

A Guide to a Successful Interview With a Lawyer

This guide will help you prepare for your interview with a lawyer.

A little preparation will make your interview successful.

Introduction

This guide describes four steps to take before you see a lawyer.

Whether you are paying for your lawyer or receiving free legal advice, it is to your advantage to be prepared to make the best use of the time you spend with your lawyer.

If you have formally retained a lawyer every moment spent with him or her is billable time. Therefore, you don't want to spend valuable time with your lawyer searching for information or documents when you should be focusing on the important legal aspects of your case.

If you are receiving free legal advice, it is likely that your time with a lawyer will be limited. Generally, "pro bono" appointments are of thirty minute duration. Therefore, it is important that you have all of your pertinent information organized in a fashion that will allow you and your lawyer to make optimal use of this limited time.

If you follow the four steps in this guide, you will be well prepared and know what to expect when you meet your lawyer. This will help you to make good use of your time and be in a better position to understand your rights.

Step 1: Fill out the Information Sheet

- Fill out the **Information Sheet** at the end of this guide. Take it with you to the interview.
- If there are other important names and addresses that the lawyer should be aware of, put them in too. If your problem has a file or case number, include that as well.
- Please print or type.

Step 2: Prepare your Document List

- Take all letters and documents about your legal problem with you to the interview. If you are in doubt about an item, bring it anyway. Next, put the documents in order according to their dates.
- Fill out the **Document List** at the end of this information. You can use it to list the documents you have.

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Here is an example of how to fill out the Document List.

Document List

Number	Dated	Pages	Description	Author	Recipient
1	June 13, 2005	2	Letter about assessment of child	Tom Delaney	School Board No. 34

What if some of the documents are in a package?

If some of the documents are in a package, leave them in the package. An example of this would be a package prepared by the Tribunal under the Employment and Assistance Act.

Leave the documents the way they are arranged in the package and do a separate Document List for the package.

If you have little Post-It notes, put the number of the document on a Post-It note. Attach the Post-It note to each document so that it corresponds to the Document List.

2. Who said what to whom – the exact words, not a summary.
3. Who was present during conversations and how long the conversations lasted.

Important: The lawyer needs to know all the details, good and bad, about your case. If you are completely frank, the lawyer will be in the best position to handle your problem and advise you on the same.

The better prepared you are for the interview, the better advice the lawyer can give you.

Step 3: Prepare your written statement

- Write out your story in chronological point form. This is your written statement. Put in all the facts that you consider important. Be specific as to the dates and who said what. When you write out your story, it should not be more than two pages. This will force you to focus on the important matters.
- Take the written statement with you to the interview. It will help refresh your memory when you are talking to the lawyer.
- If you have questions you want to ask the lawyer, write them out and take them with you. It's easy to forget the questions if you don't write them down.

The lawyer will want to know all the details

The lawyer will want to know

1. Exact dates, if possible.

Step 4: Going to the interview

There are four "S's" to a successful interview with a lawyer: **slow, straightforward, specific, and systematic.**

1. Slow

People tend to talk too fast in a lawyer interview. This is natural. Many of us are nervous when we have to see a lawyer. We want to tell all.

Think about it this way: hearing your story is like eating dinner.

- If the lawyer is eating too fast, he or she won't be able to digest it properly.
- If you tell your story slowly, this gives the lawyer time to digest and understand your story.

If you talk slowly, you give the lawyer time to ask questions. You will avoid missing important facts.

2. Straightforward

All of us want to be seen in a good light. When we talk to other people, we usually try to emphasize the favourable things about ourselves. There is nothing wrong with this. It helps us all get along.

However, when you're talking to a lawyer, things are different. **You need to give the lawyer both the good information and the bad information.**

If you did something wrong, admit it to the lawyer. It will most likely be brought to his/her attention later anyway, by the opposing party.

The lawyer needs to know the good and the bad information at the beginning. That will help the lawyer to give you good advice and save time and possibly money in the long run. Unless the lawyer knows everything, he or she cannot give you good advice.

The more straightforward you are in the interview, the better advice the lawyer can give you.

Here's a situation that illustrates the point. It's about a man who was fired for being late for work. He does not want to answer the lawyer's question.

Q. *Were you late for work on March 13, 2005?*

A. *Late! You should talk to Margo Smith. She is never on time. She gets away with murder.*

Q. *But on March 13, 2005, were you late?*

A. *Is it my fault there was a car accident on the Port Mann Bridge? These things happen!*

Q. *On Mar 13, 2005, were you on time for work? (FIRM VOICE)*

A. *Don't you listen? I've explained that! (LOUD VOICE)*

The lawyer asked the man, "Were you late for work?" But the man did not answer the question. Instead, he gave his excuses for being late.

A good exchange goes like this:

Q. *Were you late for work on March 13, 2005?*

A. *Yes!*

Q. *What was the reason?*

A. *There was a car accident on the Port Mann Bridge. I was stuck in traffic for thirty minutes.*

Q. *Were you ever late before?*

A. *No.*

Q. *Were other people ever fired for lateness?*

A. *No. Marge Smith was late all the time and she wasn't fired!*

This exchange goes to the heart of the problem.

- Always be straightforward. Answer the questions directly.
- Remember, many of the questions the lawyer will ask require simple answers.
- The simple, straightforward answer is best.

3. Specific

We all tend to talk in generalities. This person is good. That motion picture is terrific! However, such generalities are not useful when you are dealing with the law.

Law requires specific information. If you are asked a question such as: "On what date did this happen?", it is best to give a specific date, e.g., March 15, 2006. If you can't be specific, be as specific as possible. "It happened the week of March 12, 2006."

Do not summarize conversations. Instead, tell the lawyer, "Mr. Jones said...and then I said..." Repeat the exact words that were said.

4. Systematic

When you are telling your story to the lawyer, tell it in chronological order . You cannot tell everything at once.

Here is an example of what can go wrong. A woman is describing to her lawyer how she got fired from her job.

Q. *Did Mr. Jones, your boss, call you in his office?*

A. Yes.

Q. *What did he say?*

A. *He said Mrs. Smith, please sit down. I sat down. Then he said, "This is difficult, but I'm going to let you go, **because of the Atlantic mix-up. Well, I can tell you, I can swear on my mother's grave, I had nothing to do with the Atlantic mix-up."***

The information in bold type breaks the chronological order. The woman's story about how she got fired has been interrupted. The woman has begun to talk about something new, "the Atlantic mix-up." The flow and the flavour of the story about the firing are broken.

The flow of the story is important. The explanation of "the Atlantic mix-up" can wait until later in the interview. It may also be important, but if the woman gives it here, it is confusing.

- Keep your story in chronological order. Do not skip about from one time period to another.
- If you have papers and documents, get them in order before you go to see the lawyer. It is a waste of your time to spend several minutes looking for one letter in a pile of letters.

Conclusion

1. Fill out the Information Sheet and take it with you.
2. Fill out the Document List and take it with you.
3. Write out your story before you go to the lawyer. If you have questions to ask the lawyer, write them down before you go. That way, you won't forget them.
4. When you meet with the lawyer, remember to be:
 - **Slow**
 - **Straightforward**
 - **Specific**
 - **Systematic**

This guidebook is part of a series, *Guidebooks for Representing Yourself in Supreme Court*, produced by:



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INFORMATION SHEET

PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE

Date: _____

Full Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Social Insurance Number: _____

Home Address: _____

Business Address: _____

Home Telephone: _____ Business Telephone: _____

Claim or File Number: _____

Contacts, Witnesses or Others :

(Agency): _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

(Agency): _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

(Agency): _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

