great number of 2Ls hired out of summer programs. (See NALP Perspectives on Fall 2008 Law Student Recruiting at [www.nalp.org/uploads/Perspectives\\_Fall\\_2008.pdf](http://www.nalp.org/uploads/Perspectives_Fall_2008.pdf)).

Callback interviews are usually scheduled by the half-day, either morning or afternoon. However, some firms may have whole-day interviews. During your visit to the firm’s offices, you will probably meet with five or six attorneys. Your visit will likely include four 20 – 30 minute interviews with one or two attorneys at a time. The interview may conclude with either lunch or dinner, usually with one or two associates, and it is important to remember that this portion of your visit is still part of the interview, so act accordingly. It is possible to “flunk lunch.”

During the interview season, make sure that you have an answering machine with a professional message. If you are using a cell phone number as your main contact, be sure that you answer it at times and in places where it is convenient for you to speak. Remember, attorneys work late – the call coming in at 8 p.m. might be from a firm.

### **I. SCHEDULING THE INTERVIEW**

1. When you are invited for a callback, respond quickly. If you wish to schedule an interview, try to arrange to meet on the earliest possible date. Make a list of several possible dates before you call to schedule. During the hiring season, offers are made on a “rolling” basis, and firms do not wait to interview all candidates before making offers. If you have received numerous callbacks, you might consider scheduling your office visits in order of your preferences, so that you are visiting your favorite firms first. Always respond to each employer promptly, even if you plan to decline your

callback. Make an appointment with a Career Services counselor to discuss your “callback strategy.”

2. Keep track of all your interview dates and other important dates on one calendar, so that you can avoid scheduling interviews when you have other commitments, such as competitions or exams.
3. You are NOT required to accept all callback interviews. Callbacks are time-consuming for you and the employer, and you should engage in second-round interviews only with those organizations in which you have a strong interest. You do not want to overextend yourself or the quality of your interviews will suffer. Refusing a callback will not offend the employer. Keep in mind, though, that since most employers extend a limited number of invitations, it is courteous to decline the invitation *as soon as possible* so that an invitation can be extended to someone else – possibly a fellow student. Similarly, if you must cancel or reschedule a callback, give the employer as much notice as possible, ideally at least three (3) business days but no less than two (2) days notice.
4. When you phone to schedule a callback, it is appropriate to ask how much time to allot for your interviews (so that you can make your arrangements accordingly) and whether a meal will be included during your visit. You may also request to speak with an attorney in a particular practice area, realizing that your schedule will also be dependent on the firm’s attorneys’ schedules. Be courteous to everyone with whom you speak, as everyone you meet at the firm may provide feedback to the ultimate decision-makers.
5. During your conversation with the recruitment coordinator, you should also clarify the employer’s reimbursement policy. Most large firms reimburse for transportation and reasonable expenses for lodging and meals. Also, inform the firm if you have multiple callbacks in their city. They usually like to share costs and do not see it as a “breach of loyalty” if you are also interviewing with someone else. While some firms may make your travel arrangements for you, others will expect you to do it yourself. Ask the employer if you have any questions about what constitutes a reasonable expense *before* you incur the cost. Make any flight arrangements far enough in advance to take advantage of more cost-effective rates. Keep all of your receipts to include with your reimbursement request, and do not abuse the reimbursement policy by ordering pay-per-view movies in your room or raiding the mini-bar. Some firms may request that you use the NALP Travel Expense Reimbursement Form, copies of which are available at [www.nalp.org/assets/1199\\_travexp08.pdf](http://www.nalp.org/assets/1199_travexp08.pdf) or in the Career Services Office.

## **II. PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW**

1. Careful preparation for the callback will increase your confidence and chances for success. Preparation is similar to that for your initial interview, only more in depth. Be prepared to talk in depth about your resume and to articulate your career goals. Practice vocalizing your answers, either by having a friend ask them to you or by

sitting in front of a mirror. Reading through a list of questions and just thinking about your answers is not the same as actually trying to articulate your strengths, goals and interests.

2. Identify any areas of your background that you may feel uncomfortable talking about: your G.P.A., your lack of legal experience, your reasons for changing careers, any gaps in your schooling or jobs. Practice answering questions about your weaknesses in a positive and concise way. Do not dwell on the subject – instead, focus on how you have learned from the experience and move onto a strength.
3. Be confident and convey your strengths and accomplishments. It is important that the interviewer see your personality and decide that you are someone with whom they would like to work on a daily basis.
4. Research the organization as thoroughly as possible. Most larger firms have their own websites and you should review them. You should walk into your interview knowing at least the basics about a firm, such as the number of attorneys, the locations of offices, the practice areas, representative clients and how they run the summer program. Other good sources of information include: employer information on Symplicity, student evaluations located in the Career Services Office Library, The Vault Guide, American Lawyer, Martindale Hubbell ([www.martindale.com](http://www.martindale.com)), West Legal Directory, recent news articles, and students, attorneys and professors who have worked at the firm.
5. Based upon your research, you should prepare questions to ask the interviewers that will enhance your understanding of the work of the firm and of the professional environment. Ask questions of every interviewer. It is perfectly acceptable to ask the same questions of several attorneys; in fact, this may be a good way to hear different perspectives about working at the firm. Sometimes, an interviewer will have answered your questions even before you have the opportunity to ask them. When this happens, ask the interviewer to expand upon something the two of you were speaking about.
6. Make sure that you know how to get to the office and whom to ask for when you arrive. Most firms are located in large buildings with strict security measures in place; therefore, allot for time to check-in and bring a photo ID. Plan to arrive in the firm's offices about 10 – 15 minutes early to acclimate yourself to the office.
7. You may call the firm's recruitment department the day before your interview and find out who will be interviewing you. Although your schedule might still change, take the time to look up the specific interviewers and read about their backgrounds. Most firms have informative "attorney bios" on their websites. If you and your interviewer attended the same undergraduate school, be prepared to talk about it.
8. Always bring a few extra copies of your resume, transcript, writing sample(s) and list of references.

### **III. DAY OF THE INTERVIEW**

1. When you arrive for your callback interview, you are usually met by the recruitment coordinator or someone from the recruitment staff. You will receive the schedule for the day, including the names of the attorneys with whom you will be speaking. Expect more conversational interviewing during the callback, as the firm is trying to gauge your “personability” quotient. Although you may be asked the same questions by several different attorneys, keep up your enthusiasm and remember that the interviewer will hear your response just once.

#### **2. Quick Tips for the Actual Interview**

- Assume everyone you meet with during the day is interviewing you
- Dress conservatively and professionally
- Greet everyone you meet with a solid handshake
- Use Mr./Ms. unless you are told otherwise
- Sit up straight in your chair and maintain eye contact during the interview
- Remember to smile
- Speak clearly and slowly – when people are nervous, they tend to speak more quickly
- Tailor your answers to the employer (practice areas, size, location)
- Tailor your questions to each interviewer and the conversation
- Stay interested and enthusiastic throughout the visit – never appear bored and do not yawn
- Speak positively about previous employers even if you had a less than perfect experience
- Be honest, don’t exaggerate about your experiences or pretend to know more than you do
- Stay focused on the interviewer, don’t take notes during your interview

#### **3. Quick Tips for the Meals**

- The meal is a continuation of your interview and act accordingly
- Follow the lead of the attorneys, order an appetizer only if they do
- Order foods that are easy to eat (forget the spaghetti) and stay away from garlic
- Choose entrees that are mid-priced
- Remember good manners, ex. don’t start to eat until everyone has been served
- Drink non-alcoholic beverages
- Your drink is positioned on the right side, and your bread dish is on the left
- Even if invited to do so, do not sample food from your interviewers’ plates

### **IV. SAMPLE QUESTIONS**

#### **1. Questions an Employer May Ask**

- Tell me a little about yourself.

- What can you tell me about yourself that does not appear on your resume?
- What is your most significant accomplishment?
- What qualities do you possess that will make you a successful lawyer?
- Why did you choose law? What do you see as the disadvantages of a career in law?
- Why did you choose Boston College Law School?
- What has surprised you most about law school?
- How well have you done academically? Do your grades reflect your ability?
- What have you gained from clinical experience, moot court, law review, etc.?
- How did you like your experience at \_\_\_\_\_ last summer?
- What did you like best/least about that position?
- Why do you want to work for our firm? (Be specific and use the facts you acquired through your research.)
- What can you do for our firm/organization? Why should we hire you?
- Why have you selected \_\_\_\_\_ (city) in which to interview? Which other cities are you considering?
- What two or three things about a job are most important to you?
- What motivates you?
- What do you think about \_\_\_\_\_? (Insert a current event.)
- What are your long-range plans? How do you hope to achieve them? (The interviewer does not necessarily expect to hear that you plan on staying with his or her firm forever. He or she would probably be more impressed with a candid reply about practice areas and clients that shows a real commitment to the profession.)
- How would you describe the ideal job for you following your graduation?
- Is there anything else that you'd like to tell me about yourself? (This question provides you with the opportunity to describe a particular characteristic about your self or to emphasize your interest in the particular firm.)

## 2. Behavioral Questions an Employer May Ask

- Give me an example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
- Give an example of a situation where you took the initiative.
- Describe the process you go through to plan and implement a project.
- Have you ever worked in a situation where the rules and guidelines weren't clear? What did you do?
- Tell me about a time when you had to perform under pressure.

## 3. Your Questions for the Interviewer

- How is the work delegated? Is the work coordinated through a centralized source?
- What criteria are used to gauge an employee's progress and performance? How often do associates receive reviews?
- What is the time period before an associate could expect to have his/her own caseload and appear in court?

- What should an associate be able to handle (with limited supervision) after his/her first year?
- Could you describe the matters you are currently working on?
- How is your firm involved in the community?
- How long have you been working for the firm? How has your level of responsibility changed?
- What has surprised you most about working here?
- If there is one thing you could change about the firm, what would it be?
- (If the interviewer is a lateral hire) What attracted you the most about this firm?
- (If the interviewer has been with the organization for 7+ years) What has kept you at this firm?
- Are there plans for expansion within the next few years?
- How would you describe the personalities of the attorneys occupying the offices to the left and right of your office?
- Could you describe how your candidate selection process works? What personal attributes does a successful candidate have?
- What is the single best thing about working at the firm?
- Did you work with any summer associates recently? Were you pleased with his/her work product?
- After the summer, how does the firm assign associates to departments?

You can find more sample questions in your Job Search Handbook under the “Interviewing” section.

## **V. AFTER THE INTERVIEW**

1. Shortly after leaving the office, take notes about your impressions of the particular firm. Were office doors open? What was the interaction between attorneys and support staff like? Were people behaving friendly and respectful towards one another? Was the office busy or quiet? Did associates look happy – or harried and overworked? Did you like the surroundings? You should leave with the impression that you would enjoy spending time in the office as you may be spending more waking hours there than in your home.
2. Thank You Notes? Many recruiting coordinators and attorneys who work in large firms have told the Career Services Office that thank you notes are completely unnecessary and are rarely read. The exception is when some specific and unusual assistance was given to you. For example, if you knew an attorney in the firm who forwarded your resume to the hiring partner, and you were invited to interview, you should write a thank you to your contact for his or her assistance.

## **VI. TIMING OF OFFERS AND ACCEPTANCES**

1. There is no general rule on the timing of offers, as the answer depends on many factors, including the firm’s policy, the target size of a firm’s summer class, and the quality of students interviewed. Many firms have a hiring committee that will meet

weekly and discuss all of their candidates. You should anticipate that the firm will let you know of your status within two weeks. Some firms may not decide on all the candidates presented at a meeting, but may wait to decide on a student's status until they have met with more students, including students from the same school, in which case it might be several weeks before you hear from the firm.

After your interview, it is appropriate to ask an employer when you can expect to hear back from them. If you do not hear in the expected time frame, wait another week and then follow-up by email or a phone call. Additionally, if there is a change in your credentials after the callback, go ahead and email or call the firm with your good news.

2. The National Association for Law Placement has set standards for the timing of offers of employment and job acceptances. All employers having forty attorneys or more and who recruit on campus are requested to comply with these "Principals and Standards for Law Placement and Recruiting Activities." Although most firms abide by these rules, these standards are just guidelines and NALP does not have any enforcement power.

The standards include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Employers offering summer positions to students in the fall of their second year, who were not previously employed by them, should leave the offers open for at least **45 days** following the date of the offer letter or until December 30, whichever comes first. Offers made after December 15 for the following summer should remain open for at least two weeks after the date of the offer letter.
- Students are expected to accept or release offers or request an extension by the applicable deadline. Offers that are not accepted by the offer deadline will expire.
- Students should not hold open more than 5 offers of employment at any one time. For each offer received that places a student over the offer limit, the student should, within one week of receipt of the excess offer, release an offer.

These standards cover many other situations, including specific timelines for third-year students receiving offers for full-time employment following graduation. For a complete description of these guidelines, visit [www.nalp.org/fulltextofnalppinciplesandstandards#Part\\_V.\\_General\\_Standards](http://www.nalp.org/fulltextofnalppinciplesandstandards#Part_V._General_Standards)

***Should you have any questions as you participate in your callback interviews, please make an appointment with the Career Services Office. We are always glad to meet with you and help guide you through your job search. Good luck.***