

# 10 Questions Every Law Student Must Ask Before Joining a Law Firm

*Know what you are walking into before you sign the offer letter*

Most Indian law students focus entirely on getting the offer — and forget to evaluate the firm itself. The wrong firm can stall your career, exhaust you, and leave you underpaid and under-trained. These 10 questions will help you make an informed decision before you join.

## Q01 What will my actual work look like in the first six months?

### Why this matters:

Many Indian law firms — especially smaller ones — assign new joiners to photocopying, filing, and administrative work for months. You need to know upfront whether you will be involved in real legal work or treated as support staff.

### How to ask it:

*"Can you walk me through what a typical week looks like for someone joining this team at my level — what kind of tasks would I be handling day to day?"*

### ► Red flags to watch for:

*Vague answers like 'you will learn everything' or 'it depends on partners' — push for specifics. If no one can tell you what you will actually do, that is a warning sign.*

## Q02 Who will supervise and mentor me — and how accessible are they?

### Why this matters:

In Indian law firms, the quality of your supervising partner or senior associate directly determines how fast you grow. A brilliant firm with an absent mentor is a poor learning environment. Understand the supervision structure before joining.

### How to ask it:

*"Who would I be directly working with and reporting to? How involved are partners in day-to-day associate work at this firm?"*

### ► Red flags to watch for:

*If associates or partners cannot name a specific mentor, or say 'you figure things out yourself here,' treat this as a serious red flag — especially in your first role.*

## Q03 What is the salary — and is there a structured review and increment policy?

### Why this matters:

Salary non-disclosure is common in Indian legal practice, especially in litigation chambers. Many firms pay below market without a clear increment path. Know your number, understand how and when it will be reviewed, and compare it to market benchmarks before accepting.

**How to ask it:**

*"What is the fixed salary for this role, and can you tell me about the appraisal cycle — how often are increments and performance reviews conducted?"*

► **Red flags to watch for:**

*Firms that refuse to state a salary clearly, offer 'stipends' for full-time roles, or have no defined appraisal process should be questioned carefully. Check Tier benchmarks: Tier 1 NQ salaries in Mumbai/Delhi typically start at ₹12–18 LPA.*

## Q04 What does the work-life balance actually look like — not in theory, but in practice?

**Why this matters:**

Indian corporate law firms — particularly those handling M&A, PE, and capital markets — are known for extremely long hours during deal closings. Understanding the real culture versus the marketed culture can save you from burnout in your first year.

**How to ask it:**

*"What are the typical working hours during a busy period versus a quieter week? Is weekend work expected regularly, and how does the firm handle time off after intense deal periods?"*

► **Red flags to watch for:**

*Answers like 'we work hard but play hard' with no specifics are marketing. Ask current associates privately if you can — they will give you the honest picture. Watch for firms where nobody takes leaves or where 'balance' is never mentioned.*

## Q05 What practice areas will I be exposed to — and can I specialise?

**Why this matters:**

Some Indian firms keep junior associates on a single repetitive workstream for years. Others rotate across teams. Knowing whether you will be pigeonholed into one task — or given broad exposure — is critical for your long-term development and employability.

**How to ask it:**

*"Is there a rotation policy for associates, or will I be placed in one specific team? How does the firm support associates who want to develop a specialism over time?"*

► **Red flags to watch for:**

*If the firm has no rotation structure and you are joining a practice area you are unsure about, you may spend years doing work that does not align with your interests. Smaller firms often cannot offer the breadth that larger ones can.*

## Q06 What is the associate-to-partner ratio and realistic partnership timeline?

**Why this matters:**

Indian law firms vary enormously in their partnership structures. Some are lockstep, some are eat-what-you-kill, and many have no transparent path to partnership at all. Understanding the ratio and the typical timeline helps you set realistic career expectations.

**How to ask it:**

"What is the current associate-to-partner ratio in this team? Can you tell me about the typical timeline to partnership and what the firm looks for in candidates being considered for elevation?"

► **Red flags to watch for:**

*Firms with very high associate-to-partner ratios (10:1 or more) and no clear elevation criteria are often using associates as billing engines without genuine partnership prospects. High attrition at the senior associate level is a telling sign.*

## Q07 Does the firm support further education — LLM, Bar exams, or professional courses?

**Why this matters:**

The Indian legal market is increasingly competitive. Firms that support LLM programmes (especially foreign LLMs), SEBI/IBBI certifications, or study leaves give you a long-term advantage. Many firms have no policy on this at all.

**How to ask it:**

*"Does the firm have a policy on study leave or financial support for further qualifications like an LLM or professional certifications relevant to the practice area?"*

► **Red flags to watch for:**

*Firms that actively discourage further education or have no policy on it are often concerned about losing associates post-qualification. This can limit your career ceiling significantly.*

## Q08 What is the firm's client base — and will I have direct client exposure?

**Why this matters:**

Working on high-quality mandates from reputed clients is what builds your reputation and CV. At many Indian firms, junior associates never interact with clients directly — all communication is filtered through senior partners. This limits your development as a lawyer.

**How to ask it:**

*"What does the client base look like in this team, and at what stage do associates typically get to attend client calls or meetings directly?"*

► **Red flags to watch for:**

*If client interaction is described as 'only for partners' or 'after many years,' your growth as a client-facing lawyer will be severely restricted. The best firms — regardless of tier — give associates meaningful client exposure early.*

## Q09 What is the firm's attrition rate — and why do people leave?

**Why this matters:**

High attrition is one of the clearest indicators of a problematic work culture, poor management, or below-market compensation. In the Indian legal market, attrition at Tier 2 and boutique firms can be very high. Understanding why people leave is as important as understanding why they join.

**How to ask it:**

*"How long do associates typically stay at the firm, and what are the most common reasons people move on — is it typically to go in-house, to another firm, or something else?"*

► **Red flags to watch for:**

*Evasive answers to this question are themselves informative. Check LinkedIn for the firm — if you see a pattern of associates leaving within 12–18 months, investigate further before accepting.*

## **Q10** What is the firm's culture — and how are associates treated during difficult periods?

### **Why this matters:**

Legal culture in India can be hierarchical and, at times, high-pressure to the point of being unhealthy. Understanding how the firm treats junior lawyers during crises — a deal falling apart, a court deadline, a client complaint — tells you more about the culture than any brochure.

### **How to ask it:**

*"How does the firm typically support associates during high-pressure situations like deal closings or urgent court matters — is there a culture of collaboration, or does pressure tend to fall entirely on junior team members?"*

### **▶ Red flags to watch for:**

*Culture problems are rarely visible in interviews. Ask to speak to a current associate informally before accepting any offer. Watch for firms where nobody smiles, where partners rarely acknowledge juniors, or where 'pressure' is spoken about with pride rather than with awareness.*

## **PRE - JOINING CHECKLIST — BEFORE YOU SIGN**

- Researched the firm on LinkedIn — checked associate tenure and attrition patterns
- Spoken to at least one current or former associate informally
- Confirmed the fixed salary in writing — not just verbally
- Reviewed the offer letter carefully — notice period, IP clauses, non-compete terms
- Confirmed the team and supervising partner you will be joining
- Verified the firm's tier and reputation on Legal 500 India or Chambers Asia-Pacific
- Understood the increment and appraisal cycle clearly
- Asked about the work-from-office policy and location requirements
- Confirmed whether BCI enrolment support or Bar Council dues are covered by the firm
- Trusted your gut — if something felt off during the interview process, it usually is

**⚠** *Never accept a verbal offer without a written offer letter.*

**⚠** *A firm that pressures you to join immediately without time to review the offer is showing you its culture early.*

**⚠** *'Stipend' for a full-time associate role is not standard practice at reputable Indian law firms.*

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