



# Guide to Law Firm Callback Interviews

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## Overview

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Congratulations, you made it through the initial screening process and have received (or hope to receive) a callback interview! In contrast to the 20-30 minute screening interview, a callback is a lengthier assessment of your candidacy, usually consisting of a series of interviews at the employer's offices. Your objective in both cases is to help the employer imagine you as an attorney at the firm. In a callback interview, the employer has already decided that you have the credentials the employer is seeking; much more emphasis is placed on determining your enthusiasm for the position and your fit with the firm's culture. The callback interview is also an opportunity for you to get to know the employer better; keep your eyes and ears open during the callback so you can further assess whether the employer is a good fit for your work style and professional goals.

A callback interview usually lasts for a half-day, but can span an entire day. You will typically meet with several attorneys, both partners and associates, for a series of 20- or 30-minute interviews. If your callback is scheduled for the morning, you will often be invited to lunch once the interviews conclude – usually with a few of the firm's junior associates. Less commonly, you may be invited to dinner if your interviews are in the afternoon. Some firms employ alternative interview structures during callbacks, such as panel interviews. If you have a question about a particular type of interview or a particular firm, please see an attorney-counselor.

## The Callback Invitation

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Most employers will offer callbacks via telephone. If you do not feel ready to respond, or would like to be sure you have evaluated your priority list of target firms before committing to a callback, it is smart to let the call go to voicemail (**tip** – make sure your voicemail message sounds professional).

When offered a callback, you should respond as quickly as possible – ideally, within 24 hours of the initial invitation. Responding slowly, or failing to respond at all, damages your professional reputation as well as the school's relationship with the employer. If you are weighing your options and are unsure as to whether you want to schedule a callback, you should still respond to the initial invitation as soon as possible. Thank the employer for the invitation, indicate that you are working on your schedule and that you expect be able to respond to the invitation within the next few days; any longer creates an inconvenience for the firm and can create ill will.

If you no longer have interest in pursuing a position at the firm, let the firm know as soon as possible and in a positive manner – thank the employer for the invitation, express appreciation for the time the interviewer spent with you, but tell them that you are pursuing other employment options.

When you schedule the callback, you'll likely be offered a number of date options. We recommend that you schedule your callbacks as early as possible, particularly for your priority firms, as employers typically make offers on a rolling basis. In general, we do not recommend scheduling two callbacks in

one day. Most students find that their second interview of the day suffers, as a full callback takes quite a bit of energy. However, it works well for some students – you know yourself best. If you need help navigating the scheduling process, schedule an appointment with an attorney counselor.

## Travel Arrangements

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When scheduling the callback, the firm will usually pay for your travel and accommodations if you are traveling to a location outside of driving distance from Ann Arbor. Some employers utilize travel agencies and pay directly for flights and lodging, while others will reimburse students via NALP's reimbursement guidelines<sup>1</sup>. If you are not explicitly instructed, ask the recruiting coordinator how the firm would prefer you handle travel and hotel arrangements. Students should be prepared to pay up front for these costs (**tip** - be sure to have a credit card with a limit that enables you to cover travel costs before reimbursement). Additionally, you should keep all copies of receipts for necessary costs during your stay. Breakfast prior to a morning interview is a necessary cost, in-room movies and alcohol are not. If you are unsure as to whether an expense is reimbursable, speak to an attorney-counselor.

Firms that are within driving distance of Ann Arbor, particularly large firms and firms that are NALP members, usually reimburse students for the mileage to the office and for parking costs. Recruiting coordinators at the firm can provide details about the firm's reimbursement policy.

(**Tip** - Be sure to research whether the firm participates in the law school's L-STAR program, which provides donations to Student Funded Fellowships for costs that students avoid by staying with friends and family in cities where they are interviewing.)

## Before the Callback – Do your Research!

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You should have already done thorough research on the firm prior to your screener interview but if you have not, now is the time to do so through the resources on the OCP website (under the "Law Firms & OCI" page) or on the EIW student site. If you haven't already spoken to upper-class students who worked at the firm where you will be doing your callback, make sure you do so. You can identify those students using the [Summer Employment List](#). We do not recommend reaching out to attorneys currently working at the firm once your callback is scheduled, which can be seen as too strategic.

Firms will usually send you the names of your interviewers in advance of your callback. You should review the attorneys' firm and LinkedIn bios. Prepare questions that focus on the attorneys' professional experience and show that you've done your research.

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<sup>1</sup> NALP stands for the National Association for Law Placement, which sets recruitment guidelines for the legal profession. Most firms ask students to use the [NALP Travel Expense Reimbursement Form](#) to submit travel expenses.

Know where you are going and how to get there. Arrive well ahead of time, but do not enter the employer's office more than 10 minutes early, as waiting for a long period of time in the firm's reception area can be awkward for both you and for the firm. Instead, wait out the extra time at a nearby coffee shop or similar location. Remember to allocate sufficient time to get through the building's security procedures.

Be sure to know your resume inside and out and be able to explain the reasons behind the career decisions you've made. Interviewers will typically want to know not only the substance of the bullet points on your resume, but more in-depth information about what you learned, challenges you faced, and other aspects of the soft skills you bring to the firm. Everything on your resume is fair game! These experiences will also form your answers to behavioral questions that may be asked by interviewers (**tip** – schedule a mock interview with an attorney-counselor to polish your interview skills).

## During the Callback

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Come prepared. You should have extra copies of your resume, transcript, writing sample and list of references with you, even if you provided these to the recruiting team ahead of time. You would not want to tell an interviewer you do not have those materials on hand, if requested. If for some reason you are asked for materials you do not have, you can usually send those items by e-mail to the recruiting coordinator after the interview. Carry these materials in a padfolio with you from interview to interview, but leave your overcoat (if any) and briefcase/larger bag in the reception area.

Callback interviews can be physically and emotionally taxing – they are marathon interview sessions. Be sure that you do your best to eat and sleep well prior to the interview. You may wish to take a break between interviews to go to the bathroom to refresh. Additionally, do not hesitate to ask for a glass of water if needed during your interviews.

Most callback interview questions will be similar to the questions you were asked during your screening interview, although some firms employ behavioral questioning or alternative interview formats. In many cases, several attorneys will ask the same questions – often the same questions you were asked in the screening interview. It is important for you to remember that each new interviewer is hearing the information you have to give for the first time, so do not get frustrated or concerned when you repeat the same answer with multiple interviewers.

Many callbacks include a lunch or dinner, typically with associates at the firm. This meal is usually a bit more relaxed than the formal in-office interviews, but remember that you are still being evaluated. Use this time to demonstrate your fit with the firm culture by not only being interesting, but by being interested in the attorneys. As with small talk, you'll want to stay away from controversial topics. Additionally, you'll want to follow the rules of professional dining etiquette and be conservative in what you order – stick with something mid-range, price-wise, and something that will not be too messy (**tip**: review our [Etiquette Guide](#)). We also recommend that you avoid alcohol, as you want to be functioning at top capacity and do not want anything to impair or alter your performance.

During a break or immediately after your callback, jot down some quick notes about the substance of each of your conversations with interviewing attorneys, which will facilitate the thank you emails you'll write after you complete the callback. Do not take notes during the callback interviews themselves, which is distracting from the conversation.

## After the Callback

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After you've completed your callback, be sure to follow up with thank you emails to the attorneys with whom you interacted during the day. Also consider sending an email to the Recruiting Coordinator, especially if he or she was the person with whom you coordinated travel and other logistics. You should send separate emails to each person, rather than writing one blanket note, and the emails should be sent out within 24 hours of your interview.

Firm response time varies greatly, both by market as well as by individual firm within the market. Some students have received offers in the cab on the way to the airport after the interview, while others wait weeks for a response. The amount of time you have to wait likely has more to do with the individual firm's policies and procedures than with your qualifications. If you haven't heard back from a firm within two weeks, it is advisable to send a follow-up email reiterating your interest unless you've been given a different decision timeline by the firm. OCP is happy to advise on follow-up outreach strategy. As with offers for callbacks, it is advisable to respond to offers for summer associate positions as soon as you are confident in your decision, as a courtesy to both the firm and to your fellow MLaw students.

If you are lucky enough to be in a position to weigh multiple offers, the decision-making process can feel nearly as stressful as the callback process itself. Be familiar with the [Michigan Law Professional and Ethical Standards for Students](#). OCP has multiple resources available to help you make a decision that is a good fit for your personal and professional goals. Schedule an appointment with an attorney-counselor to talk about your decision-making strategy.