

GUIDE TO CALLBACK INTERVIEWS & SUBSEQUENT OFFERS



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WHAT IS A CALLBACK INTERVIEW?

A callback interview is the second level of interviewing that takes place at the firm's office after an initial On-Campus Interview Program (OCI) interview. Generally, firms do not make decisions on offers of employment until after a candidate has completed a callback interview. A callback interview generally includes interviews with numerous lawyers conducted in a manner similar to an OCI interview, and often includes lunch or dinner with two or more attorneys from the firm.

THE PURPOSE OF A CALLBACK INTERVIEW

A firm has two main goals for a callback interview: (1) to see whether a candidate is a good fit for the firm and (2) to sell the firm to the candidate. Firms will determine whether a candidate is a good fit by trying to get to know the person during their time at the office. The interviewers' goal is to feel like they really know who the candidate is by the end of the day. Interviewers will sell the firm to a candidate by describing the firm's operation, atmosphere and work through personal experiences they have had with the firm. At the same time, a callback interview is an opportunity for a candidate to see what life is like for a lawyer at the firm. This may be the only chance for a candidate to get to know the firm before receiving an offer of employment.

I. GETTING THE CALLBACK INTERVIEW

When will I hear back from a firm after my initial OCI interview?

Most firms will contact you shortly after your OCI interview to schedule a callback. However, some will contact you a few weeks later. Do not get anxious if you have not heard back from a firm. It is best to not contact the firm unless you have received an offer from another firm and the deadline to accept is approaching. Be prepared to state who the firm is when you call. Callback invitations may come by phone, letter or email. Make sure your contact information is correct on your résumé. Make sure you have voicemail (with a professional sounding message) and check your email often, including your junk folder.

How do I respond to an invitation for a callback interview?

Your callback invitation should provide you with the name and contact information for the person you must contact to respond to your invitation. You should respond as soon as possible, even if you will not be able to schedule your callback for a few weeks. It is considered professional courtesy to respond within one day. You must respond to decline a callback with the same professional courtesy. Sometimes, students receive callback invitations at the conclusion of their OCI interview. In such cases, you should respond enthusiastically, but you do not need to commit to the callback at that time, unless you are certain you want to accept.

II. SCHEDULING THE CALLBACK INTERVIEW

Who do I contact to schedule my callback interview?

Your callback invitation should tell you whom to contact to schedule the callback. Most likely, the person you will speak with is the recruitment coordinator. The recruitment coordinator is usually a member of the firm's staff who is not an attorney but whose job is devoted entirely to hiring laterals and running the summer associate program. In some cases, the recruiting coordinator will be an attorney. It is imperative that you treat the recruiting coordinator with the same respect that you give to the attorneys you interview with. Even though this individual may not be an attorney, they will undoubtedly be asked to provide their opinion of you and will be a factor in the hiring decision.

How long do callback interviews last?

The length of a callback interview can vary. Some callback interviews last 2-3 hours, others can last all day. You should ask the recruitment coordinator or the attorney responsible for scheduling your callback for information on how long the callback interview should last, how many attorneys you are meeting with, and the names of the attorneys you are meeting with. It is possible that the recruitment coordinator will not know who you will be meeting with and will ask you to call a few days before the callback to get the information.

My callback will take place out of town. What do I do about travel expenses?

Many, but not all, firms reimburse candidates for travel expenses incurred from a callback interview. Generally, a firm will pay for all *reasonable* travel expenses:

- Single hotel room
- Coach airfare
- Cab fare to and from the airport, hotel and firm
- A meal or two (depending on your arrival)

Reasonable travel expenses do not include any superfluous expenses such as first class airfare, room service or pay per view movies. You should speak to the recruitment coordinator about the firm's policy on travel expenses. A good way to raise the subject is to ask the recruitment coordinator whether you should make your own travel arrangements. At that time, the coordinator should explain the policy to you. Keep in mind that if a firm requests a hotel receipt, they will see all expenses incurred, even if you intended to pay for some things out of pocket. Incurring expenses such as room service or pay per view movies can reflect poorly on you and can be taken into consideration by a firm when making a decision. If you have any doubt about an expense, check with the recruitment coordinator before incurring the expense. Keep in mind that some firms will only reimburse expenses after they have made an offer of employment to that individual. Other firms will not pay for travel expenses at all.

What do I do if I have several callback invitations in a particular city?

If you are interviewing with more than one firm on the trip, be sure to ask the coordinator about the firm's procedure for sharing expenses. Don't worry about letting the firm know that you are interviewing with other firms, firms know that this may be the case. They will appreciate your honesty and interest in saving them money.

III. PREPARING FOR THE CALLBACK INTERVIEW

Research, research, research

It is imperative that you prepare for your callback interview by doing a lot of research. You should research the firm, its summer associate program, the city the firm is located in and the individual attorneys you are meeting with.

Learn about the firm

While a firm's web site has a lot of information about the firm, you do not want to recite the firm's web site back to the interviewers. Some additional sources of information:

- A news search of the firm on Westlaw or LEXIS
- Area bar journals, many of which are online
- Legal web sites like Find Law (<http://careers.findlaw.com>) and Chambers and Partners (<http://www.chambersandpartners.com>)
- A web search through a search engine like Google

Learn about the summer associate program

Many firms have extensive information about their summer associate programs available on their web site. You should familiarize yourself with the information provided to avoid asking any questions that could be answered by reading the web site.

Learn about the city/state/region you are interviewing in

It is possible that you will be asked why you are interested in the city you are interviewing in. Be prepared to discuss your interest in the city as well as the state and region. You want the interviewer to be convinced that you intend to move to the city if you receive an offer.

Learn about the attorneys you will be meeting with

You should ask the recruitment coordinator for the names of the attorneys you will be meeting with. The recruitment coordinator may not have this information available for you until a few days before your callback. If you do get the names of the attorneys in time, you should learn more about them. Martindale-Hubbell (www.martindale.com) provides short biographies of attorneys. In addition, the firm's web site should also provide biographical and professional information about the attorneys. You may find that the firm has scheduled interviews with attorneys that share some things in common with you (law school or college alma mater, work experience, etc.).

Prepare questions to ask during your callback interview

Be sure to prepare questions to ask during interviews. It is acceptable to ask the same or similar questions of more than one attorney because you may get different answers. You can also tailor questions to a particular attorney and his practice area/experience. Do not ask about billable hours, whether associates work on weekends, dress code, attrition rates or the like until you have an offer.

What should I bring with me?

Bring extra copies of your résumé, transcript, writing sample and two lists of references – enough for everyone you are meeting and extras, in case other attorneys ask for your information, or are added to your schedule.

What do I wear?

Dress as you did for the OCI interview. Make it a point to dress professionally.

Packing for an out of town callback

If you are flying to another part of the country, be sure to dress accordingly for the weather. Check www.weather.com for the latest forecast in the city you are visiting. Always bring extra shirts, shoes, socks, panty hose, etc., just in case. Bring an overcoat and umbrella.

Review and update your online information

It has become common practice for employers to go online to learn more about their callback candidates. This includes Googling a candidate as well as reviewing any social networking pages a candidate may have (i.e. Facebook and LinkedIn). In anticipation of this sort of scrutiny, you should use discretion with regard to any online information available. Your online reputation is as important as your real life one, so you should take steps to ensure that any online information about you will not derail your efforts to obtain an offer. Google your own name and see if you are comfortable with the information available. Also, take a look at your social networking pages and make sure that the details do not reflect poorly on you. You do not have to remove your pages. Instead, take advantage of the access restriction available to you by making your pages private and be sure that any photos visible to any visitor to the page are ones that you are comfortable having a potential employer see.

IV. THE CALLBACK INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

There is no set formula for a callback. You could meet with as few as two attorneys and as many as ten. Some attorneys will meet you in small groups, others individually. These interviews will be a lot like your OCI interviews and can last from 20 minutes to an hour.

What is lunch like?

Callback schedules generally include lunch or some type of break. You can expect anything from lunch at a nice restaurant near the office, a catered lunch at the office, a coffee break, a walking tour of the area near the office, etc. Lunch generally lasts an hour to an hour and a half. The purpose of the lunch is to provide the attorneys joining you an opportunity to get to know you. Remember that lunch is still a formal part of the interview. You should prepare questions to ask attorneys while at lunch. Since lunch usually includes first and second year associates, you should ask questions about their experiences thus far. However, beware of young associates who tell you that you can ask them anything, even about salary and billable hours. You will be eating with a number of people so be sure to include them in your conversation. When responding to a question, make eye contact with everyone at the table, not just the person who asked the question. Try to speak to everyone at the table and remember to use proper dining etiquette.

What should I order?

Lunch is part of the hiring process; even your meal order is important. Order from the middle price range and something easy/not messy to eat. Do not order alcoholic beverage, even if others do. Use your discretion in ordering appetizers/desserts, i.e. if everyone else orders or insists that you order.

V. AT THE CALLBACK INTERVIEW

Arrive approximately 15 minutes early and ask for the recruitment coordinator/the individual you were told to ask for.

What if I know I am going to be late?

Should some emergency arise (car accident, traffic), call ahead and tell the recruitment coordinator so your schedule can be arranged.

Greeting attorneys and staff

You should treat anyone you meet at the firm respectfully, whether the person is a partner or a staff member. Shake hands when introduced. Always make eye contact.

Pay attention

A callback interview is the perfect opportunity to observe the firm. You will probably be taken from one office to another for each interview. While walking through the office, try to notice the firm atmosphere. Do attorneys greet each other when they pass? Are doors open or closed? Is there friendly interaction between the staff and attorneys? Do people seem pleasant or hurried and tired?

Saying goodbye

Thank each interviewer at the conclusion of your interview. Ask for a business card so you have the proper spelling of their name as well as their contact information. The last part of a callback generally consists of a tour of the office and a final discussion with either the hiring attorney, recruiting coordinator or the attorney in charge of the summer associate program. You can take this opportunity to ask questions regarding the firm's hiring process (i.e. when the hiring committee meets) and when you can expect to hear back from the firm. At the end of the callback, thank the recruitment coordinator for coordinating the callback.

VI. AFTER THE CALLBACK INTERVIEW

Take notes

Immediately after the callback, write down notes on your impression of the firm and the discussions you had with each attorney. These notes will be helpful when you prepare your thank you letters and will help you make a decision should you get an offer from the firm.

Thank you letters

Within 48 hours, prepare and send thank you notes to each interviewer you met and the recruitment coordinator. Do not send the same letter to each person. Tailor each letter to the individual by referencing topics you discussed at your interview. Send thank you letters via email and postal mail. Email delivery ensures that your thank you will get there in a timely fashion, while postal mail demonstrates your professionalism and class.

Hearing back from the firm

Remember to write down when you were told you would hear back from the firm. If that time passes without any response from the firm, you may contact the recruitment coordinator to reiterate your interest in the firm and to ask if there is any additional information that you can provide them. If enough time has passed that you have received additional grades or accolades, offer to send that information to the firm. Do not ask point blank whether a decision has been made and do not continue to nag the recruitment coordinator. Keep in mind that firms often make a first round of offers and then, based on how many rejections they receive, make a second round of offers. Therefore, you may still receive an offer even if you do not hear from them soon after the callback.

VII. ACCEPTING AND REJECTING OFFERS

Receiving the offer

It is possible that you will receive an offer during your callback interview. You should respond enthusiastically, but you do not need to accept on the spot. You also may receive a phone call telling you that you have an offer. A firm should still put your offer in writing and you can wait until you received the written offer before accepting.

How long do I have to decide whether to accept an offer?

According to the NALP guidelines (The National Association for Legal Career Professionals – www.nalp.org – Principles & Standards), all offers should remain open for at least 28 days after the date that the offer is made in writing. Therefore, the offer will expire at the close of business on the 28th day. Employers with 40 or fewer attorneys in all offices are required to keep offers made through December 15th open for at least 3 weeks and offers made after December 15th open for at least 2 weeks. There may be some last minute schedule changes. Do not let that shake your confidence.

Regardless of the NALP guidelines, you should notify the employer of your decision to accept as soon as you make it, even if it is in advance of the deadline you've been given. You should also notify the Ovidia CP&P Office upon acceptance of an offer. You should reaffirm your interest in an employer who has extended an offer by contacting the firm within 28 days of the date of the offer letter, even if the employer has not specifically asked you to do so. A firm can retract an offer if a law student does not reaffirm his or her interest. You should mark the 28 day deadline on your calendar so you do not forget to call.

How many offers can I hold at one time?

At any one time a student should not hold open more than five offers of employment simultaneously. Offers for employment include those received as a result of previous summer employment. 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.

I have an offer I don't want. What do I do?

You should decline promptly offers that you are no longer seriously considering. You should notify the employer as soon as you make the decision, even if it is in advance of the deadline. You should also notify the Ovadia CP&P Office upon rejection of an employment offer.

I still have questions about my callback offers

For any additional questions that may not have been answered in this guide, please contact Ana Bierman, Assistant Dean at acbierma@fiu.edu.