

Paralegal interview questions

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What to expect

Paralegal interviews mix practical process questions about how you manage documents and deadlines with behavioural questions about accuracy under pressure, plus at least one scenario testing judgement on client confidentiality or conflicting priorities. Expect a panel that may include a supervising solicitor and a practice manager or HR representative.

- **Process:** Questions about how you handle document drafting, file organisation and legal research day to day.
- **Behavioural:** Past-experience questions probing accuracy, time management and handling pressure or difficult clients.
- **Scenario:** Hypothetical situations testing judgement on confidentiality, deadlines and escalation to a supervising solicitor.
- **Technical:** Questions about legal research tools, drafting conventions and practice management software.
- **Client-facing:** Questions about communicating with clients, courts and other legal professionals appropriately.

Interviews typically open with background and motivation questions, move into process and technical questions about research tools and document handling, then use one or two scenarios to test judgement, and close with questions about availability and fit with the practice area.

1. Walk me through how you would organise the file for a new litigation matter from the day it lands on your desk.

Why they ask

Tests whether you have a systematic approach to file management, which is core to the role and where errors are costly.

How to structure your answer

Walk-through: describe the process step by step in the order you'd actually do it, from initial intake through to ongoing maintenance, naming the tools you'd use at each stage.

Example answer

"I'd start by setting up the file in the practice management system, LEAP in my last role, with the correct matter number and key dates entered straight away, including limitation periods. Then I'd create a document index and folder structure separating pleadings, correspondence, evidence and disclosure. As documents come in I'd log them against the index immediately rather than batching it, because that's where things get missed. I'd also set calendar reminders ahead of any filing deadlines so the solicitor has review time, not just the deadline itself."

2. Tell me about a time you caught an error in a document before it went out.

Why they ask

Attention to detail is the single most important trait for this role, and this question checks for a real, specific example rather than a general claim.

How to structure your answer

STAR: set out the situation and task, the specific action you took to catch and fix the error, and the result, including what you changed afterward to prevent it recurring.

Example answer

"I was proofreading a settlement deed before it went to the client for signing and noticed the schedule of payments didn't match the figures in the body of the deed, a transposition error from an earlier draft. I flagged it to the solicitor immediately rather than just fixing it myself, since it changed the commercial terms, and we corrected it before it left the office. After that I started doing a final cross-check of schedules against the main text on every deed I drafted, not just a read-through."

3. A client calls asking for an update on their matter while your supervising solicitor is out of the office and unreachable. What do you do?

Why they ask

Tests judgement about the boundaries of a paralegal's authority, since paralegals can't give legal advice and need to know when to hold the line with clients.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: state the immediate action, the boundary you'd respect, and how you'd follow up once the solicitor is available.

Example answer

"I'd check the file so I understand what's happened on the matter, then call the client back and give them a factual update on where things stand procedurally, for example that we're waiting on a response from the other side. I wouldn't offer any view on strategy, likely outcome or advice, since that's the solicitor's role. I'd let the client know the solicitor will follow up personally once available, and I'd leave the solicitor a clear note of exactly what was discussed."

4. How do you approach legal research when you're given a question you haven't dealt with before?

Why they ask

Checks practical familiarity with legal databases and a logical research method, since research quality directly affects the advice given to clients.

How to structure your answer

Walk-through: outline your research method in sequence, naming specific databases and how you narrow from broad to specific sources.

Example answer

"I'd start with the legislation itself if there's a relevant Act, checking for recent amendments, then move to case law on LexisNexis or Westlaw using citator tools to check a case is still good law. I'd also check AustLII for free access to recent judgments and any Law Society practice notes on the topic. I keep a short memo as I go, noting the source and pinpoint citation for everything, so the solicitor can verify it quickly rather than re-running my research."

5. Describe a time you had to manage several competing deadlines at once.

Why they ask

Litigation and transactional work both involve overlapping deadlines, so this checks prioritisation skills under real pressure.

How to structure your answer

STAR: describe the competing demands, the criteria you used to prioritise, and the outcome for each deadline.

Example answer

"I once had a discovery deadline for one matter due the same afternoon as trial preparation documents for another. I flagged both deadlines to the two solicitors involved as soon as I saw the clash, rather than trying to quietly manage it alone, and we agreed I'd finish the discovery bundle first since it had a hard court deadline, while the trial documents had a few hours' buffer. I finished the discovery bundle with time to file it, then completed the trial materials that evening. Being upfront

about the clash early was what made it manageable.”

6. What experience do you have with practice management software and how do you keep client billing or time records accurate?

Why they ask

Tools like LEAP and Clio are used daily in most firms, and accurate time recording matters for client billing and cost control.

How to structure your answer

Direct experience answer: name the specific systems you've used, describe your habits for keeping records accurate, and note any gaps you're prepared to learn on the job.

Example answer

“I've used LEAP for file management, time recording and document precedents, and I've had some exposure to Clio in a previous placement. I record time as I complete each task rather than reconstructing it at the end of the day, since that's when accuracy slips. I haven't used every module of every system, but I pick up new software quickly and I'd ask for a short walkthrough of any firm-specific templates or workflows in the first week.”