

Judge's Associate interview questions

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What to expect

Judge's Associate interviews in Australian courts usually combine a written exercise with a panel interview. The panel typically includes the judge, the current associate, and sometimes a registrar or court officer. You will be assessed on your legal research, your drafting, and your judgment.

- **Technical legal research:** Assess your ability to find and apply primary and secondary sources, often using LexisNexis AU or Westlaw AU.
- **Written drafting exercise:** You may be given a set of facts or a judgment extract and asked to draft a bench memo or set of orders under time pressure.
- **Behavioural:** Questions about how you have handled competing deadlines, sensitive information, or disagreements with a supervisor.
- **Scenario and judgment:** Hypotheticals about confidentiality, conflicts of interest, or an urgent request from the bench.
- **Process and motivation:** Why this court, why an associateship, and what you plan to do afterwards.

The process often starts with an online application and a short written research or drafting task. If you progress, you will attend a panel interview, usually 30 to 45 minutes, with the judge and their associate. Some courts hold a second interview with the head of jurisdiction or a registrar. You may also need to complete a National Police Check and sign a confidentiality undertaking.

1. Why do you want to be a Judge's Associate, and why this court?

Why they ask

This is a motivation and fit question. The panel wants to know you understand the role and have a genuine interest in the court's jurisdiction.

How to structure your answer

A three-part answer: your interest in judicial decision-making, the specific jurisdiction or caseload of this court, and what you hope to do afterwards. Keep it under two minutes.

Example answer

"I want to be a Judge's Associate because I am fascinated by how judges reason through complex legal problems and craft orders that affect people's lives. I have followed the Federal Circuit and Family Court's work in family law and child support, and I am drawn to its mix of urgency and sensitivity. In the longer term, I hope to practise as a barrister, and I see this role as the best possible training for that path."

2. Walk us through how you would research a novel point of law for a reserved judgment.

Why they ask

This tests your legal research method, your ability to identify binding authority, and your skill with tools like LexisNexis AU and Westlaw AU.

How to structure your answer

A step-by-step process: define the question, check the legislation and binding authority, search for persuasive authority and commentary, note any conflicting lines, then summarise in a bench memo with a clear recommendation.

Example answer

"First, I would restate the question in one sentence and check whether it is a matter of statutory interpretation or common law. Then I would search the relevant legislation and any binding High Court or appellate authority on LexisNexis AU or Westlaw AU. If the point is novel, I would look for persuasive authority from other Australian jurisdictions and any relevant law reform reports or journal articles. I would note any conflicting decisions and their relative weight. Finally, I would draft a bench memo that sets out the issue, the competing arguments, and a recommended conclusion, with citations in AGLC format."

3. Tell me about a time you had to manage several urgent tasks with competing deadlines.

Why they ask

This is a behavioural question about time management and prioritisation, which is critical when the judge needs something by a certain time.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the situation, the task, the action you took to prioritise and communicate, and the result.

Example answer

"During my final semester, I was working two days a week at a law firm, finishing my honours thesis, and volunteering at a community legal centre. I had a draft advice due for a client, a thesis chapter due to my supervisor, and a shift at the centre on the same day. I sat down and ranked the tasks by hard deadlines and impact on others. I told my supervisor at the firm that I could not take on a new research task that week, and I blocked out two hours each morning for the thesis. I delivered the advice on time, submitted the chapter a day early, and the centre was able to use my shift to cover an urgent intake. The main lesson was to communicate early rather than let things slip."

4. Imagine the judge asks you to prepare a draft order by 4pm, but you notice a potential issue with the form of the order. What do you do?

Why they ask

This is a scenario question about judgment, initiative, and knowing when to raise a concern.

How to structure your answer

Show that you would clarify the issue, check the rules or a precedent, raise it with the judge promptly, and propose a solution rather than just a problem.

Example answer

"I would first check the relevant rules or practice note and look for a precedent in the court file or a similar matter. If the issue was real, I would draft the order in the form the judge had requested but prepare a short note explaining the concern and suggesting an alternative form. I would then ask the associate or the judge's tipstaff for a moment to raise it before 4pm, because it is better to fix a problem before the order is sealed. I would not simply change the order on my own, because the judge is the decision-maker, but I would not stay silent either."

5. How would you handle receiving confidential information about a case from a friend who is a solicitor at a firm involved in the matter?

Why they ask

This tests your understanding of confidentiality and conflicts of interest, which are central to the associate role.

How to structure your answer

A clear ethics answer: stop the conversation, remind them of their obligations, do not repeat the information, and disclose the incident to the judge or your supervisor.

Example answer

"I would politely stop my friend immediately and remind them that they should not be sharing confidential information about a matter before the court. I would not repeat what they said to anyone else, and I would make a note of the time and what was said. I would then disclose the incident to the judge or the associate in chambers as soon as possible, because even the appearance of receiving confidential information could compromise the matter. I would also avoid any further discussion of the case with that friend."

6. How would you approach writing a bench memo that summarises both parties' submissions?

Why they ask

This tests your ability to be neutral, concise, and accurate, which is the core of the drafting work.

How to structure your answer

A structured answer: read all the material first, identify the issues, summarise each party's argument fairly, note any factual disputes, and finish with a short analysis of the strengths and weaknesses.

Example answer

"I would start by reading the pleadings, submissions, and any relevant evidence, and I would make a list of the issues the judge needs to decide. Then I would write a short introduction setting out the matter and the question. I would summarise the applicant's submissions first, then the respondent's, using their own words where possible and avoiding any editorial comment. I would note any factual disputes and how they might affect the legal issues. Finally, I would add a brief section identifying the key authorities and any points that seem unresolved, without telling the judge what to decide. The memo should be neutral and easy to read in a few minutes."