



Alison Monahan: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we're talking with Sadie Jones about handling virtual interviews, which people might be seeing a little more frequently these days. Your Law School Toolbox host today is Alison Monahan, and typically, I'm with Lee Burgess. We're here to demystify the law school and early legal career experience so that you'll be the best law student and lawyer you can be. Together, we're the co-creators of the [Law School Toolbox](#), the [Bar Exam Toolbox](#), and the career related website [CareerDicta](#). I also run [The Girl's Guide to Law School](#). If you enjoy the show, please leave a review or rating on your favorite listening app. And if you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to us. You can always reach us via the [contact form](#) on LawSchoolToolBox.com, and we would love to hear from you. With that, let's get started.

Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we're talking with ex-BigLaw recruiter Sadie Jones about how to handle virtual interviews, which we're guessing people might start seeing more frequently these days. Welcome, Sadie.

Sadie Jones: Thanks for having me back.

Alison Monahan: My pleasure. Well, given that we can't meet in-person these days, which for reference these days is April 3rd, most job interviews are either going to be on the phone or on video for the foreseeable future. That's hard to say. Let's talk about how people can best handle these. Well, let's start off with the phone and move on to video. If you have a phone interview, what are some things to keep in mind?

Sadie Jones: Well, I think that you really need to go into any of these like you would go into a regular interview. So, take it seriously. Just because it's a phone interview or a video interview doesn't mean that you don't need to prepare and be ready in the same way. But I think the most important thing on a phone interview is to make sure that all the technical stuff is ready to go, so you can hear clearly, you have headphones, you probably shouldn't have it on speaker or be holding it up to your face. You want to make sure your phone is charged or you have a charger, so it's not going to run out. Same with the headphones if you have AirPods. You want to be in a quiet place that you know isn't going to cut out for any reason, at least on your end. You have good service, you've practiced. So I think you just need to set yourself up for success on your side with this.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think that's right. Also, my other tip would be to be 100% sure you know how this call is going to actually function. Is someone going to call you? Are you going to call someone? Are you going to call a conference line? Are you going to call with Zoom or click on a link? Because sometimes when we do phone interviews and people haven't bothered to look to see how we're going to do them, and then I'm sitting there waiting for them and waiting for them. And



they come on and say, "Oh, I didn't know it was a conference line, I thought you were going to call me." That doesn't look great.

Sadie Jones: Definitely. And sometimes, people might send you a calendar invite, and I think some people don't look in the calendar invite. They just assume, "Oh, it'll have a phone number in it." And then it turns out you needed to set something up, and these days, it might involve downloading an app. I also think if it is a joint conference line, I would suggest getting on it earlier because you're ready to go five minutes before they're ready to go. They don't know that you're sitting around waiting, it doesn't matter.

Alison Monahan: Right. I wouldn't go on 30 minutes earlier, but I think at least in the five-minute and under range is perfect. You don't want to show up at the time or even a minute or two later because you're waiting to dial the number, all these things, and then have someone there waiting for you. You want to be there ready to go.

Sadie Jones: And then I think if you need to call them, it's just a direct call. I really try to call exactly at the time. I think it's important.

Alison Monahan: I think that's right. Again, you just don't want people waiting for you. And if they're going to call you, you want to make sure that you're ready to take that call. Sometimes, if I have a scheduled meeting to call someone and I call and they don't answer, because people aren't used to answering unknown numbers at this point, or numbers they don't recognize. So, if you can, find out what area code or number they might be calling from, but also just be prepared that at that moment you're probably going to need to answer that call when it comes in.

Sadie Jones: And another tip if you are making the call, is to turn your phone to "Do Not Disturb" so you're not getting a call on the other line.

Alison Monahan: Right. That's a great point too.

Sadie Jones: Because it's always awkward. And that can happen; roll with it if it does, just ignore it. Hit "Ignore", don't let it mess you up. But I think whatever you can do to prevent these things from happening is going to keep your train of thought on the call. It can be easy to have distractions.

Alison Monahan: And it's just funny. I realized half the time I don't really know how my phone even works until one of these things happens. Like I'm on a call and suddenly something else comes in and I'm looking at it being like, "I have four options, what do I do? Oh my God, what's happening?" You could just decline it or ignore it. I know phones are pretty weird for people, so just be sure you know how the phone actually works.



- Sadie Jones: Well, I think we're so used to texting and doing everything not actually talking to people, that sometimes these things do throw us off even though they seem really basic.
- Alison Monahan: I know. I was even thinking, "Could you use a landline?" And I'm like, "Can you use earphones with a landline? I don't know."
- Sadie Jones: It depends.
- Alison Monahan: A landline might have, if you still have one, have better service, but again, do you want to have to hold that phone? These are things I actually think about, which sound crazy.
- Sadie Jones: And also, you need to plan that ahead of time if you have to give them your phone number. Don't change at the last minute or anything like that. Make sure that it's set, it works. You've decided. All that stuff.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, alright. So hopefully, you can figure out how the phone works and how to talk in it. It's a lot easier said than done these days.
- Sadie Jones: Seriously.
- Alison Monahan: What about other stuff? It could be hard when people aren't getting those cues about what other people are looking like, or thinking, or saying. You can hear them, but that's all you get.
- Sadie Jones: So, I think, something to think about is you want to feel good on the other end of the line. And so, I like to pace when I'm on the phone and it actually helps me to concentrate. And that might help you. You might do it without realizing you do it. Start thinking about when you're on the phone, what do you do that keeps you in the conversation? I know people also say, "If you smile, somebody can tell on the other end of the phone that you're being positive." And I think that you should get dressed like you're going to an interview, even if it is on the phone. I don't think wearing your pajamas is a good idea.
- Alison Monahan: At least wear like an interview top. No, go ahead and get dressed. Take a shower, put in your contacts, all these things, because you want to be prepared for this as if you were going to an actual interview. I'm not sure you need full hair and makeup or whatever, but I definitely feel like I behave differently if I'm sitting around in my pajamas and I haven't showered for two days, versus if I get up, I make my bed, have some breakfast, jump in the shower, put in my contacts, and put on actual clothes.



- Sadie Jones: Yeah. I just think you want to feel professional when you're talking to them about doing a job. And I think it does make a difference. Also, make sure if you need a cup of water, you have it ready, or whatever it is. You don't want your stomach grumbling, or all of these things that you can figure out ahead of time, "Okay, I feel pretty good and ready to go."
- Alison Monahan: Right. I like to have hot tea because I feel like that helps my voice if I'm going to be talking a lot. It sounds silly to say "Smile", but I do think in addition to that... Or you can also do some vocal exercises before the call, because you want your voice to sound normal, which we're not talking that much usually, right now.
- Sadie Jones: Particularly in the morning.
- Alison Monahan: Right. First thing in the morning...
- Sadie Jones: I think people don't even realize how much they sound sort of gravelly in the morning. So, if you have it first thing in the morning, you need to get yourself up earlier and practice.
- Alison Monahan: Do something – a little bit of yoga, wake up the body, wake up the brain, wake up the voice, because you can hear. It's actually interesting. I feel when I am talking to people, you can hear a lot in the inflection of their voice. Are they super stressed? Are they angry? All these things. And here, I think you want to be coming across upbeat and lively. Not totally overbearing, of course. It's not like, "Oh my God, oh my God." But you want to be professional but upbeat. It's a difficult time for people, so yeah. What do you think people should have in front of them? What do they need here?
- Sadie Jones: Well, I think the advantage here is that you actually can have some materials in front of you that you wouldn't have in an in-person interview. You can refer back to them, but also you might just feel a comfort, that you can look at this stuff. I would have your resume, your cover letter, your transcript, anything that you need to reference. Or maybe there were some notes, things you wanted to hit or some questions at the end. I don't suggest writing everything out, but I think it's fine to jot down a couple of notes if you want to remind yourself. I think that's the advantage of having a phone interview, is having those things. And you can also have their information in front of you. That's, again, something you wouldn't be able to have in an in-person interview. So, their bio, their photo so you know who you're talking to – I think that's helpful.
- Alison Monahan: I agree. I know sometimes our tutors do that with their students – they have their picture up if they're talking with them, just so they can see them. Yeah, I think anything you can do to kind of personalize it. I think your point about taking some notes in front of you is great, particularly for questions. I don't think you need to be taking extensive notes during the interview, but you can



jot a few things down. But if you are one of those people who you kind of freeze when they ask you if you have any questions, just have five questions written down and then you can just look at them and start asking them.

- Sadie Jones: Yeah, I think it's a huge advantage in this situation. Again, I don't want it to sound like you're reading off a script or anything, but I think, just keep it conversational and you can refer back to it. I think there are situations where you can actually feel better prepared in this situation.
- Alison Monahan: I think that's absolutely right. The other thing, I think, is if you are feeling a little unsure about this, I think people should practice. Call up a friend or have them call you up and ask you some questions that you think the job might ask you or have them ask you, "Do you have any questions for us?" And then you can practice going through your questions.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, and you can ask them how you sound on the phone. Ask for an honest opinion and get feedback and be open to it. You can also make sure your phone works.
- Alison Monahan: Exactly.
- Sadie Jones: And any of that technical stuff, yeah. So I think you'll also see if you somehow get distracted by things or off-topic, or you're looking at things around your house, that kind of thing, like, "Okay, it's better that I go into this one room and close the door. Or I pace or whatever." I think practicing is a great idea.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think it can also be weird. I remember when I first started recording things and it was really weird to me that I was just talking to the computer and I wasn't getting any of that interactivity that you're used to. You can get used to that pretty quickly, but I do think this idea of practicing where you're going to take it makes sense. Are you going to be in a quiet office room, or your closet, or whatever? Or you could be in the kitchen, whatever it is. And again, you can see how you sound there. You're going to sound different in different areas of the house.
- Sadie Jones: Definitely. And do it with someone who's going to be able to give you good feedback.
- Alison Monahan: Right. And do it nicely.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: How prepared do you think students need to be for questions about this current situation? So, what your school's doing, how it's working, how you feel about it, what your thoughts are.



- Sadie Jones: I think you should definitely be prepared. It seems like there's kind of two things going on: Some people are just trying to act like business as usual and not talk about it, I think, and just conduct their jobs and not bring it into work stuff. And then I think there's other people who are just naturally thinking about it a lot. And so, it's kind of the beginning at least, or maybe the end. It just kind of comes up on the call. So, I would be prepared to talk about what your school is doing, how you've adapted to that. I think it's actually a great opportunity to play up that you've been able to roll with it, and maybe offer some things you've learned. I think you should try to take sort of a not extremely positive, but sort of positive look on it. I don't think you should be bringing all your anxiety that you may actually feel into a job interview right now, but I also think if they ask you how's it going, I don't know if being like, "Great" is very appropriate right now. I see a few people doing that too, and I think it's because they're just used to saying that. So you have to find a word and tone that's sort of middle-of-the-road. Like, "Things are tough, but I've adapted" – that to me is kind of the tone.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think you want to be positive, but also realistic. I'm imagining myself sitting in, back when I was doing interviews at a law firm. And if I had a virtual interview with a student and I asked them right now, "Oh, how's everything going?" They're like, "It's fantastic." I would be like, "Really?" I just don't feel like that's really where most people are at right now.
- Sadie Jones: I think it would feel odd, yeah.
- Alison Monahan: But on the other hand, if they're like, "It's terrible, everything is falling apart." I don't want to hear that either. So, I think you're right. It needs to be something along the lines of, "Well, obviously this is a challenging situation for everyone, but my school has done the best they can and we're all adapting and we're making it work."
- Sadie Jones: Also, it's a good point – even if you're not happy with what your school is doing, this is not a time to bring it up with an employer.
- Alison Monahan: Right.
- Sadie Jones: You should never be a negative about school, a professor, even your friends. You just can't do that right now. I think it's not the time to air that in that situation. And I think that's something people forget.
- Alison Monahan: I agree. I think you can express that yeah, it's challenging. Everyone understands that, but do not go into a litany of complaints about, "And then they did this, and then they did that, and then they did this thing with grades, and then that was crazy, and then..." It's like, nobody wants to hear it.



- Sadie Jones: Exactly. I think you just have to keep it neutral as best you can.
- Alison Monahan: Right, because they're also looking really for evidence of how you're going to react to challenges in the workplace, and a large part of what the interviews are about is figuring out things don't always go smoothly when you're a lawyer. You're always trying to solve problems and troubleshoot, so that attitude of, "Well, yes, it's a challenging situation, but I'm handling it and I feel like it's going to be okay." That's kind of what we're looking for when people are doing legal hiring, typically, anyway.
- Sadie Jones: Exactly. I would consider sort of a behavioral interviewing question, which is, "This is the scenario, how are you managing it?"
- Alison Monahan: "You're in a crisis situation, how do you handle that?" It's like, we're all living that right now.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah. It's like everyone is struggling and I think you just kind of have to do the best you can to talk about the things you've done to adapt. That's what I think the key is.
- Alison Monahan: Right. I think you also want to be making the point it's totally possible that you might be doing this job from home in a few months. So, you want to be like, "Oh, working from home has been an adjustment but I've made it work, and I'm sure that if I needed to continue in the future, I could make that happen."
- Sadie Jones: Definitely. And I would actually have thought about a couple of examples that you can point to of how you've structured your day or how you've set up your study space or how you've had to kind of separate personal from work and home, if you have a family or whatever it is. I think there should be some specific examples of what you've done.
- Alison Monahan: Right, because I think they're not just asking you that to have a question. People at some point are actually interested in, "Could you make this work if we were to hire you in a few months and if we could not go back to an office?"
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, so you definitely don't want to be saying, "I haven't been able to study at all, because I just watch Netflix all day." Not that anyone would say that, but yeah.
- Alison Monahan: You never know. Yeah, save that for your friends. Alright. Well, let's shift gears a little bit and talk about what to do if people have a video interview. I think everything we've said about phone minus what to have in front of you probably applies, but let's talk specifically about video.



- Sadie Jones: And I actually think that's a good point – don't have that stuff in front of you. They can see everything, so you have to think about that.
- Alison Monahan: Or have it out of view, at least.
- Sadie Jones: Exactly, and you need to know what they can see. So, for the video, you do absolutely have to dress like you're going to an interview. That does mean whatever you would do normally, the same kind of outfit, have your hair, have yourself put together. I think you want to think about where you're sitting, what the background is. It should be as sort of blank and neutral as possible. You don't want them seeing junk in your house or...
- Alison Monahan: Your bedroom.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, no, don't sit on your bed. And I bet there are things that people just wouldn't... You don't always think about what the person on the other side can see, but I think you really need to consider that because anything in view of them is fair game. And you also just don't want them to be distracted by anything. That also means that you've set up a quiet space away from anyone else you live with, and they know that you're going to be on this video interview, no one's going to interrupt you. You also need to absolutely make sure the technology's set up, and practice and make sure there's no issues, because it's a little more than just a phone call.
- Alison Monahan: Right. Yeah, I think the background is so key. I know at least on Zoom, you can choose the background, so maybe choose something neutral. What I would often do sometimes is, say I was going to do the interview in my kitchen, because there's better lighting in there – which you've also got to think about your lighting. But what I would do is set up my laptop maybe on a stack of books or I have a laptop riser so that the camera height is actually at a good height, because you want it to be ideally slightly above you, not below you, so you can kind of prop it up. But I would sit in front of the wall, and then I would have the camera on the table. So behind me was just this very neutral blank wall. You can actually do this if you are sitting on a couch and you have the wall behind you, but you want to think about something that's very neutral. And I do think the camera height is something people don't really think about, because if it's below you, you kind of look like Godzilla. So, you just want to make sure that you have looked at this. And I think often these cameras are pretty wide-angle. I was on a Zoom call the other day and I was actually amazed by how much of my kitchen my friends could see. And also, you want to think about your lighting, whether it's going to be behind you. You don't want to be sitting in front of a window or with a window in the background, because then you're going to be in silhouette and it's going to be hard to see you. So, definitely got to practice this one, you've got to do your setup, do it at the same time of day if you're going to have



natural lighting, and have a friend call you on hopefully the same technology you're going to be using and just check it out.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, and make sure that they're giving you feedback if there's anything that seems off or there are things they can see that you don't realize. I also think you should think about your posture and kind of what your face is looking like when the other person is talking.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Sadie Jones: I think is important because on a video compared to in-person, I think it's more obvious that they're just looking directly at you, versus if you were in an in-person interview, they might look around the room a little bit. So, it's just more focused.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, which can be super weird. I agree. You want to make sure you're resting face is positive looking and interested. Maybe raise your eyebrows a little bit or be a little bit more animated. I think something neutral is your best option. Apparently dark blues and purples look good on videos, so maybe a dark suit with a neutral thing under it. Again, just see what it looks like before you jump into this.

Sadie Jones: Yeah. I think the key here is really practice and making sure you're 100% comfortable with the technology, how everything looks. And I think practice can just help you sort of get used to it, because it can feel a little bit strange at first.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it's definitely weird. You also want to make sure, again, you have all the necessary technology. So I know for me, for example, Zoom only seems to work in one type of browser on my computer, and I always forget which one that is. So, you want to make sure you're like, "Oh yeah, right, I need to use Chrome for this", that kind of thing. And again, triple checking that you know how to connect. Is it a link? Is it whatever? And I would say probably a mic and headphones here too, just so you can hear. I mean, you don't want to have your giant DJ headphones, which I'm currently wearing because we're recording a podcast. But a neutral set of headphones, some ear buds, whatever – I think that can be helpful.

Sadie Jones: I agree. I think it'll be easier to hear. And you just want to make sure, especially if you have AirPods, that they're charged and that they're working properly, because I have noticed they can cut out sometimes.

Alison Monahan: Mine do that all the time, it drives me nuts.



- Sadie Jones: And that they're connected to the right device. They sometimes want to Bluetooth to something else, so shut off the Bluetooth on everything else. So, all that stuff you should practice ahead of time.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, they're driving me nuts, because mine are always doing stuff like that.
- Sadie Jones: This is a situation where it is probably better to have something that's plugged in.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. Oh, one other thing we wanted to talk about in terms of video. What do you think about panel type of interviews where maybe you are going to be on a call with multiple people?
- Sadie Jones: That is something that I could see happening, especially in places that already did panel interviews. Personally, I'm not a huge fan of the format, I think it can already be confusing who you're talking to, whose question you need to answer, who goes when? But I can imagine that happening in this situation and just trying to get all the interviews done at once. That's something I would also probably practice ahead of time. So, I would ask three friends, if that's what the panel is.
- Alison Monahan: Get your study group together.
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, and I think you can do that for someone else, they can do it for you. I'm sure people are willing to give some time to do this. And then I would sort of practice answering different people's questions. It's fine if you're not sure when to go to ask. These things are awkward, they already know that. So, you just kind of have to roll with it and make the best of it.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think if you're doing a Zoom you want to make sure you know how to do the thing where you can get everybody up at once, versus having it just flip back and forth between the person who is talking and that kind of stuff. There's probably some technology to make sure that you... You want to see everyone and see their reactions to what you're saying and the reactions to what the other person is saying. And I do think in terms of who should talk, let people finish with their thought and then give it a second, and then you start talking.
- Sadie Jones: Exactly. I think it's better to have a blank few seconds than it is to be talking over someone or talking, stopping, talking, stopping, because no one knows when to go. Also, if you're dealing with someone who's setting this up, like the recruiter or the HR person – it's fine to ask them how it's going to work. If there's anything you need to know, I think that's fine.



- Alison Monahan: What I think you definitely, definitely... If they want to do a video interview, you definitely want to ask them, "What technology do I need? Can you send that to me in advance just to make sure I'm totally set up?"
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, I think it's a situation where it's better to ask more questions than fewer. And they're going to know it's because you want to be prepared. Everyone knows that this is different than what they're used to. And I'm sure on their end, they're still trying to figure it out also, so that's fine.
- Alison Monahan: I would say, ask within reason. I mean, at some point, if you're sending your entire tech set up to this poor person who's just trying to send you a scheduling link and you're like, "Well, I have Windows this, and then I have this type of browser, and then I have..." – they're like, "I don't care, just make it work."
- Sadie Jones: Exactly. I think you just need to know the basics, the high-level stuff – what's the program? Is there anything you need to know about who's going to call who or how it's going to start, who's going to be on it? All of that kind of basic stuff.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, do you need to download something, any of these things – figure that out in advance. But I think as with most things, you just kind of have to roll with it and do your best, try to stay positive but realistic. Any final thoughts you have around this?
- Sadie Jones: I think that these situations can kind of make people nervous because they're feeling awkward about it, they don't know how it's going to go, they don't know who's going to start it. There are all sorts of questions that come up. And I think you can do all of the things we talked about to prepare and get yourself ready. And then I think you also just need to tell yourself it might be awkward, maybe something's going to happen in the middle, and it's important to be able to just roll with it. If your dog does bark or something cuts out, it's like, "How am I going to fix this? How am I going to get back to it? How am I not going to get distracted?" So, it's okay if something happens; you just need to get back to the interview.
- Alison Monahan: Right. I think, again, like we said earlier, in some ways this is an opportunity for this potential employer to see how you would roll with the things that happen, and things will always happen because that's what life as a lawyer is pretty much about. There's always going to be stuff coming up, and you have to react to it, and some of it's not going to go perfectly, and maybe your first reaction isn't the greatest, but you recover. Somebody who has their dog bark and kind of laughs it off like, "Oh sorry, my dog didn't eat today – that's going to be better than someone who's like, "Oh my God, I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry. Oh my God, my dog was barking, it's a disaster." It's like, "Your dog barked, it's okay."



- Sadie Jones: Exactly. It's like if you're late for whatever reason to something and you can't stop talking about apologizing for it and being late, and then you sort of make the whole interview about that, that's way worse than just being late. So, I feel like it's the same thing here.
- Alison Monahan: Absolutely. And one other point I will make on that is, double check you know what time zone you're dealing with.
- Sadie Jones: Yes.
- Alison Monahan: Because sometimes people might send you a link and you think it's in one time zone and it's really in the other. Just be really, really, really sure that you know exactly when this is actually scheduled for.
- Sadie Jones: And if anything isn't clear, I think that's something that's fine to clarify ahead of time too: "I wanted to confirm which time zone." If there's something weird about the calendar invite or something seems odd, I think it's better to directly ask, because I agree, time zone issues seem to be a real problem for people.
- Alison Monahan: Well, and I think too, assuming it's not a calendar link, but say you're going back and forth in an email – what I would always like to do is in that confirmation email say, "So, okay, we are meeting at 12:00 PM..." I guess I always confuse early morning and late night. But anyway, I would say, "At 1:00 PM Pacific Time, is that right?" Just so that in case they get it wrong, you have that back up where you're like, "Oh, I said Pacific Time, and you said 'Yes'."
- Sadie Jones: And if you schedule it, let's say a few days ago, I always double check the morning of, because sometimes you just have something in your head and it's not right. So, I think that's always a good idea. And if you know they're in another time zone and you're in this time zone, I also think it's fine to write, "1:00 PM Pacific Time, 3:00 PM Central Time." Write both your time zones in, because that even covers you more.
- Alison Monahan: Exactly, because hopefully at that point somebody would be like, "Wait, 3:00 PM? No, I thought we were meeting at 1:00."
- Sadie Jones: Exactly, so then you've confirmed, yeah, both of your time zones.
- Alison Monahan: I agree, definitely. I think that's a good idea. Alright, well, speaking of time, with that we are out of time. Thank you so much for joining us.
- Sadie Jones: Thanks for having me back.
- Alison Monahan: My pleasure. For more career help and the opportunity to work one-on-one with us, including prepping for your interviews, check out [CareerDicta.com](https://www.careerdicta.com). If



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