The goal of everything to this point (e.g., designing your resume, writing letters, and networking) is to get an interview. An interview is generally the most important step in the job search, and having a good interview is a must in order to get an offer. Fortunately, interviewing is a skill that most law students can master with practice, so utilize mock interviewing opportunities available through the CSO. This section will discuss the interview process, including how to prepare for and have successful interviews.

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

You should spend a considerable amount of time learning about the employer and planning an interview strategy. Interview preparation should take place on two levels. First, learn about the organization and the interviewer to help formulate intelligent questions and give you a profile of the type of employee needed by the organization. Second, prepare yourself to answer questions in a manner that tells the interviewer why you are right for the job. Interviewers are impressed by applicants who know details about the organization, how they can fill some need the organization has, and what they want in an employer.

Learning about the Employer

Employers expect you to do your homework about their organization before the interview. By asking questions, you demonstrate the depth of your research and obtain information you can use to show that you are a good candidate for the job. In addition to making you look good, asking intelligent questions helps you determine whether you want to work for this employer.

Journalist Barbara Walters stated, “It is almost impossible to maintain poise when you are scared to death. My best advice for dealing with destructive anxiety is homework....Homework helps enormously when you apply for a job.” You will be more confident and more at ease in an interview if you have a list of informed and researched questions to ask.

Files, Directories, and Websites

Start your research by checking the CSO for current literature on firms and legal organizations. The Employer Files and the NALP Directory of Legal
Employers contain basic information about many large firms across the nation. The Martindale-Hubbell Law Directory contains information about many law firms’ attorneys and areas of practice. Conduct online research using LexisNexis, Westlaw, and Google, to get additional information about the organization.

**Articles**

Do an online search of business and trade magazines, law journals, and local business newspapers (most are available on LexisNexis and Westlaw) for recent articles about the employer, its clients, and its competition. Take special note of current issues you can ask about in the interview.

**Personal Contacts**

Collect valuable inside information from alumni, family, friends, classmates, and law professors who have worked for or know about the employer. Ask tough questions about the working environment, what the position you are seeking involves, and what it takes to get hired. To counteract biased personal advice, obtain information from many different sources, and carefully weigh the value of each. During the interview, let the interviewer know that you went beyond reading the firm’s resume and took time to learn more about the employer. For example, you could mention that you spoke to an associate and learned about the firm’s pro bono policies.

**Marketing Yourself to the Employer**

The second type of preparation involves developing your own marketing strategy.

**Why Should I Hire You?**

Regardless of the questions interviewers pose, they are really asking, “Why should I hire you?” Prepare answers with this important question in mind, and insert them throughout the interview, even if the question is never directly asked (and it almost never is). You do not need to be pushy by saying, “You should hire me because . . . ,” but you can weave your selling points into the answers you give throughout the interview. While some of the skills you sell will differ according to the needs of the organization, legal research and writing skills are very important to most legal employers, and
you should try to mention your proficiency in these skills, if possible, during your interview.

**Anticipate Tough Questions**

Prepare great answers to questions you hope the interviewer does not ask, such as, “What is your GPA?,” “Did you get an offer from the firm where you clerked last summer?” or “Why did you do so poorly in Civil Procedure?” Have brief explanations ready to offer, but do not make excuses. It is especially important that you maintain eye contact when you are dealing with tough issues.

**Know Your Resume**

Be ready to clarify or expound on, in detail, any part of your resume. For instance, if you have listed performing arts as one of your interests, make sure that you can discuss a somewhat recent concert you attended or participated in.

Also be prepared to mention things that, while not included on your resume, may show why you are qualified for a specific position. Use the mock interview opportunities available through the CSO since good interviewing is largely a skill you acquire through practice.

**Relocating**

If you plan to relocate to a new area, you must develop a convincing answer to the question, “Why do you want to work in our city?” You must demonstrate that you know about the city and that you value what it has to offer. There are several sources available to help you learn more about specific cities and geographic areas. These sources include performing an online search (such as a city website), chamber of commerce offices, local newspapers, and books (such as the Places Rated Almanac). Visit the city to attend cultural events, investigate housing options, and explore outdoor recreation and sports activities. If you have children, show that you have researched the educational system.
Top 25 Most Common Interview Mistakes

1. Arriving late.
2. Arriving too early.
3. Bad-mouthing your last boss.
4. Lying about your skills/experience/knowledge.
5. Wearing the wrong clothes (for this workplace!).
6. Wearing a Bluetooth earpiece.
7. Failing to research the employer in advance.
8. Talking about salary requirements too soon.
9. Failing to make a strong case for why you are the best person for this job.
10. Failing to remember what you wrote on your own resume.
11. Being unprepared to answer the standard questions.
12. Interrupting your interviewer.
15. Bringing along a friend, your spouse, or your mother.
16. Chewing gum, your pen, your hair.
17. Laughing, giggling, whistling, humming, lip-smacking.
18. Saying, “you know,” “like,” “I guess,” and “um.”
20. Shaking hands too weakly, or too firmly.
21. Failing to make eye contact (or making continuous eye contact).
22. Becoming angry or defensive.
23. Complaining about anything!
25. Failing to ask for the job.

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THE INITIAL INTERVIEW

The Interviewer

Attorneys are cautious and conservative by nature. They are much less likely than corporate interviewers to take a chance on students they think may be “diamonds in the rough.” Thus, you must show during the interview that you are a good fit with the firm’s style, culture, and personnel. This principle should guide the way you dress, your mannerisms in the interview, the questions you ask, and your responses to the interviewer’s questions.

Professional Appearance

First Impressions

Studies indicate that if applicants make a positive impression in the first five minutes, they will be offered at least a call-back interview 75% of the time. If the impression is negative, the applicant will not be hired 90% of the time.

During those first five minutes (and before you say one word), the interviewer will judge how you look, how you dress, and how you carry yourself. A positive first impression is an essential part of a successful interview. Begin the interview with a warm smile and a handshake to each person with whom you interview. Be confident and make eye contact.

Dress Conservatively

Always err on the side of caution in dressing for an interview. Your clothing should be conservative (both in color and in style), clean, and well pressed (carry a lint roller with you). For men, a dark suit (black, dark gray, or navy blue are best), a professionally laundered (white, long sleeved) shirt, a conservative tie, and dress shoes (shined) are appropriate. Women should also wear dark suits with coordinated dress shoes, avoiding very long or very short skirts and low-cut blouses. Jewelry and make-up should be kept

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simple. Neither men nor women should wear noticeable fragrance to the interview.

Your goal in dressing for the interview is to avoid making a negative impression. Ideally, the interviewer should notice your overall professional, confident, and clean appearance, not what you are wearing.

**Invest in a Good Suit (Men and Women)**

If you do not own appropriate interviewing clothing, invest in your career by purchasing an interviewing suit. If you start shopping now, you will have the luxury of waiting for sales. One Law Society member from New York said students must buy a $1000 suit on sale for $400 rather than buy a $400 suit on sale for $200. You need to dress like the attorneys who are hiring you.

Women should wear a skirt to interviews even if wearing pants on the job would be entirely appropriate. If wearing heels, make sure they are professional and appropriate for the workplace.

Always remember to cut the threads that are meant to temporarily hold together pleats or slits in the suit jacket or skirt, and remove the brand labels from suit coat sleeves.

**Spouses or Dates at Employer Functions**

Spouses or dates who attend employer functions should also observe the dress standards that follow. You may be dressed appropriately, but if your spouse or date is not, it will reflect negatively on you.

**Men’s and Women’s Dress Standards**

The following pages include charts delineating what is meant by the common business categories of black tie, business formal, business casual, and casual.

**NOTE:** For an interview, you should ALWAYS dress in business formal.

**Find the CSO on Pinterest**

For examples of appropriate attire, accessories, and styling advice for any occasion, see the CSO’s Pinterest boards at [www.pinterest.com/byulawcso](http://www.pinterest.com/byulawcso).
## WOMEN’S DRESS STANDARDS*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Formality</th>
<th>When Appropriate</th>
<th>Clothes to Wear</th>
<th>Clothes to Avoid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black Tie or Formal</td>
<td>Some office activities. Generally designated in the invitation to those activities. Rarely used.</td>
<td>Formal gown. The gown should not be revealing of the legs, back, or bust and should not be too bright.</td>
<td>No dresses with sheer fabric or gowns that are revealing. You should not wear pants to black tie events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Formal, Business, or Professional</td>
<td>Court, interview, some offices.</td>
<td>Suit pants or knee-length suit skirt with a matching suit coat. The suit should be dark in color (black, dark gray, navy blue, or dark brown) and should have full-length sleeves. The suit should be worn with hosiery. Pair the suit with a collared shirt or nice blouse. Dress shoes should be closed-toe.</td>
<td>No sandals (and any open-toed shoes, including pumps), revealing clothes, brightly colored suits or shirts, hats, sundresses, dresses, or sheer/see-through fabrics. Slits in skirts should be sewn down to the knee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Casual</td>
<td>Office, some out-of-office activities.</td>
<td>Skirt with a blazer (they do not need to match exactly, but should be complementary). Skirt or slacks with nice blouse or collared shirt. Skirt with a cardigan and blouse or a sweater set. Shoes should be closed toe.</td>
<td>No hats, sandals, revealing clothes, brightly colored skirts or shirts, sundresses, or other dresses. No Polo shirts, turtlenecks, t-shirts or tank tops. No jeans, capris, shorts, sweats, or sweatshirts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual</td>
<td>Office activities outside of the work environment.</td>
<td>Dresses and sun dresses are appropriate at these kinds of activities. You may also wear khakis or slacks with a nice blouse, nice sweater, or collared shirt.</td>
<td>No revealing clothes. No jeans, capris, shorts, sweats, sweatshirts, t-shirts, overalls, sandals, or sleeveless tops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>Outside of the work environment.</td>
<td>Jeans, t-shirts, sweatshirts, shorts, tennis shoes or sandals.</td>
<td>No revealing, torn, dirty, or otherwise unacceptable clothes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*See examples on the csö’s Pinterest style boards at [www.pinterest.com/byulawcso](http://www.pinterest.com/byulawcso)*
## MEN’S DRESS STANDARDS*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Clothes to Wear</th>
<th>Clothes to Avoid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black Tie or Formal</td>
<td>Some office activities. Generally designated in the invitation to those activities. Rarely used.</td>
<td>Should wear tuxedo in black with a dark tuxedo tie, or tuxedo bow-tie. Dress shoes should be shiny and black.</td>
<td>Do not wear anything without a collar, a plain suit, scuffed shoes, or any excessively bright colors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Formal, Business, or Professional</td>
<td>Court, interview, some offices.</td>
<td>Suit coat with matching pants. Collared shirt with a tie. The tie should not have bright colors. Nice dress shoes. The shirt should be white and the suit should be a dark color, such as black, dark gray, navy blue, etc. Always wear a suit coat. Make sure your belt matches both your suit and your shoes (if your suit is dark grey or black, wear a black belt and black shoes).</td>
<td>No brightly-colored shirts or ties. No sneakers or tennis shoes or any kind of casual footwear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Casual</td>
<td>Office, some out-of-office activities.</td>
<td>Always wear slacks or dress pants. These can be paired with a sport jacket and a collared shirt, with or without a tie, or a collared shirt with sweater vest with or without a tie.</td>
<td>No jeans, polo shirts, turtlenecks, sweatpants, t-shirts, tennis shoes, or sandals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual</td>
<td>Office activities outside of the work environment.</td>
<td>Khakis or slacks with a polo, nice sweater, or collared patterned or colored button down shirt.</td>
<td>No t-shirts, jeans, sweatshirts, sweatpants, shorts, tennis shoes, or sandals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>Outside of the work environment.</td>
<td>Jeans, t-shirts, sweatshirts, shorts, tennis shoes or sandals.</td>
<td>No revealing, torn, dirty, or otherwise socially unacceptable clothes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*See examples on the CSO’s Pinterest style boards at www.pinterest.com/byulawcso*

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Habits and Body Language

Annoying speaking habits or body language could cost you a job. If you have any nervous habits, such as biting your nails, popping your knuckles, bouncing your legs up and down, or fidgeting, learn to control these during an interview. If you fidget with your hands, put them in one of three positions: (1) arms resting on the chair arms, (2) hands folded in your lap, or (3) one arm resting on the chair arm and the other hand resting on your knee. Do not fold your arms across your chest as this could signal defensiveness and distrust.

Keep your feet on the floor and sit with your head erect and your shoulders back. This is hard to do in a plush chair or sofa so, if given a choice, sit in a straight-backed chair. Use gestures to enhance your verbal messages, and nod your head at appropriate times without overdoing it. Having said this, do not be so self-conscious that it is impossible to relax. You do not want to look stiff or uncomfortable.

Eye Contact

You should maintain eye contact during an interview, especially when you are answering questions. This is viewed as a sign of sincerity and openness. However, do not stare the interviewer down, since this will make him or her more uncomfortable than no eye contact at all. If there are multiple interviewers, make eye contact with each of them regularly so that you do not appear to favor one interviewer.

Confidence

Use the self-assessment section of this handbook to determine what your strengths are, and play upon those strengths in the interview. Remember that you are receiving a wonderful legal education from a top law school. Interviewers will recognize when you do not possess inner confidence. Begin early in your law school career to develop a strong sense of who you are and to reflect upon the skills you possess that led to you the study of law.

Other Interviewing Tips

- Stress your strong points and specific skills.
- Demonstrate self-confidence.
- Be assertive but not overbearing or aggressive.
• Think before you speak, and provide a well-formulated, succinct, positive answer.
• Avoid presenting yourself as a specialist if you are not one.
• Interact as an equal during the interview, and play an active role.
• Be professional; do not buddy-up to the interviewer.
• Build rapport.
• Remember that interviewers are always asking the unspoken question, “Do I want this person as a colleague?”
• If asked about your weaknesses, name only one that will not affect your performance in the job. If possible, show how your ability to deal with this weakness is a strength.
• Do not volunteer negative information, but if asked a tough question, be honest and cast the answer positively.

Thank you Notes

Send an email or a handwritten or typed thank you note to screening (initial) or call-back interviewer(s), and refer to something specific that was discussed during the interview. This will help the interviewer remember you and will show your interest in the organization. For example, mention the newly developed rotation system for first-year associates or the weekly department seminars. Send your thank you letter as soon as possible after the interview, within 24 hours.

THE CALL-BACK INTERVIEW

Receiving a call-back, or second interview, indicates serious interest in you. It means the employer thinks you can do the job and is evaluating you for “fit” in the organization. You will spend several hours in the employer’s office interviewing with a number of attorneys who may also be trying to sell you on taking the job. While you are being recruited and evaluated, consider whether the employer is a good fit for you.

Prior to the Call-back Interview

Acknowledging the Call-back Invitation

If you receive a letter and/or telephone call from the employer inviting you to visit its office, confirm your acceptance by telephone as soon as possible.

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The organization will then help you make the necessary arrangements for travel and accommodations.

Making Arrangements

Arrange your visit for the earliest possible date. Schedule no more than one or two call-back interviews per day. The call-back process is exhausting, and you might be late for the next appointment if interviews take longer than planned.

Sharing Expenses

Firms have different policies regarding call-back expenses, so do not make any assumptions. If the information is not volunteered, ask the recruiting coordinator or hiring partner about the policy. Firms generally pay the reasonable business expenses directly associated with your trip, such as economy roundtrip airfare, hotel accommodations, meals, and ground transportation. Costs not directly related to interviews should not be charged to employers. Keep accurate records of expenditures and save all receipts. Reimbursement for spouses’ travel expenses will probably be covered if they are specifically invited for the trip. If your trip includes multiple call-backs in the same city, firms will usually share your expenses, so coordinate your visit.

Preparation

Prepare for this interview in great depth since you are now much closer to getting a job offer. Learn everything you possibly can about the firm. Be ready to answer questions about your motivation for practicing law, your interest in the firm, and your qualifications and personal characteristics that make you the ideal candidate for the job. No matter how much research you have done, you must have a list of thoughtful questions to ask about the attorneys’ work and the firm culture.

AT THE INTERVIEW

Call-back interviews may last from several hours to an entire day, and the attorneys you meet will be evaluating your fit with their firm. Your questions, answers, and comments should articulate your strengths, thoughtfulness, and serious interest in the firm and the job. Above all, you are trying to characterize yourself as a good risk.
The Players

You will probably meet with several partners, associates, and alumni who will vote on whether to give you an offer. Partners are not necessarily more central to the decision than associates. In many firms, the vote to hire must be unanimous. Furthermore, staff members and others who do not officially vote usually have the ear of those who do. Therefore, treat everyone you meet with the same high degree of respect, including recruiting coordinators (who often sit on the hiring committee), secretaries, clerks, and receptionists.

If prior to your interview the organization provides you with a list of the attorneys with whom you will be meeting, find out something about each of them so that you can ask appropriate, individualized questions. At the same time, however, be honest about your career objectives (e.g., do not express your desire to do energy law to an energy law attorney if you have absolutely no interest in the area); should you receive an offer, the attorneys you meet with may take your expressed interests into consideration when giving you assignments.

The Meal

The call-back schedule will generally include either lunch or dinner at a nice restaurant (at the expense of the organization). Remember that you are still being interviewed, so do not abandon your professionalism. These attorneys are evaluating you in a social setting. They are looking for maturity, self-confidence, professionalism, ability to converse easily, and whether you are pleasant company. Make sure you have the confidence to feel comfortable eating a $50 dinner.


Do I Really Want This Person as a Colleague?

At the end of the interview, lawyers will ask themselves, “Is this someone I will trust to take over an assignment for me? Is this someone with whom I want to work, especially in a stressful situation?” Let your actions, questions, and answers during the call-back interview show that the answer to these questions is a resounding, “Yes.”

BYU Law School Career Services
Follow-up Thank you Letters

Send a thank you (email or letter) to the person at the firm who was responsible for scheduling your interviews and arranging your itinerary. You may also write individualized letters to each person who interviewed you. Copies of all correspondence will be kept in your file, so do not send identical letters to everyone. If you only write one letter, send it to the person who arranged your interviews. Your letter should clearly acknowledge your visit to the firm, remark on any memorable events or important items of discussion, and give specific thanks for the hospitality that you were shown.

TIP: See Chapter 8 for a sample Thank You letter

After a few weeks, if you have not heard from the employer, you may want to consider an additional follow-up correspondence to show your continued enthusiasm for the employer. A few reasons you might find to send an email or letter to the firm include the following:

- You wanted to forward a copy of your new grades.
- You wanted to let the hiring partner or one of the people with whom you interviewed know of your election to a board position in a law school organization.
- You received an honor or award at the law school and wanted to let the hiring committee know.
- You wanted to provide the hiring committee with a copy of a paper you recently completed for a class or a copy of an article that was recently accepted for publication.
- You received an offer from another employer and need to let the employer know if you accept that offer or not; however, you are still hoping for an offer from this employer. (If the other law firm is especially prestigious, you may want to drop its name in your correspondence.)

THE OFFER

Before you leave the call-back interview, ask what the time frame is for making a decision. If the hiring committee does not contact you within the stated time, do not write-off the organization or assume a rejection will follow. No contact probably means no decision has been made due to one or more of the following circumstances:
• Key decision-makers have been unavailable.
• The organization still has other candidates to interview.
• The organization has not determined their hiring needs or budget.
• The organization has outstanding offers and does not know how many will accept (i.e., hiring needs are temporarily uncertain).

Once the firm makes you an offer, you should acknowledge it quickly. Call to thank them, to express continued interest, and to learn their timetable for an answer. All offers require a response. Whether accepting or rejecting an offer, call the individual who extended the offer. A personal phone call is very important even when saying, “no” (do not decline an offer with an answering machine message). It leaves the organization with positive feelings about you. You should also send a confirming follow-up letter.

TIP: See Chapter 8 for sample Offer Acceptance & Offer Declination letters

Between your acceptance of the offer and your arrival at the firm, continue to stay in-touch with your contacts at the firm, for instance, by informing them of any new achievements. Remember that you still have not received a permanent offer, so any positive impression you make or commitment to the firm you demonstrate will work to your advantage. Additionally, if the hiring committee remembers who you are, it may be more likely to entrust you with the more interesting summer assignments.

Please be sure to review that NALP Principles and Standards for Recruiting in preparation for this upcoming fall. You can find the complete text at: www.nalp.org/fulltextofnalpprinciplesandstandards

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions Likely to Be Asked During an Interview
• Tell me about yourself.
• Why did you decide to interview with our law firm?
• What law courses did you like best? Least? Why?
• What are your major accomplishments in school?
• What are your strengths?
• Tell me about a weakness you have overcome.
• What are your short- and long-range career goals?
• Why did you establish these goals, and what are you doing to prepare yourself to achieve them?
• What qualities do you have that will make you a successful lawyer?
• Why did you decide to go to law school?
• What do you know about our firm?
• What are you looking for in a permanent job?
• Tell me about a situation where you used initiative to solve a problem in the workplace.
• Tell me about your participation on . . . (a journal, moot court, club, or so forth).
• Tell me about your legal work experience last summer.
• Did you get an offer from your summer employer? (Why not?)
• Where else are you interviewing? (It is very important to have other offices to mention.)
• Have you been offered jobs by other firms? Where?
• How is your work experience relevant to our practice?
• What kind of law would you like to practice? Why?
• Why should we hire you?
• What would you like to know about our firm?

Application Form Questions
• Give details of how you spend your extracurricular time, including your contribution to any clubs/societies. For at least one of these explain the benefits you derive from this activity.
• Describe a position of responsibility you have held. What did you learn about yourself and your impact on others?
• By reference to other careers, explain why law would be your chosen career.
• What aspects of your character and/or experience do you think make you particularly suited for a legal career with a firm like ______?
• If you have taken a gap year, or intend to take a gap year, please tell us how you have, or intend to spend this time.
• If there are any gaps in the timeline of your application, for example between employment positions or education please detail what you did.

Basic Questions to Ask the Interviewer
• What is your firm looking for in its associates?
• What are the organization’s strengths and weaknesses?
• Does your firm do pro bono work?
• What opportunities do new associates have to be involved in pro bono work?
• What kind of work could I expect as a new associate?
• How is work assigned, supervised, and/or evaluated?
• How is partnership/other advancement determined?
• What staff support is available to attorneys?
• Why did you decide to join this organization?
• Is there anything about the office that bothers you?
• Do business cycles affect work flow or partnership track?
• What does partnership entail in terms of legal and financial responsibility, monetary contribution to the firm, and workload? (Check your sources to learn whether these issues should be discussed during the call-back stage or after you get an offer.)
• Where do most members of the firm live?
• Does the firm encourage associate involvement in community/bar association activities?

ADVICE FROM ON-CAMPUS RECRUITERS

• Be prepared to carry the ball during the interview; not all interviewers are talkative.
• Make sure answering machine messages aren’t bizarre or offensive and that you get your messages.
• Be yourself, but on your best behavior.
• Be frank about your academic performance—state circumstances that may have influenced your performance, but don’t apologize for your record.
• Bring a writing sample that is solely your own work to the interview.
• When scheduling the call-back interview, ask what you will need to bring to the office.
• Be candid with us about splitting expenses between firms for call-back interviews.
• Make sure that you have the firm’s phone number with you as you travel to the interview so you can notify us if you will be late. Be consistent with your demeanor during the on-campus interview and those conducted at the firm.
• Extreme deference to authority translates poorly.
• If you interview with multiple firms in a city, realize that the recruiting coordinators are friendly competitors and compare notes. There are no secrets.

For More Information

American Bar Association-Law Student Division – www.americanbar.org/groups/law_students.html

The Law Student Division focuses on practical and professional skills development and provides assistance in the search for jobs, both during and after graduation from law school.

Interview Strategies: A Flawless Follow-up – www.sfbsearch.com/content.cfm/ID/20129

This is the 13th and final article in a series providing interview tips and techniques for attorneys. Links to previous articles in the series follow this article.