AILF INSIGHTS · STUDENTS AND COLLEGES

What law firms really look for when they hire

Marks matter less than students think. The skills and habits Indian law firms look for in interns and new associates, and how to build them.

Students often believe that firms hire on marks and the name of the college. Both open doors. Neither decides the outcome. Partners who interview for a living describe the same qualities again and again.

The seven qualities

1. Clear writing. Short sentences, correct grammar, accurate citations and a conclusion. Much of legal work is writing, and poor writing is noticed within minutes.

2. Sound basics. Contract, procedure, evidence, constitutional law, company law. A candidate who truly understands the fundamentals can learn any specialisation.

3. Attention to detail. One wrong date or clause number can damage a client. Check your CV for errors first.

4. Research ability. Finding the current law, reading it, and saying honestly what is settled and what is not.

5. Reliability. Meeting deadlines, following instructions and telling a senior early when something is going wrong.

6. Commercial awareness. Understanding what the client is trying to achieve.

7. Integrity and discretion. Confidentiality is non-negotiable.

What also helps

- Internships with real work to describe.
- A publication or two that you can discuss in depth.
- Moots, legal aid or journal work.
- Comfort with technology, including responsible use of AI tools.
- Good manners and the ability to work in a team.

What does not help

- A CV listing certificates with nothing learned behind them.
- Claims you cannot support in an interview.
- Copied or machine-written applications.
- Indifference to the firm you are applying to.

Preparing for an interview

- Know your CV line by line.
- Revise the subjects you say interest you.
- Read about the firm's areas of practice.
- Follow recent developments in law and business.
- Prepare one or two thoughtful questions.
- If you do not know an answer, say so, then reason it through.

For students outside the well-known colleges

Firms are widening their search, and good work travels. Apply directly with a strong writing sample. Intern at smaller firms and ask for references. Regional and mid-sized firms offer excellent training and earlier responsibility.

What firms should do

Recruit openly, assess skill and not background, and tell students what is expected. A profession that hires only from a few campuses misses much of its talent.

The simple truth

Firms hire people they can trust with a client's problem. Show that you write clearly, check your work and keep your word, and the rest follows.

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