

Guide to a Successful Interview with a Lawyer

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

If you have difficulty reading or writing - is there someone you know who can help you complete the form or write down your story? Asking for help now could save time and effort later.

Introduction

This guide describes 4 steps to take **before** you see a lawyer. Before you see your lawyer, try to organize all your important information or documents so you and your lawyer can make the best use of your time together, and focus on the legal parts of your problem.

If you follow the 4 steps in this guide, you will be well prepared and know what to expect when you meet your lawyer.

This Guide provides general information on how to prepare for an appointment with a lawyer. It does not explain the law. Legal advice must come from a lawyer, who can tell you why you should do something in your case or whether you should take certain actions.

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.

There is a Document List at the end of this Guide that you can use to list the documents, including letters you have. For example, include documents:

- you prepared
- you got from the court
- you have been served

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.

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

Number	Dated	Pages	Description	Author	Recipient
1	June 13, 2010	2	Letter about assessment of child	Tom Delaney	Mary Smith

Step 3: Prepare your written statement

Write out your story in point form and in the order of dates and times they happened. This is your written statement. Put in all the facts that you consider important. Be specific about 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 points.

Take the written statement with you to the interview. It will help refresh your memory when you are talking to the lawyer.

Tell the lawyer if you have difficulty reading or writing.

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:

- Exact dates, if possible.
- Who said what to whom – the exact words, not a summary.
- Who was there 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 it.

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.

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

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.

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, 2015?

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

Q. But on March 13, 2015, 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, 2015, 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. This uses up time at the interview.

A good exchange goes like this:

Q. Were you late for work on March 13, 2015?

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. 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. For example:

- This person is good.
- That movie is terrific!

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 the exact date, e.g., March 15, 2015.

If you can't be specific, be as specific as possible. "It happened the week of March 12, 2015." Do not summarize conversations. Instead, tell the lawyer, "Mr. Jones said...and then I said..." Repeat the exact words that were said. The more

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

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 flow of the story because Mrs. Smith has begun to talk about something new, "the Atlantic mix-up."

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.

Remember

Fill out the Information Sheet and take it with you.

Fill out the Document List and take it with you.

- 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.
- When you meet with the lawyer, remember to be slow, straightforward, specific and systematic.

Information Sheet - Please Print or Type

Date: _____

Full Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Home Address: _____

Business Address: _____

Home or Cell Telephone: _____ Business Telephone: _____

Claim or File Number: _____

Contacts, Witnesses or Others (use more paper if you need to):

Name: _____

(Organization they work for): _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Name: _____

(Organization they work for): _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Name: _____

(Organization they work for): _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

