

Congratulations! If you're reading this you are likely contemplating a career move which can be fun, exciting, nerve-wracking, and unfamiliar all at the same time. Our Paragon team hopes this guide will provide you with useful reminders and new strategies so that you feel well-prepared and confident for your next interview.

Before the Interview

1 Prepare! Familiarize yourself with the company, interviewers, and ... yourself!

Review the company's website, social media platforms, and other publications to learn its culture, mission, industry, and geographic scope. Consider how its legal department may be impacted by these characteristics.

Visit the interviewers' LinkedIn and/or other professional profiles. This can help you find common ground prior to the interview.

Read back through your résumé. Remind yourself of where you've worked, when you worked there, and what you've done in the course of your career. What about you is going to speak to your fit for this role? What might the interviewers have questions or concerns about?

2 Remember that the interview includes all of your time interacting or corresponding with *anyone* from the company.

Be considerate and polite to everyone you encounter (online and in person), not just the interviewers. Receptionists, assistants, and paralegals are integral team members and will likely provide input for a hiring decision, particularly if your behavior stands out negatively. Recruiters are also often asked for their input.

3 Prepare responses, examples, and anecdotes for the questions you anticipate being asked.

Thoroughly re-read the job description and note where your experiences are most relevant. Have *specific* examples (e.g., size, volume, scope, and role) of relevant responsibilities prepared. This underscores the importance of reading back through your own resume as noted in the first tip of this section.

4 Prepare smart and thoughtful questions to ask the interviewers.

Interviewers want to know about you, and you will spend a lot of time talking about yourself and your past accomplishments. But asking questions is a great way to show the interviewer

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that you have done your research and are seriously considering what it would be like to be part of the team. Asking questions also helps you gauge whether this is the right opportunity for you.

Make sure to have at least a handful of different questions written down in case one or two get answered throughout the interview.

During second round interviews, you may want to prepare ideas of how you can add value to the business or help raise the bar based on information learned in the previous interview.

5 Refresh your interview skills.

Even if you are comfortable with interviewing, it does not hurt to practice. Each interview and position is different so your approach needs to be tailored each time.

Do a few mock interviews with recruiters or trusted peers to ensure things sound as good aloud as they do in your head.

6 Obtain feedback on your interview skills.

Working with a recruiter, who counsels hundreds of candidates like yourself each year, is an opportunity to leverage their industry knowledge, gain insight into hiring managers, and solicit candid feedback on your interviewing skills. If you are not working with a recruiter, practice with a trusted friend or colleague who will provide honest and constructive feedback.

7 Rehearse the logistics.

Double-check the time and place of the interview. Ensure links and access codes are included for video interviews. If the interview is online, the background must be tidy, quiet, and equipped with proper lighting (see “**Tips for Video Interviews**” section). For in-person interviews, map out the route to your meeting beforehand to avoid getting lost or arriving late. Arriving early is great, but avoid checking in more than 15 minutes before your scheduled meeting.

8 Organize your materials.

If interviewing in person, pack your résumé, notepad, and a pen the night before the interview. If you’re interviewing virtually, be sure you have a printed copy of your résumé to reference during the meeting if needed. While note taking is certainly not mandatory, there will be information you want to recall and having pen and paper handy demonstrates you are engaged and taking the interview seriously.

During the Interview

This is your time to shine! An interview is an organization’s opportunity to get to know you – your personality, skills, and career goals. It is likewise an opportunity for you to get to know the organization and your potential future colleagues – their personalities, values, goals, and responsibilities. This next section is intended to provide guidance on how to successfully navigate this potentially nerve-wracking conversation.

Avoid

Answering in generalities or assuming the interviewer knows the details of your practice.

Answers that are too generalized can make you seem unprepared or unqualified. Additionally, vague answers are not memorable, which makes it hard to stand out from other interviewees.

Instead

Brainstorm specific examples of situations or instances in which you demonstrated a particular skill. Providing succinct and relevant color on the types of agreements you’ve worked on, size of sales teams or business units you have supported, deal frequency and size, and volume or caseload can be particularly helpful. Likewise, being able to clearly explain your role and responsibilities as it relates to your colleagues, partners, and/or outside counsel is key.

Remember, they are meeting you to learn about your professional accomplishments *relative* to their hiring needs. Make sure your examples correlate to the position for which you are interviewing and the responsibilities highlighted in the job description.

Avoid

Rambling.

Rambling suggests unorganized thinking. It also risks boring or losing the interviewer if they cannot follow your train of thought. This wastes precious interview time.

Instead

Pause and take a breath before answering a question to gather your thoughts. Ask for clarification before speaking if you aren’t sure you understand the question.

Fight the urge to say more. Most questions can be answered in 2-3 strong sentences. Allow the interviewer to process your answer. If you are unclear whether you have covered what has been asked of you, ask the interviewer if they have a follow up question or would like more specificity.

Utilize the **STAR Method** (explained in “Behavioral/Situational and Soft Skills-Based Questions” on page 5) for any situational or behavioral interview questions.

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Avoid

Letting a misstep derail the interview.

We all get tongue-tied at times. And sometimes, you and the role just aren't the best match. But interviewers may have other open opportunities or colleagues seeking candidates. So if it becomes clear that the role may not be a good fit, don't dwell on a gap in experience or applicable skill set, and don't waste the opportunity to make a good impression.

Instead

Focus on where your strengths lie and how else you might be able to contribute to the organization or team.

Maintain a positive outlook and demeanor.

If appropriate, acknowledge that this might not be the best fit and express your genuine interest in exploring other opportunities with the organization.

Avoid

Speaking poorly about your previous or current employer/manager/role.

Complaining about your past or current job is poor etiquette. It raises questions about your professionalism, attitude, judgment, and sportsmanship.

Instead

Take responsibility and focus on the positive components of the experience. Talk about what you have learned from the situation, which shows that you have looked back at it with introspection rather than resentment.

Emphasize what you hope to *gain* from this new position rather than complaining about the things you were missing from your previous role. Focus the interview on how you can contribute to this new company and what you hope to learn from this new position.

Less is always more when it comes to discussing sensitive topics.

Avoid

Letting your nerves get the best of you. (We know, easier said than done sometimes.)

Being nervous for an interview is normal and can demonstrate how much you care. However, you do not want your nerves to get in the way of letting your personality, skill sets, and communication skills shine.

Instead

Remember that companies are not in the business of wasting time. If you are invited to interview, they see something that sparks their interest in your candidacy and feel you may be a fit.

Do a mock interview. Answer potential questions *aloud*. Things often sound

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smoother in our heads. Let the mirror, not the interviewer, hear you tongue-tied. If you are nervous about a particular question that might stump you, role play an answer to that question to calm your nerves. It's better to have your canned answer ready than crafting it for the first time during the real interview.

Avoid

Sitting as if you are in your own living room.

Overly casual body language can be perceived as disinterested, dismissive, or bored.

Instead

Sit up straight to show your respect for the opportunity and the interviewers' time.

Practice active listening. Use gestures appropriately, such as maintaining eye contact or nodding to show that you are following along with the conversation.

Video Interview Tips



For the most part, you want to approach video interviews as you would an in-person interview with a few important modifications.

1

Check your technology

Do a technical test run to make sure your equipment (computer camera, microphone, battery charge, and internet connection) is ready to go. Do not assume because things were working great yesterday that you will not run into a snafu today.

Put your phone and computer on Do Not Disturb mode to prevent any notifications from popping up on the screen during your interview. Better yet, store all other electronic devices in another room during the interview.

Close any irrelevant windows or tabs on your computer to minimize distractions.

2

Be conscious of the view

Video interviews mean that instead of a traditional office setting, you have flexibility on where you will take the call. Your background should be professional, uncluttered, and well-lit. Keep your face out of the shadows so that the interviewer can see you clearly.

3 Eliminate distractions

Eliminate any potential distractions such as clutter and noise. You want the interviewer to focus on you, not what is happening behind or around you.

Clear your desk space, except for your resume, a notepad, and a pen to take notes.

Make sure that you are in a private and quiet setting.

Be sure those you are sharing space with know not to disturb you. Put a gentle reminder on the closed door.

4 Engage the interviewer with positive and professional body language

Maintain virtual eye contact and actively listen to show the interviewer that you are paying attention.

When answering questions, look directly into the camera lens.

Center your face on the screen and sit up straight to show your engagement.

Find the right distance from your screen. Your head should be two inches from the top of the interviewer's screen when seated comfortably. Sitting too far or too close is both distracting and can impact the interviewer's ability to hear you clearly.

5 Project and pause

Because the interviewer is not sitting in front of you in a traditional office setting, you have to speak clearly and slowly into the microphone. Project and enunciate so that the interviewer can hear and understand you.

Delays in digital connections are common. So to avoid interrupting the interviewer, let them finish the question and then pause for a few seconds before answering back.

After the Interview

1 Touch base with your recruiter or HR contact if you are interviewing directly with the company

Provide honest feedback about the interview. Identify any concerns, confusion, or deviation from what you expected of the role. Inquire as to next steps if you are genuinely interested.

2 Send a thank you note or email

Short and sweet - two or three sentences expressing your gratitude and continued interest. You may want to add an additional sentence referencing something discussed in the interview to personalize the note, but avoid overselling or trying to squeeze in too much additional information.

Proofread. Then proofread again. Many offers have been lost over sloppy follow-up.

3 Start thinking about whether you would accept an offer

The goal of each interview is to get an offer, and every interview you have should be treated that seriously. You shouldn't be caught off guard by the desired outcome.

While you should not feel pressured to accept an offer immediately, remember that this is a critical hire and the company needs the help as soon as possible. So, your decision impacts more than just you.

Reflect on how the interview went. Ask yourself:

- What were your impressions of the interviewer and the company as a whole?
- Pros/Cons? How does it relate to other opportunities you are considering?
- Can you see yourself working there?
- Do you have any unanswered questions?

4 Communicate any changes to your situation

Always remember to be courteous of everyone's time. If you accept a different position, are no longer interested, or cannot commit to the job, communicate that as soon as possible. Transparency goes a long way in maintaining your reputation even if you decide to go with another opportunity.

Sample Interview Questions

While interview style and questions vary, most interviewers will use a variety of these types of questions. These are “real life” questions our candidates frequently encounter.

1 Behavioral / Situational and Soft Skills-Based Questions

Behavioral and situational questions are questions that ask you to recall a previous work-related experience and share how you responded to the situation.

Soft skills are transferable skills that are not specific to a particular role, such as: communication and interpersonal skills, social competence, decision-making abilities, leadership and project management, collaboration, work ethic, time management, creativity, etc.

Interviewers love these types of questions because they help gauge your strengths, competency, and overall fit using past achievements and experiences.

Importantly, they also reflect your ability to communicate succinctly and cohesively to tell a story to bring to life how you work and how you would operate as part of their team.

The STAR Method is the most straightforward and focused way to answer soft skills and behavioral/situational questions. This technique allows you to comprehensively and concisely provide real-life examples of how you handled a specific situation/issue without rambling.

This method follows a simple framework:

| S ituation | T ask | A ction | R esult |
|---|--|--|---|
| Set the scene and give necessary details to contextualize your example. Keep it short and direct. | Highlight your role(s) and responsibilities in that situation. | Explain the exact steps you took to address the issue as well as the reasoning behind those actions. | Share the outcomes and accomplishments of your actions, as well as the important takeaways you learned from the experience. |

Lastly, close it out by reiterating your main point briefly.

Sample Questions

1. Tell me about a time you successfully adjusted to a new environment quickly.
2. Describe a recent project or assignment you had to complete under a tight deadline and how you managed your other responsibilities to complete it.

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3. What achievement are you most proud of?
4. In a stressful situation, how do you ensure that you execute your tasks on time while still maintaining the highest quality of work?
5. What do you do when you are given a task and do not have the necessary resources and information to complete it?
6. As a contract attorney, it is important to collaborate with other employees and forge productive relationships quickly for the sake of productivity. Describe how you work with others, especially those who have different communication styles from you.
7. What was the last thing you accomplished that required you to leave your comfort zone to develop a proficiency in something new and unfamiliar?

Sample
Questions
and
Approach

Describe a time when you were given a new and unfamiliar task that you needed to complete. How did you approach the situation?

- S** For the first time, I was designated as the secretary to write minutes for the upcoming board meeting.
- T** I was tasked with taking efficient minutes to record what was addressed in the meeting for my peers who missed the event as well as for company record.
- A** First, I clarified any questions I had about the assignment with my supervisor to ensure that I understood their expectations. Then, I looked over the company files to reference past sample corporate meetings to get an idea of the company's typical format and content. After reviewing those available documents, I asked my peers, who have been at the company longer than I and had served as secretaries before, for some advice on completing corporate minutes thoroughly and efficiently.
- R** My colleagues referred me to the appropriate resources they used in the past and gave me helpful tips so that I could better prepare for the meeting. I was able to accurately and thoroughly record meeting notes. This experience taught me that it is okay to ask for help and clarification when questions arise, especially when you are given assignments that are unfamiliar to you. Rather than doing the task incorrectly and approaching the task blind, asking my peers for help guided me in the right direction.

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Tell us about a time when you had to prioritize multiple important projects and competing deadlines.

- S** I was working on a key project that was due to the client in one month while I was also completing a longer term and less urgent legal research assignment.
- T** Two weeks into the project, my supervisor notified me that the delivery date for the key project was moved up by a week.
- A** I re-evaluated my calendar and to-do list to update the new delivery date. This broke down the month-long project into smaller and more manageable assignments to ensure that I was on track to meet my new deadline. It especially helped me avoid procrastination because I was able to physically look at my calendar and complete the different components in smaller chunks. Additionally, because the deadline got moved up, I realized that I had to shift more of my focus on the more urgent task before moving on to less time-sensitive assignments, which my supervisor understood.
- R** Breaking down the project into smaller tasks made the overall situation less daunting. Keeping a checklist with the smaller tasks kept me organized and ensured that my goals were realistic within the timeframe. Lastly, the change in deadline showed me the importance of flexibility. Though the deadline was unexpectedly moved up, I still wanted my work to reflect on the company positively; so, I re-adjusted my schedule to meet the new delivery date. Managing my time and breaking down the workload into more manageable chunks ensured that I submitted the assignment on time to the client within the new deadline of 21 days. I also asked for and received a one week extension on the legal research I had to put on hold and was able to complete that after I finished up the client's project.

2 Hard Skills-Based or Technical Questions

Hard skills are specific technical abilities that are required to carry out tasks of the job. Be as specific as possible by using numbers and real-life examples, which helps give the interviewer a greater sense of your expertise.

Sample Questions

1. What types of agreements have you worked on?
2. How comfortable are you with drafting and redlining agreements?
3. What types of contracts management systems and contracts were used at your previous employers?

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4. What types of transactions (e.g., acquisition, divestiture, sale, spin-off) did you work on and what role did you play throughout the process (e.g., due diligence, drafting/negotiation, integration)?
5. What filings were you personally responsible for?
6. To what extent were you responsible for drafting policies and/or handbooks and conducting training? Did these experiences relate to international jurisdictions?
7. What is your experience/comfort level with drafting and/or revising relevant policies?
8. What types of data security and privacy matters have you been involved in previously?
9. Describe the resources that were available to you (e.g. outside counsel, paralegals, junior attorneys, etc.).



The team at Paragon Legal always welcomes the opportunity to connect with you. We can be reached at info@paragonlegal.com or **415.738.7870**.