

Grace Under Pressure: 5 Steps to a Calm, Confident, and Resilient Interview Season

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These tips are also featured on [Vault's Career Advice Blog](#).

Diane Costigan is Winston & Strawn's Director of Coaching & Well-Being. She offers bespoke, one-on-one coaching to attorneys and professional staff, and develops industry-leading programs that reflect Winston's commitment to mental and physical health and well-being.

There is no denying that preparing for Summer Associate Program interviews is an inherently stressful process – and it can feel like your entire future hinges on a few short conversations with decision-makers you've never met before. Taking particular care of your mental and physical well-being helps build stamina and confidence that will ensure your personality and unique accomplishments shine through in all your interviews.

Diane helps hundreds of students navigate the nerves and stress that come with the law student recruiting process and with exams every year. Here, in her own words, are Diane's tips for putting your best foot forward:

1. Get enough sleep

Sleep is the key to staying alert, engaged, and presenting your best self in every interview. Here are some tips for getting enough:

- Punch the clock. Know how many hours of sleep you need to be at your best and commit to getting them. Making this a regular habit is the ideal, but it is crucial during especially busy and stressful periods.
- No late-night cramming for interviews—as tempting as that might be. Appearing fresh and relaxed is far more important than remembering every fact about a particular firm.
- Balloon & Bubbles—one of my favorite ways to transition from a busy day into sleep.
 - I take a few, deep belly breaths where I visualize blowing up a big balloon in my belly on the inhale, then imagine I am blowing bubbles out through my mouth on the exhale.
 - I like to call this balloon and bubbles breathing. It's a great way to slow your breathing down and stimulate the body's relaxation response. Then, I like to do a body scan where I intentionally name and check in with each

major body part, to see if there's any tension or residual stress from the day. Before moving on to the next body part I visualize letting go of the stress, for example in my shoulder, and thank that area of my body for all it does for me throughout the day.

- This is a great way to get out of your head and into the sensations in your body. (Plus, it works in a gratitude practice—which has many benefits.) Often, I don't make it through the whole scan before I fall asleep. It also works well if I wake up in the middle of the night.
- If you can't fall asleep or wake up in the middle of the night in a panic that you won't fall back to sleep, try the body scan technique above, or a short, guided sleep meditation like those on [Calm.com](https://www.calm.com). One of my favorites is called "[Deep Sleep Release](#)."
- If thoughts about interviews pop into your head such as, "I forgot to say X," or "the perfect question for me to ask would be Y," get up, write your thoughts down, and try to get back to sleep.
- At the end of each day take five minutes to let your mind wind down. Play some soothing music or write down a few things you're grateful for. This will help you decompress, focus on the positive, and give yourself a mental break.

2. Eat healthy(ier) food

Digestion uses a lot of your body's precious energy, which will be put to much better use acing an interview than processing junk food. Consider the following to help determine what "healthy eating" means for you.

- Foods that are minimally processed and as close to their natural form as possible, like fruits, vegetables, and whole grains are easiest for our bodies to process and can contribute to a feeling of physical well-being and just being more comfortable throughout the day.
- Making deliberate rather than impulsive food choices is a healthy habit all of the time, but it is especially important during times of stress.
- Most of us tend to fall into poor eating habits when we're feeling overwhelmed—this can mean not eating enough, eating too much, or choosing less healthy comfort food. Before deciding what to eat, check in with your overall state of being. If you're feeling out of whack, take a moment to confirm that you are, in fact, hungry and in need of food to refuel and regain focus. If you feel you need something other than food to alleviate feeling unsettled, try exercise, a nap, or a quick meditation instead.
- A final pro tip—to stay energized during a long day of interviews—is to choose a healthy snack like nuts or fruit over more caffeine or sugar, which can make you feel jumpy and then potentially crash.
 - One of my go-to energy-boosting snacks is to slice up a banana or an apple, slather on some nut butter and sprinkle with various toppings like berries, granola, shredded coconut, or cinnamon.
 - If I'm on the go and need a few snacks throughout the day, I like the protein box at Starbucks. It has a hard-boiled cage-free egg, grapes and apple slices, cheese, nut butter, and a whole-grain bun. You can add some avocado spread to make it a meal.

3. Meditate or practice breathwork

Meditation or practicing deep breathing exercises are two powerful ways to stay on top of stress, and it's easy to reap the benefits even if you're a beginner.

Conscious breathing can help create pauses throughout the day that give you the space to step back from your impulses and make more mindful decisions.

- To incorporate deep breathing or meditation into a stress-filled day, consider scheduling several five-minute "breathing escapes":

- With your eyes open or closed, bring your attention fully to your breathing, and as you take a full, deep breath, count “1”.
- Completely exhale and count “1” again.
- Continue breathing and counting this way on each inhale and exhale until you get to “5”; then repeat five more deep breaths in and out, counting backwards from 5, for a total of ten reps.
- This will result in a solid three- to five-minute deep breathing session. You can also use the stopwatch on your phone to time yourself to get in a full five-minute session.
- Another option is to find a few minutes before each interview to center yourself:
 - Close your eyes, sit up tall but comfortably, and feel your feet on the floor and your sits bones in your chair.
 - Try picking each foot up and placing it back down slowly and with intention—imagining you are placing each toe down one by one. Really feel connected and grounded to the earth. You can even imagine that there are roots growing out of the bottom of your toes and feet.
 - Then imagine there is a beautiful golden string running from the base of your spine through the top of your head, that there is something greater than you that’s gently tugging on the string which lifts your head and chin and helps create alignment in your spine. Try to really feel the sensation of being both grounded and supported.
 - You can then do a few rounds of balloon and bubbles breathing and maybe pair it with an intention such as “Breathing in, I calm my body” (on the inhale) and “Breathing out, I calm my mind” (on the exhale).
- A bonus tip is to spend a few breath cycles sending loving kindness to both yourself and your next interviewer. This can be a nice way to give yourself a little support and pave the way to a helpful energetic connection with your interviewer. I have no science on this (although there likely is at this point) but I swear it works wonders!
- Focusing on breathing can also help during interviews if you need a minute to collect your thoughts before answering a tough question.

4. Surround yourself with positive energy

Good (and bad) moods are infectious. People who exhibit confidence and positivity can change the mood in the room and empower those around them with greater confidence and a sense of calm. Conversely, proximity to people who are nervous or stressed can negatively impact your own confidence and demeanor. Here are easy ways to keep a positive outlook:

- Interact with students and other participants who exhibit a positive and upbeat perspective, particularly if you’re feeling less than confident yourself.
- Walk away from gossip and firm bashing between interviews. You may have a tough interview, you may not click with your interviewer, or you may feel you’ve blown an important conversation - it happens. But gossiping, complaining, and blaming someone else (or listening to it) is self-fulfilling. Keep your mood as elevated as possible and just don’t engage.
- Dance away a bad mood. Music is uplifting. Play one or two of your favorite songs and dance around (or sing, loudly). Not only will it sneak in some exercise, it also gets your energy out of your head and into your body, to be harnessed effectively for your interviews. If dancing around isn’t your thing, you can repeat an affirming phrase like “You got this” or “This job is yours.” Better yet, write it down and post-it on your computer or note pad where you can see it during the interview.

5. Keep up with exercise and other self-care

We all know that exercise releases endorphins and other chemicals in your body and brain that positively impact mood, improve sleep quality, and reduce muscle tension—all of which is key to staying healthy and energized during busy times.

Exercise can also provide much-needed alone time to counterbalance the intense social interactions and information saturation that comes with the interview process. So it's important to stick to your regular exercise routine if you have one or find new ways to bake it into your day, so good habits aren't lost whenever your schedule is disrupted for extended periods of time.

Any of these will do:

- The simplest of all exercises is to take a short walk. Also, take the stairs instead of the elevator, and add biking or walking to your commute options whenever possible.
- More dancing—as in tip 4, but for longer. When I'm short on time and can't get in a full work out, 15-20 minutes of dancing around really does the trick.
- Cardio kickboxing really gets the tension out. [Here's a powerful workout](#) by my dear friend and fellow karate black belt, Violet Zaki of Zaki Fitness. You can [follow Violet here](#) to see her other workouts.
- Use an exercise app to get in a quick workout on the go. *Pocket Yoga* and *The 7 Minute Workout* offer great workouts, and here is a quick, [grounding yoga practice](#) by one of my favorite online teachers, Adriene Mishler of *Yoga with Adriene*.

Bonus Material: Calm Your Nerves with Acupressure

If you are finding it especially hard to calm pre-interview nerves, Emotional Freedom Technique or EFT tapping can be a powerful tool that is quite literally right at your fingertips.

EFT is a form of acupressure that can calm down your amygdala (an area of the brain that triggers a stress response), lower cortisol, and help your body come into the relaxation response. [Here is a quick demo](#) of an abbreviated version of EFT called finger tapping by my own tapping practitioner Julie Schiffman. Julie provides numerous tapping videos, if you want to learn more.

When I get nervous in meetings, I'll do EFT, or I'll gently tap my wrists together, which can have the same effect and is easily camouflaged from interviewers. I use this tool almost every day for myself, and it's a fan favorite of several of the attorneys I coach to help them quickly reduce stress.

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Author

[Diane Costigan](#)

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