



How to Answer Tough Law School Interview Questions

In law school interviews, it's important to explain why you're a strong candidate, experts say.

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Trial lawyers and appellate lawyers are often asked questions by judges who expect an immediate response. These attorneys cannot waver over what to say; they must improvise and come up with a compelling argument.

Some of the most influential attorneys in U.S. history are famous for their ability to deliver captivating, off-the-cuff speeches. Before he joined the U.S. Supreme Court, Justice Thurgood Marshall was a litigator known for his powerful speeches during civil rights cases. And Clarence Darrow – a trial attorney who represented clients in some of the most controversial legal disputes of the early 20th century like the "Scopes monkey trial" – was often lauded for his ability to sway juries with his remarks.

Law school admissions committees strive to identify students who have the potential to have a lasting positive impact on the legal profession. That's one reason why they look for applicants who have the capacity to speak with authority and conviction in a way that inspires others. But law schools also have a more pragmatic reason to recruit students with a silver tongue: Oral advocacy is a crucial part of many legal jobs.

Attorney Andrew Ittleman, a founder and partner with the Fuerst Ittleman David & Joseph law firm in Miami, says that showing poise during a law school admissions interview is a must.

"[In] exercises like that, you know, whether it's sitting in an interview or arguing in court, you want to get to a place where you can be loose going in," Ittleman says. "It's not a test... Nobody is grading you the way that they would on a test. They want to see who you are as a person."

Ittleman advises law school applicants to conduct a few practice interviews with people they trust who can provide honest feedback. "Go through a couple of dry runs," he suggests. Ittleman says practice interviews help students discover the right words to use to clearly express their thoughts.

With that in mind, attorneys say that law school applicants should figure out how they'd like to answer the following questions before their admissions interviews

1. Why do you want to become a lawyer? Experts say this is a question that J.D. applicants must have a compelling answer for, because law schools are wary of admitting students who view law school as a delay tactic to avoid making a career choice.

"I believe strongly that we should prepare and produce graduates who passionately want to be lawyers, because I believe lawyers who are passionate about what they are doing will be happy lawyers," says Kathleen Boozang, dean of the Seton Hall University School of Law in New Jersey. "And so I am looking to see that the student is going to law school because they are inspired to go to law school, as opposed to [because] they really can't think of anything else to do."

2. Why are you applying to this particular law school? "Students should go into interviews knowing everything on that school's website, its values, how it describes itself, who the star professors are, etc.," says Ella Tyler, a retired lawyer who works as a tutor for Varsity Tutors, a virtual education platform. "Law requires preparation and research, so if you showcase those skill sets in your interview, it's proof that you have what it takes to be a lawyer."

3. What kind of law are you most interested in practicing? What is your dream law job? If you want to use a law degree in an unconventional way, such as in a policy job or a nonlegal business position, you may be asked: Why do you need a law degree? What would a law degree allow you to do professionally that you couldn't do without the degree?

Experts say law schools are looking for applicants who can clearly articulate how they intend to use a J.D., because these schools don't want to admit students who lack a clear justification for investing the time, effort and expense that law school requires.

"Law school is hard, it's a lot of work, and you have to have the spark," Boozang says. "You have to have a passion, you need to want to do it, and I want to just confirm that the student knows what they are getting into and that the desire is real."

4. What book are you reading at the moment, and what do you think of it? If you aren't currently reading a book, you may be asked an alternative question: Who is your favorite author and why?

Boozang says she asks questions like this to see whether a J.D. applicant is intellectually curious, enjoys the written word and can formulate a coherent argument about what he or she has read. The ability to analyze a text is a key skill for an aspiring lawyer, Boozang says.

Questions of this type are also meant to reveal whether an applicant has a well-rounded personality that includes interests besides academics, Boozang says. She advises applicants to read the news and continue pursuing their extracurricular interests during the law school admissions process, because it gives them something interesting to discuss when they are asked personal questions.

"I emphasize the importance to young people thinking about law school the need to be thinking about the world around them," she says.

5. What college paper are you most proud of? The thinking behind this question is that it allows a J.D. applicant to discuss a subject they are enthusiastic and knowledgeable about, Boozang says. This interview question illuminates the way an applicant thinks and clarifies whether they have the mindset of a future attorney, she adds.

Boozang says a J.D. applicant who is asked this question should be prepared to answer follow-up queries about his or her paper, which may ultimately lead to a back-and-forth discussion with the interviewer. She says that the topic or thesis of the paper will be less relevant to the interviewer than whether the

applicant is able to clearly explain his or her ideas and make a coherent argument.

6. How would you contribute to a law school class? Experts say questions like this give law school applicants an opportunity to differentiate themselves from their competitors in the J.D. admissions process.

Nyana Abreu, an attorney at Sequor Law in Miami, says the key to answering this question well is to talk less about academic statistics and more about who you are as a person.

"That's not an academic question, and I think that's something that a lot of candidates miss – that when you're given an opportunity to talk about yourself, they don't want to know your GPA [and] they don't want to know your test scores," she says. "They already know all those types of things. They want to know something memorable about you. So I would say, think of that question as more of a first date question. You're not so much telling the interviewer why you're so studious and hardworking. You're telling the interviewer why people want to spend time with you."