

College Interviews - The Basics

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The college interview is a part of the college application process at many colleges - but not all of them. You may meet in person to talk with someone from the admission office, a current student or a graduate of the college. Or you may be able to take part in a video interview, often via Skype.

Why Interview?

The interview is rarely the deciding factor in whether the college will accept you, but it can give a representative from the college a chance to get to know you better. And the interview gives you a chance to:

- Show your interest in the college.
- Share information about yourself beyond what's listed on your transcript.
- Bring up anything in your record that you'd like to explain, like a temporary drop in your grades.
- Discuss your goals and the reasons you want to attend the college.
- Ask questions about the college.

What to Expect

You'll talk one-on-one with the interviewer. If your parent comes with you, he or she probably won't be in the room during the interview but may get a chance to talk to the interviewer afterward.

An interviewer may ask questions like "Why do you want to go to college?" and "Why do you want to attend this college?" He or she may also ask about your high school experiences, your hobbies and your accomplishments.

The interviewer will also ask if you have any questions. Asking questions shows the interviewer that you're interested in the college, and it allows you to get information you can't find on a website or in a brochure. If you're interested in a certain major, ask what the program is like. If you're planning to live on campus, ask about campus life. Just try to avoid asking questions that you can easily find answers to on the college's website.

How to Prepare

First, find out whether interviews are required, optional or not offered at all. If the college requires or offers interviews, look on the college's website or contact its admissions office to find out what you have to do to set one up. If you have to travel to the college to interview, you may want to schedule a campus tour for the same trip.

After you've scheduled an interview, you can do several things to prepare. One important step is to research the college so you feel ready to talk about why the college is a good fit for you. Another good idea is to do practice interviews with family members and friends.

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Just remember that while it's smart to get ready in advance, you shouldn't memorize answers to common interview questions or compose a speech - the interview should be a conversation.

More Interview Tips

Dress nicely, not in jeans and a T-shirt.

Arrive early.

Be polite.

Avoid using slang or other inappropriate language.

Be confident but not arrogant.

Answer questions honestly.

Send a thank-you to your interviewer after the interview

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College Interviews: Practice Questions and Strategies

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Why is a college interview important?

An interview is a chance for you to meet with someone who represents the college. It's a great way to show your interest in the college, to start a relationship with people there and to show what you're all about. Here are some types of questions you may encounter and tips for answering them.

Questions about your fit with a college

Interviews may ask questions like these:

- Why do you want to attend our college?
- What can you contribute to our college campus?

Why they ask: They want to know that you're really interested in their college. They also want to know what you can bring to the campus.

Your answer strategy: college-fit questions

Talk about what you've learning about the college and why you feel it's the right place for you. (Remember that you have to research a college ahead of time to answer this type of question well.) Discuss your extracurricular activities and achievements that show your character.

Questions about your personality

Interviewers may ask questions like these:

- What three adjectives best describe you?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?

Why they ask: They want to see that you can think and speak about yourself.

Your answer strategy: personality questions

Give examples of how your chosen adjectives describe you. Talk about how you've used your strengths to accomplish something. Talk about how you overcome your weaknesses. For example, you can say, "I have a hard time learning new languages, so I set aside more time to study them."

Questions about activities, interests, and goals

Interviews may ask questions like these:

- What activities do you find most rewarding?
- What is your favorite book?
- What do you want to do after graduating from college?

Why they ask: They want to get to know you better and learn about what's important to you.

Your answer strategy: interests questions

Think about the why: Why are those activities the most rewarding? Why is a book your favorite? If you have a major in mind, talk about why you're interested in that subject. Discuss how you

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think college can help you meet your goals. Be sincere and honest in your answer - don't say things just to impress the interviewer.

Wide-ranging questions

Interviewers may ask some broader questions. For example:

- If you had a thousand dollars to give away, what would you do with it?
- What's your opinion on the immigration debate (or another topic in the news)?
- If you could change one thing about your school, what would it be?

Why they ask: They want to see that you are informed and curious and a careful thinker

Your answer strategy: broader questions

Stay up-to-date on news and current events. Do you have strong opinions on certain issues? Can you explain your position? Try to spell out your system of values to yourself and think about how you apply it.

More college interview tips

Have a conversation. Don't try to memorize a script.

Ask questions. Do express your interest in the college.

Be yourself. Don't try to answer questions based on what you think the interviewer wants to hear.

Prepare. Do practice interviews with friends or family. Take turns asking questions.

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