



THE SEARCH FOR PUPILLAGE

A Guide to All Things Application and Interview Related

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Introduction:

Welcome to this rough and ready guide to help you through your search for pupillage. This guide will contain a number of tips & practical pieces of advice which I think would benefit any pre, current, or post-BPTC student who is currently searching for pupillage, or will be searching in the future.

I don't profess that this short guide contains all the answers to the burning questions each of you will have, but I sincerely hope it goes some way to answering your questions and alleviating your worries, and thus helps you on your path to acquire the Bar's equivalent to Monty Python's holy grail, the elusive pupillage.

The Author:

I grew up in the sunny South of England, in a little town called Bournemouth (they call it the 'English Riviera' because it only rains 4 times a week). After 8 years at my local comprehensive, I took the 12+ plus exam and was offered a place at my local state grammar. I performed under-par at GCSE and AS-Level, before 'pulling my socks up' and working my proverbial backside off to end up stumbling into University, fresh-faced and naïve, in September 2015.

I spent 3 years studying at the University of Liverpool, graduating with first-class honours in Law in July 2018. I began studying the BPTC in September 2018, armed with the generosity of scholarships from both Middle Temple and BPP. I was graded a very competent on the BPTC, managed a distinction in my LLM, and was called to the Bar in July 2018. I will begin a crime and family law pupillage in March 2020 at Chavasse Court Chambers, Liverpool.

1. The Background to the Search for Pupillage

Statistics and a Harsh Reality

For those of you who already have read up on the Bar Standards Board (BSB) statistics regarding the competition for pupillage, you can skip this subsection and move on to the next. For those of you who haven't, pay attention. You will have all heard the horror stories of candidates having to apply for hundreds of pupillages and spending years searching before finally receiving an offer of pupillage. This is not over-exaggerated; pupillage is exceptionally competitive.

According to the BSB, only 435 pupillages were advertised in the 2018/2019 application cycle, whilst the number of BPTC candidates for 2017/2018 increased by 14% to 1,624, with around the same number undertaking the BPTC in 2018/2019. This means that around 1 in 3 BPTC graduates will be successful in their hunt for pupillage each year, right? Wrong.

All the BPTC graduates who passed the course from the previous years must be factored in. Now you can see the sheer amount of qualified candidates applying for such a small amount of places at Chambers. Any given year can see well over 3,000 very capable candidates apply for pupillage, with that number only continuing to increase, whilst pupillage numbers appear to stay ranged between around 400-450 offered by Chambers per year.

Ultimately, the BSB statistics show that of the domestic students (UK and EU domiciled) who undertook and passed the BPTC between 2014 and 2017, 39% had gained pupillage by the end of 2018. This makes for scary reading and demonstrates just how long and difficult the route to pupillage can be.

Having said that, you have most likely chosen to undertake the BPTC and a career at the Bar because of your ambitions, your desire and your steely determination to rise to a challenge and never back down. I am a firm believer that anything can be accomplished with an ability to work hard, stay committed and focus on self-improvement, so if the above hasn't put you off (hopefully not), then read on.

I don't reel off these statistics at the beginning of this little eclectic collection of my thoughts and advice to scare you. I state it merely so that you understand what you are getting into. Now you have been suitably warned you are in for a hard slog, we can explore my thoughts on your impending journey

through the delight (read: not delight) of researching pupillages, filling out application forms and attending interviews – all whilst attempting to digest the 17,564 different pieces of information you're currently being taught in your crime and civil litigation tutorials.

Know Your Heart and Know Your Head

You will all know the role of a barrister, and you will all have at least some idea of what a career at the Bar entails. I am sure that you all know far more than I did just over a year ago when I began the BPTC.

You will all know in your heart that a career at the Bar is exactly what you aspire to. In fact, I am sure it occupies the majority of your waking thoughts, and probably more of your subconscious sleeping time than you would care to admit. That is absolutely fine and the BPTC will introduce you to many, many like-minded individuals, both on your respective courses at your respective universities, as well as at qualifying sessions and advocacy training weekends with your respective inns of court.

There is a lot to be said for listening to your heart throughout your life, not always just in a professional sense, but I would always advise listening to your head as well. When I use the terms 'heart' and 'head', what I really mean is that on one hand you have to listen to your dreams, ambitions, goals and desires (your heart), but you should also balance that with listening to your voice of reason, honesty, and impartiality (your head). In effect, as much as I encourage you all to dream hard and aspire to anything you desire, make those dreams realistic by using your head. That's what I did.

In any choices you are confronted with along this journey, always employ the help of both your heart and your head to aid your decision-making. This way, even if you feel that you made a wrong decision further down the line (hindsight is a wonderful thing), you will realise that ultimately you made the rational and reasoned decision which took into account all your desires and ambitions at that time. The two play off each other, and you must always keep the two working side-by-side in order to make the right decisions for you throughout your search.

For instance, I was conflicted during October/November on whether I wanted to aim to do pupillage and tenancy at a large set, or whether I wanted a smaller, more familial sized set. My heart told me that I had always had my

sights set on one big, quite corporately-focused set which I thought was my dream place to work. My heart knew it was impossible to expect to be simply successful with one single pupillage application to that specific set, and it knew that set had also rejected me after interview the year before, but my heart still kept telling me that this was exactly what I aspired to and what I wanted. My heart was not being reasonable or rational, you see? By the time October came around, and I had the hindsight of one application cycle behind me – as well as a month of fluffy civil and criminal litigation concepts floating around my brain – my head recognised that I needed to make a decision on what it was that I wanted before I started to apply. It might sound rather basic to you (and thus potentially also quite stupid), but my head also told me to write a list.

By list, I mean I wrote a table of pros and cons about bigger and smaller sets. By setting out each of their advantages and disadvantages, I could differentiate my thoughts and think rationally about my deliberations by employing the use of both my brain and my heart in this ‘thinking stage’. The more I thought, the more I realised that despite my heart telling me a bigger set was what I aspired to and had always dreamed of, my head was explaining to me exactly why I suited the complete opposite, a smaller set. Through reason, I had understood myself. I wanted a place where I felt comfortable and could build relationships, and that to me was a smaller set. Lo’ and behold, I write this having received an offer from a small set who I feel will be my working family and my support network throughout pupillage and hopefully into practice. I know I made the right choice, and I needed my head to help me do that.

Regardless of whether you agree or disagree with my size choice of Chambers, I am sure you will see the logic and reasoning in my decision-making. That is why my first piece of advice as you embark on your journey will always be to listen to both your heart and your head, and why my second piece of advice is that; if in doubt, write a list.

Push Yourself to Attain and Mould the Skills a Barrister Needs

This one is pretty self-explanatory. As will be highlighted further on in this eclectic piece, you will need to be able to answer questions such as ‘what makes a good barrister?’, ‘what skills does a good barrister need?’ and ‘what skills do you have that will make you a good barrister?’. These are all classic application and interview questions which regularly come up. From my 25 odd interviews this year, I must’ve experienced this question at least 20 times, in either written or oral form, or both. So, prepare for it.

Firstly, think about what sort of skills a barrister needs, or what sort of skills a barrister that you know has and how it helps them do their job. Once you have a few ideas, consider how these skills benefit a barrister in their day to day job.

Then you need to find ways to demonstrate that you have these skills. Collecting examples of you demonstrating these types of skills and abilities will help you further down the line when it comes to answering application and interview questions on these topics. These examples can be from both legal/academic activities, as well as from non-legal extra-curricular activities. In fact, I would openly encourage you to think of non-legal examples of ways you have demonstrated the skills a barrister needs, as I believe it demonstrates you are a well-rounded person who has experienced other paths in life. This may help to show your appeal to a panel and help you to stand out.

For instance, among other things, I believe a barrister needs to have stamina and be thick-skinned to be successful. Both these traits are needed in a career which continually demands hard work, stress management and confidence both inside and outside of the courtroom. By understanding this early, I put steps in place to ensure I could demonstrate these two traits successfully. I ensured I competed in mooting and negotiation competitions at the same time as handling my academic studies and working pro bono on various projects. This I decided was a good way to show my stamina and my sustained work ethic to a Chambers. The thick-skinned trait was harder, but I decided on recording some examples (in shorthand to jog my memory when it came to applications and interview preparation) of times when I have had my abilities questioned, or a difficulty with a client who hasn't believed in me. I thought of how I had overcome those difficulties and how I had been positive in the face of negativity. In this fashion, I felt I displayed my thick-skin.

At this point, I am sure you are thinking 'is this all he thinks a barrister needs to do a good job? What an idiot'. I may be an idiot, but I promise I realise there is far more to this job than just the two traits above. Some other traits for you to think about include (feel free to entirely disagree with me): good advocacy skills, interpersonal skills, empathy, sense of humour, kindness, honesty, integrity and self-belief/confidence, to name but a few.

Evidence, Evidence, EVIDENCE!!!

This point goes in line with the one above. Not only must you demonstrate that you know what skills a barrister needs to be successful, or what skills you have that will make you good at the job, or whatever other question you are asked about with regard to yourself or your own experiences, you **MUST** give evidence.

When I say evidence, what I mean is evidence of things you have done, experienced or seen, which can demonstrate and/or support the statement you are making. So, taking the question of ‘why would you make a good barrister?’ again, if you are asserting that you would make a good barrister because you are a capable and reliable advocate, which every barrister needs to be, then it is no good simply saying, “I am a capable and reliable advocate”. You need to show (not tell) the panel in written or oral form as to why you are a capable and reliable advocate. This may be through one example, or a variety. For instance, you might have won/had a podium finish at a mooting competition. Or you might have won a negotiation competition. A tad more left-field, but you might have been in sales in a previous career and are used to using persuasive techniques to sell products. Whatever it is, note it down and utilise it to substantiate claims about yourself.

I will talk later about interview answer techniques, but for now you need to remember that evidence is crucial. Not only because it backs up what you say, but also because barristers (who are the ones reading your applications and assessing you at any interviews) are trained in evidence. Evidence is their currency, and they know it inside and out. They will spot it a mile away when you make a statement and present no evidence on that particular point. If you are lucky, they will highlight that to you and ask another question to give you the opportunity to give some evidence for your claim. If you are unlucky, they will just make a note of your error, and continue as if nothing has happened. This is why you need to be on your game for applications and interviews, because evidence is the kind of currency that might just bank you an interview, or a second-round interview, or perhaps the holy grail that is pupillage itself.

Look After Yourself

The process, as you will have been told by every single barrister you have ever spoken too, is gruelling. It requires mental strength, self-belief and absolute commitment to be successful.

However, that doesn't mean you have to live and breathe the law and pupillage every second of every day. There is no need to swallow the White Book (unless you want 100% in Civil Litigation) and you are not required to be able to recite 'The Secret Barrister' backwards to impress a pupillage panel (at least I didn't have to anyway).

Therefore, I would strongly advise taking some time out of your studies and/or work if you study the BPTC part-time, in order to have some 'you' time. Everyone has their interests, hobbies and activities they enjoy. Find whatever is it that clears your brain, or makes you feel alive, and make sure you do it once a week. It is so easy to let this process eat you up from the inside out. You cannot let this happen. One of the ways I found it easier to manage everything was by forcing myself to take off at least one day a week completely from work. Not only did this clear my head, but I would have something to work towards, meaning I was motivated on the other 6 days of a week (with the distinct exception of a Monday morning – is anyone ever motivated on a Monday morning?)

Anyway, you see my point. Do something for you each week. If you like to drink, go and drink. If you like to gym, then keep your fitness up. If you like to watch the football like me, then go ahead and enjoy it. Switch off from work and relax. I can guarantee it will ensure you feel much better for the rest of the week, and you then have something to always look forward too if the process is getting you down at any point.

Help Each Other!!!

I cannot stress this point enough. This process is hard enough when you are all supporting and helping each other to reach your goal, let alone when you are on your own through it. Make sure that you make contacts, put yourself out there and make friends and network. You all have different strengths and weaknesses, so harness each other – both for the BPTC and for your respective pupillage searches.

I think you all have got my point. I will simply say this: it is far easier for you to all help each other reach your goal, than to see everyone as competition for your pupillage place. Remember that.

2. Points for Pre-Application:

This is the part of this piece where I (hopefully) start to give you some proper pointers on my thoughts on setting yourself up ready to write some excellent pupillage application forms come January – February.

I am sure many of you are already gearing up to the application process, or have possibly even started it, and so some of my below points may not apply to you because you have already completed them ahead of this pupillage cycle. However, if you haven't had the opportunity yet, then hopefully browsing the below points will help you in getting ready.

Sort Your CV

My first piece of advice is to get your CV in order as best you can. This will help when it comes to writing your application forms. When I say 'in order' what I mean is organise a document of your qualifications, achievements (legal and non-legal), work experience/work (legal and non-legal) and your interests. Setting this all out and providing a little bit of detail for each achievement/work experience/interest of yours will make it easier to write about them in your respective application forms when it comes to filling them out.

I would also advise setting out a few slightly different CVs if you are aiming to apply for various practice areas. For instance, I applied for pupillages mainly in crime, but also mixed pupillages incorporating crime and family, as well as a few common law pupillages which would involve crime, family and civil. By having my various key points for each 'type' of pupillage I was applying for, I already had an idea of what I wanted to talk about on each application form for each different type of pupillage I was applying for. This essentially quickened my applications up, because I had already considered elements of the forms. I then just had to write (and rewrite) the ideas I had!

The more you can do now, the easier it will be to focus on the nitty-gritty of the forms when you are under time pressure to get them done.

Choose Your Chambers

This, I think, is one of the most important elements of the decision-making process when it comes to the search for pupillage. I believe this because it is

this set of decisions which will underlie ALL of the applications that you make to chambers.

When it comes to choosing your chambers, you need to think about what it is that you want from your career. I don't mean that in the ordinary terms of 'why do you want to be a barrister?' but rather in the terms of where you see yourself in 5 years, what sort of person you are, how important you consider where you want to live to be, etc.

For the reasons above, the below points should be considered in order to narrow down your search to the select chambers in which you think you would fit:

- Do you want to be in a big or small chambers?
- What areas of law do you want to practise?
- What location(s) do you want to be working in?
- Do you want to be on circuit or in London? Which circuit?
- Do you want to work in defence or prosecution? Or work in more claimant or defendant focused work?

These are just a few of my thoughts, but there are plenty more questions you will be required to ask yourself prior to making your selected applications.

Answering these questions correctly and knowing what it is that you want from your future chambers will help you to narrow down your decisions on who to apply to. It goes without saying that there is no way you can apply to every chambers, so it is imperative that you select the ones where you can genuinely see yourself both doing pupillage and practising. That way you can come across sincerely and honestly when you answer questions such as 'where do you see yourself in 5 years time?' and 'why have you applied to this Chambers?'

Do Your Research (and Make Notes!)

You might think this point is similar to the one above, but for the reasons below, you will realise it is very different. In the above point, I intend for you to consider what suits you best in terms of which chambers and what types of pupillage you should be placing your focus on for applications. In this point, I intend for you to be armed with that information, and to then make use of all

the resources available to you to research the chambers which you are interested in applying too.

I have put this point in early because it is, with hindsight, something I would have done much earlier in the process than I actually did. Had I done so, I think it would have made my January-March much more bearable.

You may perhaps be wondering what I mean by 'do your research'. In effect, I mean it is exceptionally useful to be clued up on as many aspects of a particular chambers as possible. For example, any recent cases of interest which they are instructed on; any previous cases of interest; any niche areas of law they practice in; any particularly high-flying juniors or silks whom stand out to you for any reason...you get the gist.

It might sound like a chore (and with some chambers lack of information online, I can assure you it often is), but it is necessary nonetheless. When a chambers asks you in their application form 'Why Us?' or asks you in interview for any particular reasons why you applied for them specifically, you do NOT want to be unstuck. A poor answer to this application form question will make it much harder for them to want to give you an interview (I say want because every Chambers wants to interview every candidate they can, it is just with the huge level of competition that they are forced into selecting an amount they know they can interview fairly). A poor answer in interview will most likely render you in the 'no' pile for a second round interview.

On that basis, I consider this often-mundane seeming task to actually be one of the most important of the whole process. Look at it this way, you could give a bland, boring answer which shows you have put a reasonable amount of effort into researching a chambers and have thus said what 80% of the other candidates have said. Or, you could research as extensively as possible (easier said than done I know, but you can do your best - time-permitting - to research each chambers in-depth) and you can thus give a deep, knowledgeable and most importantly, personal, answer which will stand out to the pupillage panel and make them want to give you an interview, or want to give you a second-round interview. It's that simple.

Regarding your research itself, I have a few tips for where to focus your eyes. Firstly, scour chambers websites. As I alluded to earlier, this is not always the easiest, but it can reap rewards in terms of interesting cases, or useful information about members of chambers and their interests. This information

can all be mined and then utilised on that 'why us?' question. However, I would advise going further than this.

Secondly, take a peek at the Legal500 and Chambers & Partners comments on that particular set. Have they had a stonking review recently? Have they had your particular area of interest highlighted as one of their specialities? Have they taken on the first case in a niche new area? Do they have a wide variety of expertise across the board (from juniors to silks) in a certain area that appeals to you? Whatever it is, try and pick a few things out to demonstrate further research.

Thirdly, do some digging in the local news for the location where chambers is based. Chances are, unless that particular chambers has an exceptional command of advertising and/or a PR team, the local news will hold more information on standard cases which that chambers has taken on. For example, the chambers I will be doing pupillage at doesn't particularly use a news section to advertise the work of its members, but by using the Liverpool Echo, I found a few interesting recent cases which chambers had been involved in and was thus able to use these in my application. I can guarantee you that (unless everyone who applies this year manages to read this paragraph of this guide, which I find to be highly unlikely because the majority will have got bored by page 2) hardly anyone will go this far into their research. However, I genuinely think if you can mine information from this type of research to be used effectively to justify your answer to 'Why Us?', then you will stand out.

Fourthly, utilise the power of LinkedIn. Research individual members of chambers who you find interesting from your other research, you never know what you might find that can be of use to you by doing this. Either do this on private mode if you're sensible, or normal mode if you're feeling brazen and bold. In all seriousness, I would probably advise doing it on private, but I suppose that decision is up to you. When utilising this information, I wouldn't shout that you found it via doing some intrepid LinkedIn stalking (a panel might find this a tad weird!) but you can definitely weave it into your other points to help sustain your case.

Fifthly, look at what charities and pro bono work that chambers does. This is a great way to show how you could integrate yourself into chambers life as well as showing them that you have common interests. For instance, if a chambers supports FRU, and you have worked for FRU during your BPTC, then this common goal can be used to help show that you are minded in a similar way to

chambers. If you have done fundraising through sporting activities which you enjoy, and chambers organises similar events, then highlight this. It can only serve to bolster your application. Mentioning things like this in an application form can lead to favourable questions about your interests in interview, or if you mention them in the interview, it can lead to more questioning on that area, which clearly allows you to display your passion and interests even further – as I said, this can only be a good thing!

Finally, make sure you think outside the box on how to justify the points you make on the 'Why Us?' question. For example, maybe the clerks get incredible reviews on the Legal500 rankings – perhaps mention this and explain how important it is for you to go to a set where the clerks provide excellent service to clients? This will boost your work, won't it? Perhaps that might show to the pupillage panel that you are clued up about the more 'business side' of working as a self-employed practitioner at a set. My point is, always show them why you are making that particular point about their chambers. This is one of the few opportunities you will get to showcase how you can be business-minded, how you can demonstrate current awareness of a career at the bar, and most of all, how you will fit into life at that particular chambers and be a budding and enthusiastic member who will contribute to the junior bar.

If you do this, I promise you it will boost your applications massively.

Understand What Each Chambers is Looking For

Again, this point goes in line with the two above. If you have chosen your chambers, and then promptly researched the chambers (and made notes on them), then you should by this point know what they are looking for in a candidate. And if you don't, perhaps you need to go back and do some more research!

Some chambers will very helpfully provide a document, often under the aptly-named (but not very inventive) 'pupillage' tab, which explains what they are looking for in candidates. It will exude many exuberant words, from a few examples, I found the following words used: "confident"; "intellectual"; "natural advocate"; "impressive"; "flexible"; "committed"; "honest"; "driven", "able"; and perhaps the most unambiguous of all, "a strong and competent all-rounder". Perhaps I was being overly sarcastic at the beginning of the sentence, but my point remains clear – for all these words, does it actually help

you to understand what a chambers is looking for explicitly? Nope. Chambers arguments against my point may be just as valid however – how can we say what we are looking for, when there are so many different ways to be an excellent barrister. They would have a fair point.

On that basis, this much is clear. Think about what skills it is that a barrister needs to be successful. Recognise your strengths and recognise your weaknesses. Utilise the strengths, work on the weaknesses, and demonstrate all of that to chambers. Each panel will be interested in different elements of your CV, so remember to always be flexible when showcasing the best ‘you’ possible, both on application forms and in interview. Demonstrate your strongest points, and provide a wealth of them. If you do this, you can then let each respective chambers you apply to ‘cherry-pick’ what it is exactly that they like about YOU. Because it is important to remember that although ultimately it is the pupillage panels who hold the power, this process is all about YOU. Keep hold of that thought.

Location, Location, Location

I know I have said this before, but I will say it again for the sake of clarity (and for those who are skim-reading and thus missed it the first time). Make absolutely sure you are decided upon the locations that you wish to be in before you go applying to any old chambers.

This is important for a variety of reasons. Firstly, Chambers will often want you to demonstrate a ‘commitment’ to that particular area/location. This is especially prevalent on circuit, and entirely understandable. When you apply for pupillage, you must remember that the chambers deciding on your application or interviewing you, will be looking at you as a long-term investment. They will pay you for your pupillage, but they look far beyond this, into the future in order to assess your potential and ultimately decide whether you will make a successful tenant in the future. This is hugely important to remember, because you want to demonstrate this in abundance. Effectively, what you want to be saying (through your much more eloquent wording both in written and oral form) is: ‘Hello, I am X, and I want pupillage at your chambers because I want to be here, because I chose your Chambers over the others, because of X, Y and Z, oh and I want to live in X location’. If you cannot do the above honestly (because you don’t want to be in that location long-term), then I suggest you don’t bother applying for that chambers, because

they will see through bullsh*t a mile off. Barristers are trained to smell it out every day in court, and they always will.

Secondly, after the rather long first point, remember that you have to think of your own welfare and interests. Pupillage is hard. Although I haven't done it yet, I am preparing for a much harder slog than my undergraduate degree, or the BPTC for that matter. As a result of this, I fundamentally believe that to achieve your potential, you must be beginning your practical training and your early years in practice in a location that you want to be in. To neglect this point now may bring misery and disappointment further down the line. My point is that you may have further difficulties that you do not foresee now, which happen later, should you not be in a favourable location for you. I chose my university not off league table rankings, but based on where I actually wanted to be. I chose my BPTC provider and location not on BPTC statistics, but based on location. It's worked out well for me (so far!) so I believe quite strongly in this point. I strongly suggest you have a think about your suitable locations and where you feel you would be most comfortable. This will help you narrow down your options for chambers, which can also be a help.

3. Tackling the Application Form: How to Showcase Yourself

Back Yourself

First and foremost, before we get into any nitty gritty, I want each of you to take a moment and think about what you're good at. This (hopefully) shouldn't be too difficult, considering we were discussing strengths and weaknesses 4 paragraphs ago.

Take a breath and pause for thought. For once, remind yourself how far you've come, as opposed to how far you've got to go. I forgot to do this, and I genuinely believe it impacted on my performance in my first few interviews, because of the importance of backing yourself. You have to be CONFIDENT. I don't mean arrogant, or cocky, but simply confident in your abilities as a person and as a future practitioner. To be successful in the competition for pupillage, you must believe wholeheartedly that you are capable of getting (and succeeding at) pupillage. If you cannot do this, you will fall at the first hurdle.

I know everyone has doubts and worries. God knows I had a million over the course of the BPTC. There were times I wanted to hurl Blackstone's at the wall, put my fist through my laptop screen and my head through the White Book. The course, and this search for pupillage, will test you. It certainly tested me. But what doesn't kill you makes you stronger, and you must remember that being tested now will help you in the future. See each challenge, setback and rejection as a lesson that will help guide on the path to a 'yes', and never forget that you simply only need one 'yes' and you're in business.

What I am trying to say, is that despite your worries, you must have confidence. You must believe. You must have the faith in yourself that you will succeed. I found my various interview experiences to be half a battle with the respective panels I went in front of, and half a battle with myself at the same time. The more you can curb having to battle with yourself, the more resources you have in your armoury to face the panel and focus on them. I am sure I speak not just for myself, but every other future (or present) pupil when I say this, but if I (we) can do this, then you all can too. Don't forget this critical detail when you write your applications and when you prepare for interviews.

The Application Itself

Specific and Realistic

These two terms sound so simple that you might think I am patronising you. I promise you I am not. I just really want to drill these points into you so that at the beginning of every application form you think of 3 things: 1. You believe you are good enough for any pupillage, 2. You are specific with every single thing you say, and 3. You remain realistic throughout and do not overstate your case.

If I can persuade you all to do these three things, then as far as I am concerned I have done what I set out to do with this rough and ready guide. This piece of advice applies both to application forms, as well as to interview preparation and right up to the minute before you step inside that interview room and face the panel.

I don't feel I need to discuss number one anymore, as I think by now you will have had enough of my preaching on confidence. With regards to number two, what I essentially am asking you to do is to keep yourself focused on every point you are making. A panel are not asking you to say every single thing about yourself on an application form. They are not asking you for a life story. I think what it all boils down to for a panel is this: Are you capable of performing the job effectively whilst being a quick learner, a tolerable colleague and a character who will give back to chambers in your own personal ways.

In light of that, specificity is clearly a very important element of any well-formulated application form. When you are asked a question, no matter what that question is, you do not need to fill out the word count. Limits are in place to stop you writing an essay, but barristers (and all lawyers to be honest) value an ability to put your point across succinctly and without wasting time. In fact, going back to earlier, this is a key trait of any barrister. Therefore, if you think you can make your points with less words, then do so. I can't imagine many, if any, chambers would ever count that against you.

Also, I would suggest making a few little points within a question if you feel it fits the bill. That way you can demonstrate your ability to structure your submissions, whilst being persuasive. Ultimately, an application form is just like submissions, because you are attempting to persuade (begging(!) in my case) the chambers to interview you. In all seriousness, you must employ all the

tools of persuasion and written advocacy you can muster and use them to your benefit. So be specific, remain structured and always employ your tools of persuasion. Use your own experiences (whatever they may be) to your advantage to do this.

Considering number three, being realistic is another trait panels will value. Many of you will have mooted or performed some form of advocacy before, others of you will have completed written advocacy, such as dissertations and written submissions. You will all have, at some point, understood the importance of not overstating your case. This point remains as critical to a good application form as it does in a moot, or a dissertation or written submissions.

For example, I was the paper monitor of my class in Year 3 (prestigious achievement, I know), but chambers will see right through me if I attempt to tell them on their application form (or in interview for that matter), that this role helped me to improve my organisational skills and time-keeping. Eyebrows will be raised and small chuckles may be had. This may seem like an overly dramatic example, but I hope it makes it clear that you should never overstate your case. Only make points which you consider reasonable – for most barristers are exceptionally well-versed in reasonable and unreasonable points, and they will expect you to be too.

So, there you have it, keep these three things in mind. Be confident, be specific and be realistic with all the points you make. Provided you do that, and employ some common sense, I don't think you can go far wrong.

The Art of Persuasion – Show Don't Tell

Part of being a persuasive advocate (on this occasion representing yourself) is being able to show and not tell. In the future, a judge won't tolerate you telling them what to do, but they will allow you to show them the way. You should employ the same tactics with a pupillage panel. When you make a point, don't simply tell them what that experience gave you, or what skills you honed during mooting/negotiation competitions. *Show* them what skills and abilities you gained and improved. Tell them why you think you improved. Self-reflect not just on what you did, but what you gained, and *show* each panel that.

For example, I always placed great emphasis on my pro bono work. I spent a lot of time on the BPTC teaching and overseeing the StreetLaw Project. For those of you who don't know, the StreetLaw initiative involves law students

going into schools and teaching children about laws which affect them. I have taught lessons on the right to vote, murder and manslaughter, and possibly the hardest of all my experiences, the law on sexting and revenge porn to a bunch of giggling (and sometimes rather lippy) Year 10s. Through these experiences, I have had to tackle difficult scenarios and repeatedly adapt to changing environments. Through the advocacy element of teaching, I have had to remain flexible and have often had to go off-script and think under pressure during questions from pupils. By teaching a variety of different aged children, I have learnt to tailor my public speaking to many different target audiences. Teaching children in schools situated in deprived areas has made me appreciate the differences in society and how to engage and persuade those who would rather sleep than listen to me, to take note of what I am saying.

I hope you see what I did there. I did not simply tell the panel what I did and what skills I think I gained. I *showed* them what I did, and I *showed* them how I think it has improved my skillset. It may seem like a subtle distinction, but it is a crucial one nonetheless, and one that you should employ as much as possible within your applications and within interviews, when you get to them.

The Art of Persuasion – Target Audience

Somehow I have managed to mention this during my example of the primary school 'show and (don't) tell' concept above. I'll keep it simple then. Remember who you are aiming to persuade. Get an accurate picture of them through your research and keep them in mind when you write your form. What area of law do they practise in? What things will they therefore be most interested in on my CV? What will they want me to talk about? What might they want me to discuss in-depth, and what might they simply want a flavour of before I move on? Where do I need to really showcase myself and my skills? How important is X activity to them in relation to Y activity? Do I mention I was paper monitor in my year 3 class...? Alright I'll stop. Aside from the final one, I think you get the picture.

Ensure what you say is targeted at engaging and persuading your specific audience. Use that research on the specific chambers to guide your reasoning on what is important for you to say and what isn't. Remember each set is different and that they will all place varying weights of importance on each point you make and each activity from your CV, but you can make it easier for them by making educated decisions on what you think a certain chambers will find more important, and what they will find less important.

For want of a better example, consider the fact that a chambers specialising in employment law will find your pro bono work in the area of unfair dismissal far more interesting than your work on the criminal appeals project, and vice versa if you are applying to a criminal set. I am not saying don't talk about your other experiences – to the contrary in fact, they can be very useful – I am just asking you to employ some reason when deciding on what to go into detail about, and what to mention in a form and wait to be asked about in interview should the chambers/panel find that particular point interesting enough to want to ask a question about it.

The Art of Persuasion – Keep it Simple

This is another point I have mentioned arbitrarily, although not explicitly, in other parts of this guide. Simplicity goes in hand with being realistic and specific. I am not saying you have to talk in words which are only 6 characters in length and below, but try and keep your sentences short and to the point. Don't waste words on pointless fillers and waffle which doesn't further what you are saying equivocally. Where there are exceptionally short word counts, ensure every word adds value to what you are saying, and if it doesn't, be brutal and cut it out. Chambers won't thank you for filling the word count if half of your words don't add value to your points. Equally though if they do add value in some form, then keep them in.

Simplicity stems from specificity. So, the chances are if you read back your work and don't quite feel you are hitting the nail on the head and aren't being simple enough, then chances are you aren't being specific enough either. The same point applies conversely as well. Remain focused on your audience and your points, make them and move on. Don't languish in territory which won't persuade your target audience to invite you to interview.

The Art of Persuasion – Don't be Afraid to Stand Out

You might think this point perhaps contradicts the overall point I have been making about being specific and simple over the last few paragraphs. I disagree. When I say about not being afraid of standing out, I mean that you can say things confidently and use what differences you think you have compared to other candidates, to your strength in an application. I don't mean for you to think I am advising an open invitation to be a d*ck because you think chambers will find it funny. I can almost guarantee they won't.

As I am sure you will have realised by now if you are on the BPTC, or deep into your undergraduate degree, or currently working, the Bar has a diverse workforce who have all taken different journeys to reach their ambition of practising as an advocate. These differences are what keep the Bar vibrant, successful and united.

I think it is important to showcase these. As I have said before, I am not advising you to go off-piste and 'piste' the barristers off, but I am advising that you showcase what you think is different about you as compared to other candidates, whilst having confidence in yourself and pride for the journey you have undertaken so far. For example, if you have acted and performed in theatre productions since the age of 7, then talk about it – show (not tell) a panel what you have learnt and the skills you have gained from these experiences. If you compete in toughmudders across the UK for charity or represent the UK in the European egg and spoon race championships, then show a panel why your experiences matter. Differences are what makes us all human, so be proud of them and use them to your advantage. Be smart in how you deploy your various experiences and you shall reap the rewards of your work.

But in revisiting a previous piece of advice, do be careful not to overstate your case. I once heard an amusing (but very valuable) story from a barrister on their respective chambers pupillage panel who told me about a candidate who was convinced that her acting as a troll in Lord of the Rings fan battle re-enactments was critical to her ability to be a capable and reliable advocate. I think not, and safe to say from said barrister's reaction to his own story, neither did he or the rest of the panel. Do not let this story put you off from using the weird and wonderful, but do utilise your life experiences with a pinch of salt, and always ask yourself 'will this further my application in persuading the panel that I am a good candidate for their pupillage and tolerable as a human-being and future colleague?'

Explain, Explain, Explain, Evidence, Evidence, Evidence

Building on (and reminding you of) the 'Evidence, Evidence, Evidence' point above, make sure that before you write a point you have completely understood where you are going with it. Never, ever, ever, start writing a point on an application form without knowing where you are going from start to

finish. To do so would only demonstrate to a panel that you cannot maintain a well-structured and relevant point, a crucial ability of a good advocate.

Always explain yourself, always justify what you say, and always back it up with relevant evidence which highlights the point of why you are making the point in the first place.

I could repeatedly try and explain this concept and hope and pray that it goes into your head, or I could provide you with a few examples which, in my view, will give you a better idea of what I mean by the above paragraph. These are excerpts from my own pupillage applications that I completed last year. Although I won't tell you the name of the Chambers for each example, I will tell you the question they asked me and show you my answer. I hope by doing this you will see exactly what I mean when I say: Point, Explain, Evidence, Justify. Try to trace (as best you can) me making my point, explaining why it is important, and then using evidence to justify it.

Example 1: Why Are You Applying to Our Chambers for Pupillage? (Criminal Pupillage)

“Chambers are regularly instructed in high-profile cases, demonstrated by the recent Massey assassination trial and Salford double shooting trial. As a pupil, this will provide opportunities to work on prominent cases and learn from advocates at the forefront of the profession.

Chambers crime team accounted for approximately 36% of Chambers income in 2017 – 2018. This demonstrates the clear influx of criminal work that Chambers has, meaning there is plenty of work for a pupil to engage in. The range of seniority of Chambers crime team also conveys the broad spectrum of work being received, meaning that a pupil will gain exposure to a range of work.

Chambers also has the largest amount of category 4 prosecutors in the country. This demonstrates the clear intention of Chambers to continue growing and improving its crime team. This means a pupil will be learning from the most adept advocates in the country, which will make a positive impact upon a pupil's growth.

On my mini-pupillage, I found X barrister, Y barrister and Z barrister all to be approachable and encouraging. I found the same attitude was displayed by all

members who were present for the 2017 pupillage forum. I consider these attributes ideal for pupil supervisors, which demonstrates the wealth of excellent supervisors that Chambers has.

Chambers manages to maintain a clear reputation for excellence whilst still being known for members and staff being approachable and down to earth. This is precisely why I consider Chambers to be the perfect place for pupillage.”

Example 2: What is the Biggest Challenge You Have Faced? (Common Law Pupillage)

“During my first year of A-Levels (2013/2014), I did not work as hard as I could to achieve my potential. I received AS Grades of BCCC in my four elected subjects. During my summer holidays, I realised I would have to seriously improve my grades to gain entry into a Russell Group Law School. Despite my teachers telling me that it was highly unrealistic that I was academic enough to attain the grades needed to study Law at University on the basis of my AS grades, I pursued my goal.

I dedicated myself to academic study during year 13, to achieve the necessary grades to study at a Russell Group Law School. Through hard work and determination, I was successful in improving my somewhat lacklustre AS-Level grades, resulting in my overall A-Level results of AABC. I have continued to improve my academic grades throughout my time at University, achieving a first-class honours degree overall, with academic prizes for individual module results including my clinical legal skills module (82%) and public health law module (85%).

This experience taught me that I can achieve what I set out to do with the right level of resilience and determination. I also learnt to not let one bad year or result define me as a person or stop me from pursuing my career aspirations.”

Example 3: What are the Skills and Abilities of a Good Advocate, and How Have You Demonstrated These? (Criminal and Family Pupillage)

“I believe good advocates require interpersonal skills, advocacy ability, resilience, a strong command of language and motivation. I believe I have demonstrated these characteristics in the following ways:

People-Person – I enjoy dealing with people, helping to alleviate their worries and achieve their desired outcomes. Through my part-time and pro bono work, I have established honest relationships with clients, to gain their trust and respect.

Advocacy – I have demonstrated an aptitude for advocacy through mooting and negotiation. My experiences have taught me relevant skills, including how to prepare lengthy submissions and maintain an efficient structure, convey points clearly under time pressure, think on my feet during judicial intervention and adapt quickly to changes in situation. I have been commended in advocacy competitions by judges for my efficiency, tenacity, attention to detail and clarity.

Resilience – I am determined and hard-working. At University, I was a quarter-finalist in my first mooting competition, the runner-up in the second, and finally the winner of my final competition. This is indicative of my resilience, openness to constructive criticism and desire to improve.

Language – Having a command of language is a powerful tool at the Bar. I have developed my command of language and used it to good effect to get published at University, empower schoolchildren through StreetLaw, connect with my peers (<https://lawentry.com/2018/07/23/the-route-to-pupillage-a-comprehensive-guide-to-work-experience-and-activities/>), work with the families of disabled children to secure the educational help they needed, and succeed in advocacy competitions.

Motivated – I consistently balanced my curricular, extra-curricular and part-time work at University. This culminated in a first-class degree and successes in my pro bono work and advocacy competitions. I consider this to demonstrate my competence in handling a busy pupillage and practice.”

Justify EVERYTHING and Always Back Yourself Up

Once again, I am tracing (and unfortunately repeating myself a little) back through the points I have already made. The way I see it, a pupillage application form answer is most analogous to layers on a cake. Although there is no set answer per se, there is a certain way of going about answering any question posed which will effectively demonstrate the things you need to, e.g. structure, written ability, persuasiveness, skills, achievements and anything else you feel important to highlight.

With this structure, you can see the Point, the Explanation, the Evidence and the Justification all as different layers on the cake. This, I suppose, is my own version of what you may have been taught by your tutors previously – the S.T.A.R method. This stands for: Situation, Task, Action, Result. Whichever way you choose to remember it (STAR sounds a bit better than my poorly named PEEJ), make sure you have highlighted each layer of the cake and built on top of each consecutive layer.

For instance, when it comes to Point/Situation, explain all the relevant details which ‘set the scene’. This is your first building block of the answer. If you get this wrong, the rest will unravel illogically and perhaps cause confusion. This means your answer will not be as clear as it could be, which may mean the panel lose interest or do not quite understand just how brilliant your answer is.

Then build upon this first layer with your second, the Explanation/Task. Here you give more details about you specifically. What did YOU do? What did YOU think? How did YOU solve the issue? How did YOU feel? You get the point. This element requires you to self-reflect on your own actions and to explain them in a logical and clear way, whilst advertising your capabilities – show and don’t tell remember. This might sound a lot to take in, but I promise you it gets easier the more you practise.

Once you are done with making the point and explaining it, you can get into the Evidence. This simply requires you to show the panel what it is you did, why you did it and to self-reflect on this. Again, this gets easier the more you practise. For instance, when you are perhaps asked about why you want to be a barrister, you might wish to make the point that you love public speaking. So, you would make the point and explain it, and then you could perhaps say (if this were true) that you first did public speaking during your paper monitor duties in year 3 (you thought I wouldn’t bring this up again didn’t you?) and that ever since then you have done plenty of public speaking. You have competed in the Bar Mock Trial Competition, mooted at university, negotiated during postgraduate study and now here you are, sat in front of the panel because (you will hopefully explain) you have always enjoyed speaking out for others and orally structuring difficult legal points in a way to persuade a tribunal of fact or law that what you say is the correct answer to the legal/factual conundrum with which they are faced.

Finally, you can then Justify your entire answer. You have given the point, explained its relevance and given your evidence. This is essentially the wrapping up of your entire point. Here, it is best to focus on showing why your evidence relates to the point you first made, in order to bring everything back full circle – this, in my view, demonstrates an ability to make a succinct and coherent point which is entirely relevant throughout. This is what you should be aiming for with everything you say on an application form, as well as what you say orally in an interview. To ensure that you are not left confused by what I mean by the above, I will highlight where I have done this using a short example.

Example: What Makes a Good Advocate and How Have You Demonstrated These Skills?

“...**Resilience** – I am determined and hard-working. At University, I was a quarter-finalist in my first mooted competition, the runner-up in the second, and finally the winner of my final competition. This is indicative of my resilience, openness to constructive criticism and desire to improve, all of which will help me during the day-to-day life of an advocate.”

(**Point**, **Explanation**, **Evidence**, **Justify**).

Finally, I have a tip for getting used to this way of making points. This will be a useful tip for both application forms and interview prep so it may be repeated further down as well for the benefit of those, who will not read this entire guide and will simply utilise whichever elements take their fancy (or whichever elements they read before they get bored of me droning on).

Tip: Practise structuring and explaining answers to questions from family and friends in the way I have explained above and seek their feedback – did you explain the point well? Did you set the scene well? Was what you said logical and coherent? Did you make your point effectively? Did you demonstrate your capabilities/traits and support them with evidence? Did you justify your points? Did you structure everything in a way that made it simple to understand the overall point? Doing this helped me massively, and I can assure you that seeking other people’s opinions on what you say and how you say it will help massively for you as well.

No Waffle

This is pretty self-explanatory as a point in and of itself. Don't waffle at all. So firstly, do not write your applications like I have written this guide! Focus on cutting out words that do not contribute value to your answers. They are simply not needed. It might only seem like 1 word here and 1 word there, but these add up, and before you know it you have a whole sentence worth of words that are not adding anything to your application. By taking these out and replacing it with a sentence which adds value, you may just have made the difference between getting an interview and getting a rejection.

READ IT OVER

I cannot overstate the importance of this. So many applicants will not read their work back, or skim read it over. This is not good enough. Barristers pride themselves on their ability to spot errors and inconsistencies in huge bundles of evidence. Your 6-page application form is easy pickings for them to analyse in comparison to a 600-page firearms offence brief which they receive on the daily.

Whatever you do, make sure you read your work over at LEAST twice before sending it. If possible, read it 4 or 5 times. You will notice little grammatical errors, slight inconsistencies in points you have made, and sometimes blatant errors (such as the time I accidentally said 'second sex' instead of 'second six' in an application...I have never been so embarrassed). I can assure you that these issues, however major or minor you consider them to be, will be spotted by the trained eyes of a pupillage panel. For this reason, ensure these issues are ironed out before you send off your applications, as most chambers will not accept a second submission. As one barrister once said to me during my application cycle last year - you can be sure that there is nothing worse for a member of chambers who is tasked with reading 100 applications than having to endure grammatical errors and inconsistencies within an application. Take note, it will count against you and it is simple to avoid.

Another tip in this regard – If you know you are shockingly poor on grammar, or awful with differentiating between the right practice/practise (this grammatical rule still evades me for sure), or whatever else it is, then ensure you get someone else to read your work. In fact, even if you think you are the most perfect, amazing, incredible future barrister that ever walked this earth,

still get someone else to read your work. You will be astounded at the mistakes in your own work that you yourself cannot see. Another person will pick up on them and allow you to make the necessary changes before you send the form off. I used to have a four-stage process with regard to editing applications.

1. Once completed, I would read it over myself twice to ensure I could edit any obvious errors and make my phrasing even better. It also allowed me the opportunity to move my structure around to make each answer read as well as I considered it could be.

2. After step 1, I would email the work to my very kind and very helpful tutor and let her read it and give me her thoughts upon it. If you have the opportunity, find someone who will do this for you, whether a lawyer, a careers advisor, a tutor at university or just someone with an understanding of the process of applying for pupillage and what it takes. This certain someone will be an incredibly useful resource. Pay them in chocolate or ply them with alcohol if you have too, I cannot recommend having this stage enough.

3. Then, once you have edited for a second time based upon the comments made in stage 2, send your work to someone else who is in a non-legal background. This could be a friend, a family member or a work colleague. Again, this stage is invaluable. That person may not have knowledge of the process you are going through, but they will read your words from a 'human' point of view. They will therefore consider innately basic issues such as: does this make sense? Would I change X structure here? Does that sentence need rephrasing to sound more fluid? Etc. I had a huge amount of help from my dad and a few close friends in this regard, and I owe them massively for my (eventual) success. I do not think I would have had the chance to attend the amount of interviews I did if I had not had their (and my tutor's!) help with editing my application forms. Remember that this form is your first, and only, time to showcase yourself to chambers before they ultimately decide the big question: Do we invite this candidate to interview, or 1 of the 100 others instead?

4. Finally, I make the edits which are suggested in stage 3, and then I read over my work twice more going carefully through each point and really thinking about whether I am 100% happy with it. Have I been specific enough? Have I ensured my point comes across as well as it could do? Have I been realistic? Have I overstated my case anywhere here? Would I invite myself to interview if

I read this? And finally, have I given an accurate and full representation of myself and my personality to the best of my ability?

Tackling Difficult Questions

I am hoping that the above points will have already helped make you feel confident in tackling difficult questions. To be honest, I think the title is a bit oxymoronic in the context of what we are discussing, because there isn't really any easy questions on a pupillage application form. That is the entire point. A chambers want to test you on paper and see what kind of person you are before they decide to invite you to interview in the flesh.

I have jotted down a few of the common questions on application forms which I initially struggled with:

- Why should we choose you as our next pupil?
- Why are you applying to us for pupillage?
- Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
- What are your weaknesses?
- What skills do you have that will make you an excellent barrister?
- What will you do if you are unsuccessful in gaining pupillage this year?
- How would your friends describe you?

All of these questions caused me some difficulty in some way, shape or form. I am sure that you will all have difficulty with different questions, because that is human nature. However, these questions commonly feature on application forms, so it may help you somewhat to start to think about how to answer them now. This preparation, like researching chambers, will make your life considerably easier further down the line when the going gets tough in January – March.

What I am going to do below is take each of these questions and pose some more questions/lines of thinking which I think will make it easier for you to think logically about these various questions and come up with your own answers.

Question One: Why Should We Choose You as Our Next Pupil?

This question, or words to that effect, is simply a set really asking you 'What are you about, will we like you, will you be good at being a barrister and do you

have the credentials for it?' On that basis, when you break this all down, you need to be thinking about:

- What skills you have that will make you a great barrister;
- What makes you stand out from other applicants in particular;
- What achievements and awards/experiences you have which will help you as an advocate;
- That you are business-minded and can appreciate the intricacies of being self-employed and marketing yourself (and chambers) to professional clients, etc.

I should add that this is not everything you need to think about, these are just my thoughts on this question, and the various others below. If you think I have missed something out, the chances are I probably have, so don't just listen to me, use your own ideas and lines of reasoning to answer these questions also.

Question Two: Why are You Applying to Us for Pupillage?

As highlighted above, this is a great question on which to score 'points' where perhaps others who have not done the research will fall down. Take a look at my advice on research and use all of this, as well as your own initiative, to come up with a solid and justifiable answer for this question for each individual chambers you apply too. It will help your application massively to give a solid and personalised answer to this type of question.

Question Three: Where Do You See Yourself in 5 Years?

One to think about and be realistic with. I would avoid any 'Jack the lad' comments such as 'a supreme court justice' or 'the next-gen Lady Hale'. Although it might elicit a laugh, I can guarantee this sort of question is designed, once again, to see what you are like and bring out your personality and work ethic. You might hope to be an established junior by then. Don't be afraid to say that. You might want to own your own house by then, be honest and say it if that is something you really aspire too. You might have another focus in your life such as sport – again, don't be afraid to talk about where you want to go with that.

All in all, be realistic and honest. Tell them where you genuinely want to be in 5 years and remember that you cannot please everyone. Some Chambers may not like your answer to this question, but others may love it. You will end up

where you are meant to be, and the only way to do that is to be honest with questions such as these.

Question Four: What are your weaknesses?

The question I most struggle with, not because I'm arrogant enough to think I haven't got weaknesses, but more because I spent two hours on one particular form tearing my hair out over which weakness to admit too, and how to minimise them in a way that kept them as weakness, but demonstrated to Chambers I was doing what I could to eradicate the weakness.

I would suggest that honesty is the best policy here (within reason). If you are unorganised, or you struggle with self-belief, or you are argumentative (what barrister isn't?), then admit to it, and show Chambers what you are doing to combat this. Showing what you are doing to combat your weaknesses is key. It says a huge amount about you to a panel. When you say 'I tend to be quite unorganised with my academic work, which has caused me a few issues in the past. However, having realised that organisation is key for a successful career at the Bar, I have purchased a diary in order to improve my organisational skills and this is really helping me to keep my academic work in check', what it really says is this: 'I recognise I have weaknesses, here they are, but because I want this pupillage, and because I want to be an exceptional barrister, I am doing everything I can to overcome these weaknesses and to make myself into the most all-round and impressive advocate I can be'. If you can nail this, boy does it look good.

Also, whilst I am on this subject, another (sorry!) lesson on specificity for you. I, in one of my interviews, stated that I have a tendency to always be the first to stick my head above the parapet for those who I believe in, which has in the past had repercussions for me. One member of the panel, with wry smile on her face, said to me 'well how is that a weakness?' I remember being stumped for a second or two, simply because I felt like that was a weakness of mine, but could not explain it. I went on to explain that perhaps what I actually meant was a weakness in trusting people too much, or being too hot-headed, or being too loyal. I learnt a valuable lesson here – say what you mean, and mean what you say. You have to be utterly specific in what your weaknesses are, as you should be in every other answer you give on an application form or in an interview. Otherwise you will end up second guessing yourself like I did, which is never a good thing. The panel can spot this type of confusion a mile away, be it on paper or in person.

My tip for questions like these is this: have a few various ideas which you can grasp onto and elucidate on. This will help your answers remain fluid whilst making you less stressed about coming up with an idea for an answer right there and then when you are presented with the question.

Question Five: What skills do you have that will make you an excellent barrister?

Having previously discussed variations of this question, I do not intend to spend much time on it. The key here is to think of the skills a great advocate needs, and then work out what evidence you have to demonstrate that you have those skills. You must then set this down on paper in such a way which demonstrates that: 1. You know what skills an advocate needs to be successful, and 2. You have those said skills and have demonstrated them in various ways.

Question Six: What will you do if you are unsuccessful in gaining pupillage this year?

Much like questions 3 and 4, honesty is the best policy here. I think it is important to highlight that you will keep going in your pursuit of pupillage, until you have exhausted all options, but perhaps tell the panel what else you will be doing to acquire the relevant skills and experience necessary to thrive at the Bar. I think Chambers will appreciate the sort of answer which takes this line and does so with an open and honest approach.

Question Seven: How would your friends describe you?

Once again, difficult. I really struggled with this question even when I was asked it for a second time. Be honest, be realistic and perhaps genuinely ask some friends for their honest view on you personally and professionally (if you are brave enough to withstand the answer that is!). This question is never an easy one to take on the fly, so spend some serious time thinking about your answer to a question like this, and always remember to link it back to you as a person and your personality. This question gives you the opportunity to show Chambers what you are really like, not just professionally, but socially as well. Don't be scared of that chance, grasp it with both hands and give them a really stonking answer.

Other Potential Questions:

Below, I have written out (and found online!) a fair few questions which I either have been asked on an application form/at interview myself, or which I think could reasonably be asked by a panel. Please do not assume that this is every question you may be asked, because it is absolutely not. Having said that, I do think these are the types of questions that you should get used to answering, both in written and oral form, because the chances are that in each application and interview, at least a few of these are going to crop up.

Legal and Ethics Questions

- Tell us about a recent case you have been interested in?
- What is your favourite case that you have learnt about?
- What is your favourite piece of legislation?
- Which area of law would you reform and why?
- What new piece of legislation would you pass?
- Tell us about a recent piece of news that caught your eye and its implications for barristers?
- Do you agree with UN intervention?
- Would you torture someone to save the lives of others?
- What is the most important English legal principle?
- Could you defend someone you know is guilty?
- Prosecution or defence work? Why?
- Do you agree with the death penalty?
- Is compensation culture detrimental to society?
- Do you agree with the legalisation of drugs?
- Should court proceedings be televised?
- What changes would you make to the criminal justice system?
- What are your thoughts on the recent reforms to Criminal and Civil Legal Aid?

Questions about the Legal Profession

- Is there a future for the bar?
- Should barristers wear wigs and gowns?
- What challenges face the modern bar?
- Do you agree with the separation of lawyers/barristers?

Career Questions

- Why should we pick you?
- What have you done that will prepare you for life at the bar?
- What unique experience have you had that will prepare you?

- What can you bring to Chambers that other candidates can't?
- Why have you applied to this Chambers?
- Which subjects did you enjoy most/least at university and why?
- Why did you pick your university?
- Tell us about your university experience?
- When did you realise you wanted to practice law?
- When did you realise you want to be a barrister?
- Why do you want to be a barrister?
- Why don't you want to be a solicitor?

Questions related to the BPTC

- How did you find the BPTC?
- What was your favourite/least favourite part of the course?
- Why did you choose that BPTC provider?
- What did you learn on your last mini-pupillage?
- What was the best/worst thing about your latest mini-pupillage?
- What was the hardest thing you had to do on a mini-pupillage?
- Tell us about a great piece of advocacy you have seen and what made it great? Tell us about a bad piece of advocacy and why it was bad?
- Do you prefer mooting or debating, and why

Personal Questions

- Which historical figures would you invite to a dinner party?
- Which historical figure would you bring back from dead?
- Which cartoon/book/film character would you be?
- What is your favourite book and why?
- What is the last book you read?
- What is your favourite film?
- What are your hobbies?
- What do you do to relax?
- What is your favourite TV programme?
- Which three fictional people you would invite to a party?
- What are the 5 most important skills a barrister needs? Which order of importance would you put them in?
- Which of those skills is your strongest and why?
- What is your biggest strength/weakness?
- How would your friends describe you?
- Which three words would you use to describe yourself?
- What achievement are you most proud of?
- Have you ever failed anything, i.e. an exam?

- Give us an example of when you have worked in a team?
- Give us an example of when you have acted as a leader?
- Tell us about a moral dilemma you have been faced with and what you did?
- If you had to present on any topic of your choice, what would it be?
- How do you organise your time and assess priorities?
- Give an example of when you used persuasiveness to convince someone of something?

Review, Review, Review

We have reached my final piece of advice for the application part of the pupillage process. I imagine you're all falling asleep by now, but for those of you who are still with me, there is plenty more useful advice for me to impart for interviews and the rest of the process in the below sections.

My final piece of advice on the application process is to review everything you have said one more time in full before you send off the application. Check grammar, punctuation, spelling, phrasing, word counts, everything. Send each application off without a single error, because if you do make a mistake, no matter how minor, rest assured it will be noticed and marks will be deducted accordingly. It is simple at the end of the day; this is your opportunity to ensure that you don't give the panel ANY reason not to give you an interview. Grasp the opportunity you have with both hands and send off the very best application you can!

4. The First Round Interview: Process and Preparation (Fail to Prepare, Prepare to Fail)

Whenever I think of the word preparation, one of my favourite (read: worst) childhood phrases comes into mind. 'Fail to prepare, prepare to fail' - my Year 9 form teacher used to shout at us, and what a stupid phrase I used to think it was. Well not anymore, because no matter how irritating my teacher was, they had a very good point. This phrase rings true for the pupillage interview process, and I have a feeling 99% of those who attended interviews like me this year would staunchly agree.

If you do not prepare, you will fail. That is a simple fact, made even simpler by the fact that every single other person you are up against for that particular pupillage will be ensuring they are as prepared as they can be before they set foot in that interview room. Keep that in the back of your mind and let it motivate you in your preparation for each and every interview you get.

Common Questions

Take a look at the chapter above for a list I have jotted down for you from my experiences and some questions I found online. Do remember that this is not an exhaustive list, I am sure there are a thousand other questions which I haven't thought of which a pupillage committee has asked a candidate at some point. But do let my thoughts guide you in considering the sorts of questions you are likely to be asked in an interview.

Prepare, But Avoid Rigidity

This, I think, is one of the most important pieces of advice I think I could give you when it comes to interview preparation. I have put it at the top of this section because I believe it encompasses all aspects of your preparation, as well as your actions in the interview itself, regardless of whether it is a first or a second round.

Preparation is absolutely key, as I have stated. However, there is a such thing, as I must admit to finding out the hard way, in preparing too much. On this basis, perhaps the advice I am trying to give you is to 'prepare smart'. Do NOT prepare word-for-word memorised answers to questions you think you are going to be asked. I advise against doing this for several reasons.

Firstly, you will forget certain points and specific words that you may have memorised – this will only serve to make your answers seem jilted and uncertain. Conversely, even if you manage to rattle off a particular answer to a question perfectly, it will come across scripted and thus have a lack of personality and flair to it. This will not serve you well for being remembered or for standing out in either respect.

Secondly, I can guarantee that should you try to memorise answers, the second you are asked a question you haven't prepared for (of which I am almost certain you will be) it will throw you off entirely. Part of being a good advocate is having the ability to think on your feet. Chambers want to see this, and it will go negatively should you fail to do so. Preparing to the point of memorising answers will cause you to freeze and fear questions you haven't prepared for, so just do not do it.

The trick when it comes to preparation of answers is to consider 'loose' points which you want to make. I personally would narrow these points down to single words which would jog my memory. For instance, for the question 'Why do you think you would make a good barrister?' I ensured I had 5-6 words in my head which would help me to structure an answer within the interview. My particular words were: Public-speaking, people-skills, personality, organisation, self-belief and passion. These words would help to spark my detailed points, whilst simultaneously allowing me to provide a well-structured answer (just as important in interview as in applications, as I have highlighted above), and also demonstrate my fluidity to answer a variety of different questions without being scripted. This is a technique which might help you to become less scripted and much more fluid in your answering. Give it a go on your friends or family and see what they think.

Believe in Yourself

I know I have talked about this above in various points, but I want to reiterate it now. Remember this...at this point, you have written out an application form to a set. You have put your heart and soul (hopefully if you have listened to the above) into that application. The Chambers have read that, they have marked it, and they have asked you to an interview. It might not seem like much of an achievement, but I can assure you it is. If you are asked to interview, it means a Chambers like you, it means they think you're good enough for their pupillage, and it means they are so interested in you, and what you have to say on paper, that they want to meet you in real life. That is quite something.

It is easy to forget this in your preparation, but try your best to remember that you have been invited on merit. If a Chambers didn't like you, then you wouldn't have received the interview invite, would you? Don't forget that.

In all honesty, I went into my first (roughly) 15 interviews without the self-belief I needed. I felt like an imposter, I felt I wasn't good enough, I suppose I never fully believed that I was good enough for a career at the Bar. I can tell you now with 100% conviction that this attitude is why it took me a while to start getting second round interviews. When you are sat opposite a panel who are expertly trained in seeing different emotions and feelings during questioning, they can tell whether you really believe in yourself or not. I am totally convinced that when I recognised this, and consequentially began to focus on my self-confidence, I instantly became better in my interviews. Perhaps I was answering questions with more conviction, and thus being more compelling. Perhaps I was a better advocate for myself and my own abilities. Who knows. All I know is that it made me better when I began to believe in myself, and lo and behold 4 second round interviews later, I got a pupillage offer.

Please do not mistake this advice for me telling you to be arrogant, or overly confident. I do not think that is a good idea at all. All I am saying is that I think each and every one of you is entirely capable of successfully acquiring a pupillage, and that is the attitude you need to have about yourself. That is not arrogance or cockiness, that is simply belief in yourself and your abilities. Channel this positive energy as much as you can both through your applications, your preparation for interviews, and most importantly, within the interviews themselves. It will make a difference.

Practise Confidence

I want to distinguish this advice from self-belief. What I meant above, was that you have to believe that you ARE good enough to succeed in getting pupillage. What I mean by 'practise confidence' is a more interview-focused technique I employed during my interviews.

We all have a tendency to get nervous at some point in our lives. For instance, some of us find advocacy nerve-racking and exciting all wrapped up in one. I will openly admit to having a fear of public speaking when I was younger. The thought of it used to make me shudder...oh how times have changed!

A very common time for nerves is pre, and during, pupillage interviews. This is different to self-belief because your nerves usually aren't as a result of you doubting your abilities so much, but more as a result of how much getting a pupillage means to you, nerves which are exacerbated by knowing the sheer levels of competition and odds against you in your search.

Again, I will openly admit to absolutely bricking it before interviews. I personally find the ominous wait in some random waiting room the worst, usually with nothing but other candidates and a receptionist or two for company. It just used to stress me out. You may find the same, or it may be something else which sets you off. We all have our quirks, but we also all have our mechanisms for coping. I am going to try and teach you a few of mine and you can feel free to either ignore them or practise utilising them to your advantage for interviews (and for advocacy, etc, for that matter).

Firstly, don't feel a need to talk in a waiting room if you don't want. Usually receptionists/current pupils/junior tenants (of whom often sit in waiting rooms to help calm you down) will be exceptionally respectful, and will let you lead on whether you want to chat or be quiet. When it comes to other prospective pupils, be polite and courteous, but if you prefer to remain quiet, then don't feel an obligation to speak. This is as much your time as it is theirs, so use this time to calm yourself in the way you find easiest.

Secondly, don't overthink. THIS. IS. THE. WORST. THING. YOU. COULD. POSSIBLY. DO. AT. ANY. POINT. BEFORE. AN. INTERVIEW. Hopefully I have made how clear how important this is. You need to get into that interview room with the clearest head you possibly can. Going into preparation, or the interview itself, with a hundred thousand thoughts bumping around in your head will not do you any good. Try and focus on what is important, and do not read into the situation too much – to drop in a classic cliché, it will be what it will be.

Thirdly, wiggle your toes. Yes, you did read that correctly. I was once told this very useful tip by a QC, who said that he still uses this trick from time to time when he gets nervous during an opening speech to the jury in very important cases. I used it in my interviews and I can vouch for its usefulness. When you are sat at an interview table, facing a panel of 2/3/4/5/6/7/8 (yes I had an interview with 8 members of Chambers once!), and you can feel yourself getting nervous, then just wiggle your toes in your shoes. No one can see you

do it. The only person in the room who knows what you are doing, is you. You are taking back some control even if you feel you don't have any – they cannot stop you wiggling your toes, and they are none the wiser to your toe-wiggling exploits. It might sound utterly ridiculous, and perhaps I am getting a little jokey here, but I promise you it works. Psychologically, it's genius.

Practise it the next time you feel nervous – I promise you that you cannot think about giving an answer in an interview, wiggle your toes and be nervous all at the same time, it's impossible! You are essentially replacing your nerves with an action which is expending the energy you were previously spending on being nervous, into something else. Yes, it sounds immensely stupid when I read the above paragraphs back, but the technique works and that is all that matters!

Adopting the S.T.A.R Style

Now I can't say I am usually into fancy answering techniques personally, but this one genuinely helped me to focus my answers in interviews and thus deserves some recognition in this little guide. S.T.A.R stands for Situation, Task, Action, Result. We did discuss it earlier if you remember. It is most useful when you are asked a question about something you have done. For instance, 'tell us about a time you have had to negotiate with another party and what was the outcome?' Or, 'When have you had to stand up for something you believed in against people who didn't agree with you?'. I have been asked both these questions in interview.

S.T.A.R does what it says on the tin. When posed with a question such as these, you would think (and then obviously explain in a concise manner to the panel): what the situation was that you were involved in, what the task itself was that you were faced with/what you had to do, then what action you actually took/what you actually did yourself, and finally the result of your action on the situation/task and the ultimate outcome itself.

This is a particularly good way to help you structure in-depth personal experiences you want to impart to the panel, such as any particular work you have done pro bono, or a particular issue during a negotiation/advocacy competition. Again, practise utilising this technique on friends and family and see if they see a marked improvement in your ability to explain a point clearly and concisely.

No Waffling

This is as critical now as it was when I advised against it for applications. Panels have set times to adhere to and they want to see you at your best. Avoid imparting irrelevant information or repeating yourself at all costs, it will count against you.

Research the Panel

This is a tip I would advise all of you to do. Most Chambers won't specifically tell you which members are on the pupillage/interview panel, but if you ring up/email and ask, most Chambers will be happy to let you know who will be interviewing you. This can be a useful in two ways.

You can see, from sites like LinkedIn, if the members interviewing you have any particular interests which are similar/the same as your own. This can help you work out what is most important from your CV to prioritise discussing during the interview. Also, it can help with nerves. If you know who is interviewing you, and can see what they are like professionally online (from Chambers' website and LinkedIn) then it will help you feel as if you know them a little before you walk into the interview room. This may just make you feel a little more comfortable from the get go, which can be invaluable for smashing the interview from the first question to the last!

Researching Chambers (Round Two)

Everything I advised about researching above (and more) should be done again. This second trawl will hopefully highlight any particularly recent news about Chambers, their cases or extra-curricular activities and pro-bono work. All of this can prove invaluable for dropping in at the right place in an interview to demonstrate that you really are interested in this particular Chambers and what they do. Show them you're passionate and that you would be a committed member of Chambers to have! This is something I don't think many candidates think to do, so this is definitely a way to showcase yourself and stand out.

Current Affairs

A seemingly critical element to any interview, you will most likely be asked to debate/discuss a topical situation from the news. This may be legal or non-legal. My tip here is simple. Keep on top of current affairs and start considering how they will affect the world/the UK. Be realistic and consider what are the legal implications of court decisions, the political implications of world issues, etc. You may also be asked your view on a certain topic and then asked to argue the other side, so do keep this in mind during your preparation and ensure you always think about both sides of an argument.

To help you imagine what sorts of areas you may have to discuss/debate, some of the topics I was asked about in my interviews include (but are by no means limited to):

- The right to end life
- Brexit
- Shamima Begum and her right to return to the UK
- Donald Trump (I was asked to present on why Trump has been good for America)
- Humanitarian Aid for third-world countries (I was asked to present on why giving aid to third-world countries is a bad thing)
- The issues with the International Criminal Court
- The prosecution of soldiers who served in Northern Ireland during the 'troubles'
- The issues with mental illness and reality TV (I had to present on this twice in two completely different interviews)
- Parole for convicted murderers who refuse to disclose the location of their victims' bodies ('Helen's Law')

Practise Your Advocacy

Absolutely critical prior to interview. 99% of Chambers will have an advocacy exercise contained within their pupillage process at some point. You can pretty much take it as given that at some point, you will be asked to perform some public speaking. This is likely to be legal in some capacity, but could potentially be non-legal. During my search for pupillage, I was asked to conduct bail applications, plea in mitigations, ethical and moral debates, and legal and non-legal presentations. For more commercial focused pupillages it may be somewhat different, but the chances are that no matter what pupillage you go

for, a Chambers will want to see you reason and articulate yourself through some sort of advocacy/presentation exercise.

Make sure that you practise these sorts of exercises. You can never be sure what is going to come up in each particular process for each Chambers, but you can bet your bottom dollar that you will come up against some of the above (especially if you are applying for crime/mixed common law pupillages). The more you practise, the more you will get used to spotting the relevant evidence from the pack handed to you at Chambers, and the easier you will find the time pressures and the advocacy element in front of the panel. During one particular interview, I was given 12 minutes to prepare for a 10 minute bail application. I had practised a few of these the week before, and it was no coincidence that I managed to perform well in this element of the interview. Practise may not make it perfect, but it certainly helps.

Know Your Weaknesses, and Work on Them

As we have talked about previously, knowing your weaknesses and working on them before going into an interview is key. It allows you the opportunity to show a panel that you recognise you are not perfect (no one is), but that you will do everything you can to strive to improve yourself in order to be a successful advocate. That speaks wonders to a panel.

Don't Forget

Remember to continue to utilise all of the advice I have given in relation to completing your application forms. Much of the advice I am giving can be utilised in relation to both your written and oral advocacy in interviews, so treat my tips and advice as applicable to all parts of the pupillage process.

5. The First Interview: During and After

For many of you, your first interview awaits you in January-March time. This type of interview will be something you won't have ever experienced before, and it really is a difficult experience to describe. Every single one of my interviews has been different in a variety of ways, from the set up of the panel, to the questions they asked, to the parts of my CV that each Chambers focused upon. You will experience the same during your own experiences this year.

Interviews are daunting, but I think that nerves can be useful. They help us perform at our best if we can channel them effectively. It is this that I want to talk about next.

Stay Calm

Goes along with the 'practise confidence' point I made above. Staying calm under pressure is a key attribute of any advocate, and will help you succeed in interview without a doubt. Preparing smart, not being rigid, having self-belief and being confident (without straying the line into arrogance) are all elements of the 'interview you' that you must channel in order to remain calm. All these elements come together and promote an aura of calmness.

Being calm helps you to answer questions effectively. There is no doubt that as I got used to interview atmospheres, questions and nerves, I began to perform. As I prepared more intelligently, became less rigid in my answers, began to believe in myself more and answer questions with confidence in my own answers, I began to perform much better.

The more you can promote yourself to act in these ways, with this belief, the better you will do. Not only will you come across to a panel more effectively, but your answers will consistently get better and better.

In relation to staying calm, if you get asked a question where you are unsure of the answer, or it is just a long question which you need to digest a little more, then do not be afraid to pause before you answer, or to even ask for a moment to collect your thoughts. A panel always want to see you at your best, and will not mind you collecting your thoughts if it means they get a relevant, well-structured answer as a result of their patience.

Be Ready for Anything

I mean this. Every interview I had was different. You never know what you are going to get. Bear this in mind for your preparation and understand that being flexible is critical. Expect the unexpected.

I've been asked all sorts of random questions, in all sorts of random orders. You must prepare for everything you can, but do so whilst remaining entirely open to the possibility that everything you've prepared for may feel entirely worthless when it comes to the actual interview. It is a steep learning curve, and can be really quite frustrating when you prepare for hours for an interview to be asked absolutely nothing on the stuff you have prepared, but it happens, and you must deal with it.

In complete disagreement with the above statement, the preparation may *feel* entirely worthless, but it is actually still very useful. Your preparation informs your answers in the interview, regardless of whether those answers are for the questions you have prepared for, or whether they are for questions you have not prepared for. This is why I always advise going over your CV rigorously prior to any interview. Go over it, and focus on your best 'selling points' and what you have learned from your experiences. Let these thoughts and strong points govern both your prepared and unprepared answers to questions in interview, because they show the best you. But do remember to avoid too much repetition.

Know Your CV and Application Form Inside Out

This links to what I was discussing in the last paragraph. It's crucial that you know your CV, and by extension, your written application, inside and out. Without this, you are highly likely to (1) be caught out when asked about your extra-curricular activities, and (2) give answers which may lack structure and depth, or even worse, be incoherent.

All of this can be avoided by ensuring that you have reread your written application to that particular Chambers, and your CV, a few times before you enter the interview room. Doing this will ensure you give a consistent account of the activities you have mentioned in your application, as well as giving you an opportunity to work out which activities you didn't manage to mention in your application which you would like to try and discuss/highlight in the interview.

You will have noted that I mentioned about not 'being caught out' just now. By this, I don't mean to insinuate that you will have lied on your application forms. Quite conversely, what I mean is that different Chambers will be interested in all manner of different things on your application form/CV. It is imperative that you therefore have a knowledgeable hand upon the entirety of your application, in order to tackle any question that may be thrown at you.

For example, I had an interview with a lovely set in London who decided that they were most interested in me having been an editor on a law review and a research assistant at my University. I was ready for questions relating to my mooted record, my pro bono work and my work experience placements. Instead I receive questions on the aforementioned for about 90% of the interview. Thankfully, both experiences were relatively recent for me, and therefore easy to recall. However, I could have been clearer with my answers if I had prepared for that eventuality and had made sure to think about those aspects of my CV prior to the interview itself. I learnt a valuable lesson, one that I hope you take on board now so you don't have to learn the hard way.

Think of Examples

Definitely within the top 5 most important pieces of advice within this guide. I am sure you will have heard this tip before, but I'm still going to waffle on about it for a couple of paragraphs because of how crucial it is.

Examples to back up your statements simply HAVE to be a part of your armoury when it comes to answering interview questions. Think of it like this, barristers, regardless of their expertise, are expertly trained in evidence and the rigorous rules that govern its use. They rely on evidence every day to do their job, both inside and outside of court. Therefore, imagine their disdain if a client turns up without the evidence they've been asked to bring. The same goes for you. If you fail to bring evidence to back your points up, then as good as those points are, they are simply your word and nothing else. How valuable would you consider that to be to a pupillage committee?

Think of it another way as well. If you fail to bring evidence to back yourself up, I can guarantee 49 of the other 50 candidates will. Who is the pupillage committee going to prefer? The candidate who just gives their word? Or, the candidate who provides a wealth of relevant and interesting examples to

support their statements? I think the answer to that one is pretty simple and I am more than sure you will have got the message.

So, bring examples. Bring lots of them. When you are asked a question like 'Why should you be our next pupil?' and you have a list of points such as: I am reliable, I am responsible, I am a great advocate, I handle pressure well, I am a hard worker, and so on, give them examples to *show* that you are that exact thing.

It all goes back to what we were discussing ages ago: show the panel, don't just tell them.

What to Expect

I suppose this is the part of this guide where you would hope to find all the answers to all the questions regarding what an interview actually entails. Unfortunately, I cannot give you that elusive answer. Not because I don't want to (believe me, I wish I could), but because there is no 'one-size fits all' pupillage interview process. Every Chambers is different. Every Chambers has a different set of questions. Every Chambers has a different routine to perform. Get used to differences in styles, attitudes and atmospheres. There will be many of them.

What I can tell you however, is the sorts of things you could expect. I am not saying that all of these things will come up in an interview, nor am I guaranteeing that any of them will come up, but these are a selection of activities and things that I experienced frequently during my interviews in January-May.

1. Expect confrontation – I am sure you will already be expecting this, but there will be confrontation and/or debate at some point during the interview (or just for the whole interview, as I experienced a few times). At times, you may not even realise it is a confrontation/debate you are having. Often, the pupillage committee members will be so experienced with this sort of interviewing style that it won't even seem like you are doing anything out of the ordinary, which is great. Just remember to always back yourself, always explain your answers as coherently as you can, and always provide evidence/examples to support your statements to the panel. Expect confrontation, but don't jump at it. Panels like those candidates who can

disagree politely and explain their opposite position, such as you will have to do in court one day.

2. Expect Random Questions – As we have discussed, expect these types of questions. They are not there to catch you out, but more to see how you handle pressure and demonstrate your flexibility. Just be ready for them and keep your mind open and be ready to think on the spot. Remember to ask for a moment if you need to collect your thoughts.

3. Advocacy Exercise – Again, as we have discussed, it is likely you will have a form of advocacy assessment at some point during the pupillage process with a Chambers. When they decide to test you, and in what way, however, is entirely up to them. I have been tested in first round and second round interviews. I have had first round interviews that were simply just one big advocacy exercise even. I have had plea in mitigations, bail applications, non-legal debates and even presentations. Just give yourself time to practise these and make sure you work on any weaknesses in your advocacy that you can highlight. All of this will help you for the real thing.

6. The Second Round Interview: Process and Preparation (Again!)

If you've made it this far reading this guide, then well done. If you've bagged a second round interview and are thus reading only this part of the guide. Firstly, massive congratulations, you're down to the last few. Secondly, I'd advise reading the above anyway as much of this guide is interchangeable and thus I am sure many (if not all) of the tips above will still be useful to you for the purpose of preparing for your final interview.

Without further ado, I will give you my tips for second round interviews.

Collect Yourself

Ensure you are calm and collected, both in the days leading up to the interview, and on the specific day in question. Being collected is key to being calm, which is key to showing the panel the best 'you' that you can be. Interviews are nerve-wracking, and second round interviews more so because of the pressure to succeed. I understand that, and the panel understand that. Remember, they once sat in the same seat you did...especially the younger members of the panel. Use that thought to calm yourself. If they have been through it, survived and indeed thrived, then so can you. Have every faith.

Be Brave

Similar to the above, but slightly different. What I want to highlight here is that you should be feeling brave before you head into the interview room. You should be ready, not for a physical fight, but for a mental one. That doesn't mean shouting and screaming intellectual words like some sort of academic battleground, what I mean metaphorically by use of the word 'fight' is that this will be the biggest challenge you have faced on your journey yet, but the braver you are when you walk in, the more positive the panel will see you as, which will only ever bode well for you.

Be Confident (Again)

Confidence is key. Show the panel who you are, give them the best you that you can be, and keep the faith with yourself. Chambers get hundreds of applications for a single pupillage, and *you* have made it, from simply a number, all the way down to the last 3-10 people who the panel have specifically picked because they are considering you for that ultimate prize.

Remember that, but make sure to tread the right side of the confidence-arrogance line (in essence, don't let yourself get too big for your boots).

Hit the Ground Running

A critical part of a second round interview, you've got to pick up where you left off effectively. Let Chambers guide it, but make sure you recollect before your interview on what was discussed and said at the first round stage, to ensure you do not end up repeating yourself too much in this second round.

Chambers will normally move you on if they feel you are repeating things, but ideally you want to avoid this, so make sure you remember what you discussed previously.

Be warned that even if the panel seemed very friendly at the first round stage, they may not be your 'friend' at the second round stage. Remember not to take offence at this, they will be doing it to the other candidates if they are doing it to you. It is no sleight on you, but more of a test to put you under that bit more pressure and see how you handle it. I have never had two more polar opposite interviews in terms of atmospheres than a first round and second round set of interviews I had at one particular set. In the first round, it was probably the nicest panel I had met, and I felt completely at ease from the first second until the last. The interview, if I am honest, felt more like a chat than it did a formal interview.

However, then came the second round, where I, quite naturally, entered the room with a jovial attitude, only to meet an atmosphere that could be described as tepid/luekwarm at best. There were 5 pairs of steely eyes meeting my cheerful greetings, which threw me off entirely. It is safe to say my second round didn't go quite so successfully, and I attribute that to the shock (if that is the right word) of the complete change in atmosphere. There is not much you can do to prepare for this, other than just being warned that this may happen to you, and if it does, just be ready for it and treat it coolly, rather than flapping and thinking you are hated (which is what I did).

In any event, just be yourself. Chambers, although it may seem like they do not sometimes, do genuinely want to see your personality come out during the process. They are assessing you on a great many things, and one of those important factors will be a 'suitability' test to see whether you will fit in at Chambers. Although not a hard test as such, to really show that you will fit in, you ideally need to let your personality shine through at times.

Lastly on this point, smile. During my first few interviews, I forgot to do this, mainly because I was so nervous I was worrying about every other single thing other than what my mouth was doing when it wasn't talking. In some feedback I received, and much to my horror, I was advised to smile a little more. I started to do this, and then I started getting second round interviews. I am not saying its synomymous with progression and/or success as such, but I do think it's a factor which comes into play with consideration of everything else. I mean think of it this way, if Chambers are deliberating over two very, very similar candidates, then would they choose the smiley and jovial one from interview, or the dour one?

Research Chambers (Round Three)

Those of you who are still soldiering on with this guide (seriously, I am impressed), will note that I have discussed this topic twice already. I highlight it again here for the following reason: not many people will research Chambers for a third time between a first round and a second round interview. If you were to do this, and say find something about a very recent case which Chambers are involved in, and just so happens to involve a member of the pupillage panel, and you managed to mention that in interview, or ask a question about it, then I think it would look very impressive.

Why, you ask? Because it shows a level of commitment above and beyond that of the average candidate. It shows you are genuinely interested in this particular Chambers and in what they do. That, in and of itself, is something that if you can demonstrate to the panel effectively, will stand you in very good stead.

Showcase Yourself

This is all about showing a panel the 'best' you, as I keep mentioning. The 'best' you isn't the one you show your friends, or your family, it's the best professional you that you can be. Confident, jovial, proud, unassuming, a great advocate, and most of all, a committed aspiring barrister. You will need to show a panel all of this, and you can do so by following my advice from page 1 of this guide until page 56. This showcasing of your professional self must last from the moment you set pen to paper on that application form, until the final nanosecond of your second round interview. The rest is then out of your hands.

Showcase your best assets, your best examples, your best achievements, show them all that you that you want to be judged on, because that's what the other candidates will be doing.

Never Be Afraid to Say What You Believe

Again, crucial and again must be applied with common sense. Obviously you should not spout irrelevant things, but I believe that as long as you consider something relevant, and you explain clearly how it is relevant, then you can say what you truly believe. Do not try to take a side you don't actually truly believe in (unless you are forced say in an advocacy exercise), because your answer will not seem as genuine and will be less persuasive.

Ask Questions

A highly debated topic in relation to pupillage interviews – to ask a question or not? I would say you should, and I always have. The trick is working out how receptive a panel are to a question or two. I liked to think of just one really good and interesting question to ask the panel at the end of an interview which both demonstrated my interest in Chambers and my commitment to a career at the Bar. Obviously, I never received feedback on my ability to ask questions, so I will never know whether they went down well or not, but every panel I ever met seemed receptive to a question at the end, and some seemed to really enjoy answering them. I think for a panel it's an opportunity (and possibly relief) to be able to speak at the end of an interview, as usually it is the candidate doing most of the talking for the majority of the interview. I also think, should you ask a good enough question, that it is a good trick to use to hopefully be remembered by the panel.

7. The Wait and the Outcome:

I think this part might be the hardest. I will tell you now, the anxiety you get waiting for a decision is horrendous. You've told yourself it's going to be a 'no' a hundred times in your head, but there is always a little part of you that clings onto hope until that email or phone call comes in. You will know the feeling when you experience it.

I have a few things that I do want to say to you on this particular topic whilst I have the opportunity.

Remember

Regardless of the outcome, you have to always remember that you have done your best. Unless you are fortunate enough (or gifted enough) to get pupillage on your first attempt, you will have moments where you struggle with your self-belief. I certainly did. But you have to keep going and remember that you did all that you could. There will be more opportunities and more interviews to smash. Remember that any 'no' you receive is just one step closer to the final 'yes' that you will one day hear.

Understand

I know it is hard to hear, and double as hard to listen to and accept, but often a rejection is not received because you aren't good enough for a Chambers, but simply because they preferred another candidate. This is just one of those times in life where you will (if you experience it), have to pick yourself back up and go again. Coming so close hurts, and I experienced the horrible 'you were so close but unfortunately we preferred two other candidates for the positions' a few times, but before being upset or let down, you should be taking an immense amount of pride in being that close. Pupillage is not easy to attain – if it was, then would we really all be so bothered with achieving it? I don't think so. As my mum used to tell me, you have to remember that the greater the climb, the better the view when you get to the top.

This challenge will be the hardest you have faced yet, but through setbacks you will only become stronger as a person and better as an advocate. I truly believe in that. Understand that, use it to buoy you up, and go again. You can do this.

Dealing with Rejection

I think I have sort of explained my way around this in the last two sub-points. Rejection is a bitter pill to swallow, even more so when you have heard the same words a few times before. I'd like to tell you it gets easier, but I am afraid, at least for me, it never did. It still cuts as deep as it does the first time, but the difference is that the more rejections you get, the quicker you heal from it. The quicker you get back up and start fighting again.

The majority of you reading this will most likely suffer some rejection at some point on this journey, as I did. There will be those who suffer less rejections, and those who suffer more. There will be those who are more affected by it, and those who are less affected. That is a simple fact when it comes to the differentiation in human nature and personalities. Whoever you are, and however you feel, you just have to keep going. Do not give up.

Many barristers will agree with me when I tell you that pupillage is a long game. It is not one single game of football, but rather a Pep Guardiola-esque, treble-chasing, season long pursuit which requires long-term attention, tremendous effort and a sheer drive to succeed.

You can be the best advocate in the world, the most intelligent person in the room, or the smoothest interviewee since Will Ferrell in 'Step Brothers'. But those things will not get you a pupillage on their own. I think what will get you pupillage is a sheer collision of everything I have discussed above (and inevitably some things I will have missed out) all coming together at the right time, in the right interview, in front of the right panel of barristers. That is what it takes, and that is why it is so hard.

That may sound absolutely ridiculous, and if I had told myself this after my first few interviews, I would have laughed you out of the room. But after 25-odd interviews in the space of 4 months, I completely believe it. I interviewed at sets where I didn't fit in, I interviewed at sets who wanted someone more academic, and I interviewed at sets who wanted someone more practical. But when I interviewed at Chavasse, I interviewed at a set who wanted a 'me'. The essence to my point is that you will find the right set, and the right set will find you. That may take 1 interview, or it may take 75, but it will happen with patience, determination and a drive to succeed.

Self-Reflection

This is something I tried to do after every interview I did. I would sit down and consider what I think I did well, and where I think I could improve for next time. This would help me work out where my interview technique was lacking, and where it was in abundance. I would then work on my weaknesses and improve before the next interview, to ensure I did not slip up in that particular area again. Through this, I felt I consistently improved through the interview process at each set.

Consider the following:

- What could I have done better?
- What more could I have said that would have helped my case?
- Where could I have been more concise?
- Where could I have prepared better?
- Did I stand my ground convincingly and with an appropriate attitude?
- Did I explain points using the S.T.A.R. method well?
- Did I argue my points effectively?

Feedback

It may seem futile after a rejection, but feedback from a set who have had you in to interview is very useful. You will receive information on your performance from the eyes of those who have been analysing you for the entire time you were in the room in front of them. This will aid you, in conjunction with your self-reflection, in improving before your next interview.

Ask for it, receive it and utilise it effectively. It is constructive and there to be used for your own future gain.

Keep Your Head Up

I think this is a nice topic upon which to part with you and leave you to continue your journey. As I have said, this is a rollercoaster of a journey, and one which many people will not understand (because of all the stupid terms mainly). No matter how long it takes you to attain pupillage, know that you always tried your best and be proud of that. If it takes you 1 year or 5 years to achieve it, it doesn't matter, because in the long run, you will be a barrister. You might get 25 'no's' before you get a 'yes', but it doesn't matter, because in the long run, you will be a barrister. You might get pupillage at 22, or you

might get it at 30, but it doesn't matter, because in the long run, you will be a barrister. I think you get the gist of what I am trying to say.

In any event, you will have all achieved a superb amount by the time you read this. You may have made a difference to someone's life through pro bono work, and you will all have come on leaps and bounds in your advocacy, your opinion writing and your knowledge of the law. You will all be far more resilient and far more practical, which means you will be far readier for pupillage and what awaits beyond it than you think. Consider the positives, rather than the negatives and use these to help channel your focus and motivation.

I wish you all the very best of luck in all of your endeavours. I hope to see all of you in a courtroom someday soon.