

HOW TO PREPARE FOR AN INTERVIEW

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Purpose of Interviews

Exchange information equally. If offered, interviews may help colleges to learn more about applicants and their interests and often aid applicants in learning more about colleges and universities. They are generally considered an opportunity to add a more personal touch to the application process.

Find a fit between the student and the college or university. Through the interview, students are often able to see how their interests and goals in their post-secondary experience may be matched at each college or university. Interviews also allow colleges to see how each student could contribute to a campus community, more so than simply reading an application file.

Interview Preparation

Check each college's interview options available to students. The format of interviews will vary from college to college. Some are conducted on-campus while others are conducted off-campus. An interviewer could be an admission counselor, an alumna(us), or a current student. Some colleges only offer interviews before their deadline and, some, only once students have submitted their applications.

Learn how interviews are viewed in the information process. The policy of how colleges view interviews in the application process also varies; for example, some require interviews of every applicant, some recommend that applicants have interviews, some make interviews completely optional, and some do not offer interviews at all. Finally, some colleges offer interviews that are merely informational interviews, while others offer evaluative interviews.

Research the college or university and prepare insightful questions to ask. Ask questions that go beyond the basic information available on the college's website and in guidebooks. These questions will reveal genuine interest in the college where the student interviews. Beyond specific questions you may have about majors or programs, some samples that might be useful are as follows:

- What kind of person would be happy on this campus? Unhappy?
- What are the current issues of concern among the students?
- How would you characterize the student 'culture' on campus (specifically regarding social life, political issues, competition vs. collaboration, school and/or athletic spirit, etc.)
- What long-range goals or strategic plans has the college set for itself?

Anticipate possible questions an interviewer may ask. Students should consider the important qualities and strengths that they hope to convey to their interviewers. They may also consider bringing a resume or a portfolio to the interview. Students should take care not to spend too much time rehearsing answers to anticipated questions since it's tough to do so for the unexpected. Some samples might be:

- How did you become interested in "X" college?
- Which one, two, or three words best describe you? Why?
- What is the one thing in your life about which you feel most passionate?
- What is your favorite class this semester and why? What do you like best about school?
- What books have you read lately? Which has impressed you the most? Why?

Look up directions to the interview location ahead of time to ensure a prompt arrival. Students should avoid being tardy to an interview. However, if they are running behind schedule, they should plan to call ahead of time to let their interviewer know that they will be late. Before the interview begins, students should then remember to turn off their cell phones.

Make a strong first impression on the interviewer. While students shouldn't be overdressed, they should make an effort in their appearance beyond their usual school attire. They should also practice greeting their interviewers with a smile and strong handshake. During the interview, they should maintain eye contact and remain engaged in the conversation. The way that students carry themselves will show interviewers whether they are taking the interview seriously.

Follow-Up after the Interview

Ask for the interviewer's business card. Students should plan to write thank-you e-mails or handwritten notes to the interviewers for their time. Follow-up correspondence provides an additional opportunity for them to convey their enthusiasm for the college or university. If students think of more questions, they can also be in touch with their interviewer directly.