

CLIENT INTERVIEW



Melbourne University

Law Students' Society

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WELCOME

Welcome to the Corrs Chambers Westgarth Client Interview Competition for 2018!

The ability to interview clients is regarded as an essential skill required in many careers. Effective interviewing requires great communication, teamwork and the ability to think quickly. The Client Interview Competition provides a valuable opportunity to develop these skills in a simulated professional environment.

This guidebook provides an overview of the Competition, including reasons to compete, the structure of the Competition, scoring and tips for glorious success.

We warmly invite you to participate in this great and unique Competition. Regarded as one of the most enjoyable competitions, we encourage you to gain practical experience and make long-standing friendships and connections along the way.

We would like to thank our sponsors, Corrs Chambers Westgarth for making this Competition possible.

Matt Gough and Liz Georgiou

2018 Negotiation Officers

<melbunilssclientinterview@gmail.com>

WHAT IS THE CLIENT INTERVIEW COMPETITION?

The Competition takes place in a mock environment where teams of two student competitors, playing the role of lawyers, are visited by a potential client for a preliminary meeting.

With only a very brief memorandum outlining the context of the meeting provided beforehand, competitors will have a discussion with the client regarding an unknown legal problem. Within fifteen minutes team members must work together to identify the key material facts and/or issues relevant to the client's dilemma.

The focus of the Competition is on understanding the client's situation, and communicating effectively with the client. Each client will have a different personal demeanour — they may be rude, shy or loud. Competitors are required to accommodate the client's demeanour, whilst acting in a professional manner.

At the end of the interview, competitors will confer with each other and put forward an opinion to the judge regarding the merit of the client's case. Teams are not judged on their ability to provide legal advice, but rather the quality of their meeting with the client and their teamwork.

WHY PARTICIPATE?

Small time commitment

- Only a brief memorandum is provided to competitors 24 hours before their interview
- Minimal preparation is required (brief 10-15 minute chat with your partner before competing)

Non- adversarial

- Opposition team is not in the room when you compete, only the client and judge will be present

No legal knowledge required

- Teams are not required to give legal advice to the client
- No need for knowledge of cases or legislation
- First-year competitors will be at no disadvantage when competing against second and third-year competitors

Vital skill building exercise

- You will develop practical interviewing skills, including relationship building, efficient interview structure and interpersonal skills
- Developing public speaking skills and improving confidence

Practical experience

- Encountering and refining these aforementioned essential components of professional life are highly valued by many employers and participation is regarded to be beneficial on your resume

HOW DOES THE COMPETITION WORK?

Structure of the Competition

- The first round is a practice round. From the second round the Competition becomes 'knock out', with two teams randomly drawn to compete against each other. Where possible, the teams competing against each other will have the same judge and client.'
- In each round clients are given a confidential memorandum which they are required to memorise prior to the interview. Clients must not reveal any information provided to them to any person prior to the round.
- Judges will be provided with a score sheet and the client's confidential memorandum, which shows the legal problems to be identified in the interview.
- Clients are volunteers and are sourced by the LSS Competitions Officers.
- In the case of an uneven number of teams, one team will be randomly selected to have a bye and progress to the next round without competing.
- Each team will interview their client for 15 minutes followed by a 5 minute briefing to the judge.
- The winning team is the team with the highest score against their opponents for the round. The competition is scored out of 30. The scoring sheet can be found on the LSS website.
- The results of rounds will be announced the day following the completion of a round.
- The decision of the Competition Officers in relation the rules or execution of the Competition will be final.

Instructions to teams

- The instructions will be released to competitors 24 hours before the round begins.
- Competitors should be dressed in business attire and are to report to the LSS office 15 minutes before their interview is due to start.
- The interview is to last no more than 15 minutes.

- Judges may choose to provide feedback at the conclusion of the round but are not obliged to do so.
- Competitors should arrange with the judges how the time limits are to be enforced. Judges are entitled to impose penalties if a time limit is breached.

The Interview

There are many ways to conduct a client interview. Below is a brief outline of how a team may approach the interview. Remember this is only a suggestion, and there will be no loss of marks for deviating from this template. Ultimately it will come down to how you and you conduct yourself, how you interact with the client and your teammate and how you adapt and respond to the situation at hand.

a. Greeting

- Welcome and settle the client

b. Formalities

- Take care of the administrative matters (i.e. informing your client of the procedures; payment; reassure them that the info will be kept confidential; etc.)
- A good formal introduction may sound similar to this:
"Hello Mr/Mrs _____, it is a pleasure to meet you. Please come in and take a seat. My name is _____ and this is my colleague _____. This meeting will run for approximately 15 minutes and any information that you tell us is confidential. As this is your first consultation with us it is free of charge, however subsequent meetings may be charged. Would you mind if we take notes during this session?"

c. Overview

- Get an overview of their problem

d. Objective

- What is the client's objective?
- What are they trying to achieve through engaging your legal services?

e. Advice

- Based on the info you have acquired; you may advise the client at this point in the interview about the next steps they might consider taking. Although this is not mandatory. You will not lose marks if you don't have knowledge of the legal area that your client is concerned about.

f. Conclusion

- Summarise the facts, the legal issues etc.

g. Reflection

- After briefly conferring with your partner, you will discuss the merits of your case with the judge. This requires intuition regarding the matter and the motivations of the client.

RULES

Teams

1. Each team consists of two Melbourne Law School students.
2. If a team member is unable to compete, the other member can compete on their own, but cannot have a substitute partner. Note that you will lose points under the 'Teamwork & Professionalism' criteria if only one team member competes.
3. Team members *cannot* compete on their own in finals rounds.

Interview

4. Each interview runs for 15 minutes. Each team will have 5 minutes to debrief with the judge about the merits of the case, and 5 minutes of feedback from the judge at the conclusion of the interview.

Scheduling

5. If teams wish to change their Competition time, teams are responsible for organising a swap. Teams are free to do this on the 'Corrs Chambers Westgarth Client Interview Competition 2018' Facebook group if they wish, or can contact other teams directly.

Once confirmed, an email must be sent to [<melbunilssclientinterview@gmail.com>](mailto:melbunilssclientinterview@gmail.com) **72 hours prior to the scheduled interview**. Only one email needs to be sent on behalf of the two teams.

The email must contain the following information:

- Your team name;
- Your original interview time;
- Name of team you've swapped with;
- Interview time of the team you are swapping with.

Forfeiture

6. Forfeiting is *strongly* discouraged. If a team cannot compete at their given time and are unable to find a team to swap with, this will be considered a forfeiture and the opponent team will progress to the next round.

Results & Feedback

7. Feedback sheets including the judge(s)' qualitative feedback will be emailed to competitors within five days after the competition.
8. Numerical scores shall not be disclosed to teams.
9. The decision of a judge is final and cannot be appealed.
10. Teams must *not*, under any circumstances, contact the judge to discuss their result or dispute the outcome of a round.

TIPS

Pre-Interview

- Even though the Competition requires less preparation than other MULSS competitions, some preparation is still necessary for success.
- Preparation should include a discussion of the potential legal issues that may be raised by your client's problem, as well as the sorts of questions you would like to ask your client to elicit that information.
- The client will knock on the door and that signals the beginning of your time. Open the door for them. Stand up to greet the client, shake his/her hand and begin your opening remarks.
- Know which one of you will be saying the opening remarks (It sounds more professional if one person does the entire introduction).

During the Interview

a. Note-taking

- Taking notes on what your client says during the interview can help direct your questions and helps develop a clearer understanding of your client's legal issues.
- Work out which one of you will be taking notes before the interview. It is not ideal for you to be both taking notes at the same time, as it can look unprofessional.

b. Questions

- Adopt an open-ended questioning style. This will facilitate the conversation and allow you to gain a better understanding of your client's issues (For instance, begin the interview by asking 'I understand that you have come to see us about a family related issue. Could you please tell us about your problem?')

- Where a client is being vague or is providing unnecessary detail, try to direct the client by asking more specific questions (e.g. On what date did you get your tattoo?)
- If what your client is saying is leading you down a different path from what you anticipated, don't be too concerned but be sure to not be lead down the garden path.
- Don't be afraid to push your client for information. Clients will hold back information on purpose.
- Listen to your client! The key to doing well is to really engage with the client's issue and pick up on the details of their problem. Clients will often answer your questions and not disclose all of the information that they have, be sure to listen carefully and ask further questions.

c. Interacting With Your Client

- Accommodate your client's personal demeanour — Every client is different! Your client may be emotional, loud, shy, or rude, adapt and make them comfortable.
- Keep your client on topic — Don't let the client distract you with irrelevant information.
- If your client asks for legal information, you should remind them that you will need to consult with your partner before providing any legal advice.
- Do not appear unsympathetic to your client. Remember that you need to create a welcoming environment for them, even if their reason for meeting with you seems frivolous.

d. Teamwork

- Never undermine your partner. Even if you disagree with something your partner has said, it will affect the client and judge's confidence in both of you if you start disagreeing during the interview. You are judged as a team, not as an individual.

- Try not to fumble. Work out which partner will ask which questions. You should NOT be turning to your partner during the interview to ask “should I ask this?” or “do you want to ask some questions now?”

e. **Post-Interview**

- After the client has left, the judge will act as the partner in the law firm that you are working for. The judge will ask you about the meeting with the client and whether you think there is a claim worth pursuing.
- Do not get caught up with your legal knowledge — you do not need to provide an in depth legal analysis or factual recount of your client’s case.
- You may say something like: ‘Based on what the client has told us, in my opinion this issue is worth/not worth us pursuing’.