Planning and Preparation for Callback Interviews

Congratulations on getting invited to a callback interview! When interviewing with an EIW employer, this is typically the final stage of the interview process before an offer is extended. Callbacks generally take place at the law firm and are generally structured as a series of 30-minute interviews with 4-6 individual attorneys over the course of a half-day visit. Generally, the interview will also include lunch (or, less commonly, dinner) with a couple additional attorneys.

This short guide will help you navigate the logistics and preparation at each stage of the callback process—before, during, and after your interview. For the sake of brevity, we’ve limited this guide to cover only the ways in which callback interviews are unique, so don’t forget to review our other interview guides for more general interview preparation tips. Specifically, we’ll focus herein on the procedures for scheduling callbacks, how to prepare for a callback interview, what to expect during the callback, and how to tie up loose ends after your callback.

Scheduling Your Callback

Generally, you’ll receive a phone call from the attorney who interviewed you during EIW. Don’t worry, you won’t have to commit to anything at this time. Be enthusiastic, be grateful for the opportunity, and be polite.

Communication is Key

- Before your first EIW interview, be sure to have a professional voicemail greeting that includes at least your first name.
- Before answering the phone, be sure you are in a setting conducive to having a professional conversation (e.g., quiet, reliable reception, reasonably private).
- Return any phone calls within 24 hours, whether or not you are ready to schedule your interview.
- Before calling to schedule, have your calendar in front of you, with two or three available times selected.

The Early Bird Gets the Offer

- Don’t hesitate for too long before scheduling your interview. Availability disappears quickly and many firms aim to finish the process by mid-Sept.

Managing Your Schedule

- If you have more than one callback invitation in a city, try to schedule your interviews on adjacent days to minimize travel (though avoid back-to-back interviews on the same day, if at all possible).
- Be mindful of your academic and extracurricular responsibilities. While missing some class time may be unavoidable, you are strongly encouraged to schedule callbacks as to not conflict with your school obligations.

Questions to Ask

- Make sure you know how long the interview will last and whether there will be a meal. If a meal will be involved, be sure to let the coordinator know about any dietary restrictions up front.
- If expenses aren’t mentioned, ask “What is your firm’s policy on travel-related expenses?”
- Be sure you know your primary contact at the firm going forward (it generally won’t be the attorney who interviewed you).

Preparing for Your Callback

As mentioned above, callbacks are generally structured as a series of interviews with several attorneys over the course of a half-day visit. In many ways, these interviews are quite similar to the screening interviews you experienced during EIW, so be sure to review our general interview guides as well. However, there are a couple important differences that will affect your preparation.

Dig Deeper

Because this is a second visit, and the firm is getting serious about you, they’ll expect you’re getting serious about them too. This means you should have a greater depth of knowledge about the firm and several specific reasons you’re drawn to it. Consult your notes from your screening interview, and use the Summer Associate Mentor List, How to Research Firms Handout, and the OCS Research Resource List.

Take note of your questions to which you are still unable to find answers. So long as they aren’t too negative or blatantly inappropriate, your callback is the time to ask them. Be aware of your surroundings during your visit as well. Look for indicators of work/life balance, firm culture, and the work environment. Pay attention to your “gut feelings” and record them after your interview.

Stay Consistent but Avoid Repetition

Unlike EIW, your back-to-back interviews will be with attorneys in the same firm. Because they will share notes, you’ll want be consistent in your messaging, but not awkwardly repetitive. Have a variety of anecdotes to share and questions to ask; give the firm a multi-dimensional image of who you are.

Logistical Preparation

- Make sure you know where you are going and how you will get there the night before your interview.
- Bring extra copies of your resume, transcript, references, and writing sample. Carry your documents in a leather folder and leave your backpack with the front desk or doorman.
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What to Expect During Your Callback

Getting There and Checking In
Get to the office 5-10 minutes before your interview begins. It is perfectly acceptable to take a cab from your hotel to your interview if they are more than a few blocks apart. When you arrive, treat everyone you meet with respect, and be flexible about any last-minute changes in your schedule.

Lunchtime Etiquette
Be polite, but don’t worry too much over stuffy or arcane rules. Generally speaking, the manners your parents taught you will get you through lunch. You can relax a bit, but do remember to stay professional. This is still part of the interview, and your “lunch buddies” will be evaluating you on the same set of criteria as the partners.

- Treat restaurant staff with respect.
- Don’t order alcohol, appetizers, or desserts unless others do so first. With alcohol, don’t feel obligated to drink because others are, and if you choose to drink, limit yourself to one or two drinks.
- Determine the appropriate price range by asking your hosts what they are planning to order.
- Be careful to order food you can eat without making a mess.
- There is no expectation that you will pay for yourself, so just say thank you.
- If there are multiple sets of silverware, start on the outside and work your way in. Remember that your bread is to your left and your drink is to your right—to help remind you, make a lowercase “b” or “d” with your fingers.

Hang in There
The day can be long, and stamina is important. Take care of yourself by requesting a short break if you need to use the restroom or if you’d like some water. Be sure to get plenty of sleep the night before, and have a healthy (not heavy) breakfast.

What Happens After the Callback

Thank-You Notes
Sending a thank-you note following your callback is a necessity. Follow these tips when doing so:

- **Who:** It is not necessary to write an individual thank-you note to every attorney you met during your interview. If you hit it off with all of your interviewers, and you have something distinctive to say to each, a personal note will never hurt. Otherwise, you may send one note thanking the recruiter for coordinating your visit and asking him or her to convey your thanks to your interviewers.
- **What:** Your notes should be short, sweet, well-written, and free of errors. A good thank-you note will not secure the offer, but a sloppy one can lose it.
- **When:** Ideally, within 24 hours of your interview.
- **How:** Email is generally preferred and will ensure that your note is received before any decisions have been made.

Reimbursement of Travel Expenses
Keep receipts for all expenses for which the firm will reimburse you, and submit an expense statement with the original receipts within a few days of your interview. Keep a copy of all receipts for your records. Reimbursements can take as long as a couple months, so plan accordingly (tip: it may be wise to use a credit card, rather than a debit card, to cover any out-of-pocket expenses for this reason). If you are visiting multiple firms on one trip, let all of the firms involved know, and coordinate your reimbursement through the “host” firm (which is typically the first interview scheduled out of the group). Remember to be a gracious guest—don’t overspend.

Timing of Offers
This varies by firm and by market, but it is appropriate to ask the recruiter about the firm’s process and timeline before leaving the interview.

Accepting or Declining Offers
As with callback invitations, you should return any phone call within 24 hours, whether you are ready to accept the offer or not. Pursuant to the NALP Principles and Standards, you may not hold more than five offers open at once and you may not hold an offer for longer than 28 days. Be sure to review the NALP rules in their entirety at [www.nalp.org](http://www.nalp.org). Practically speaking, however, do not hold on to offers you are sure you will not accept—it benefits everyone (literally: you, the firm, and any classmates interested in that firm) if you release unwanted offers in a timely manner.