

THE INTERVIEW

Many selective colleges do require interviews. A successful meeting on campus with a member of the admissions staff can't help but work in your favor. One of the difficult aspects of the interview is that it is not always apparent to the student what the college hopes to accomplish during the session. The interview can take different forms. Each type has a specific purpose. If you are not sure of the type of interview a specific college gives, call the admissions office to find out.

EVALUATIVE: The candidate meets with a member of the admissions committee on the campus or with a trained alumnus/a off the campus to discuss both the school and the candidate. A record of the meeting becomes a part of the student's application.

NON-EVALUATIVE: The candidate meets with a member of the admissions staff, a student at the college, or an alumnus/a to obtain information about the school. The interview does not become part of the application, but is intended to provide information to the candidate.

GROUP INTERVIEWS: A campus meeting in which the candidate gets information and a tour, but little opportunity to leave an impression. From the college's point of view it is the most efficient way to have contact with prospective students on campus.

GENERAL MEETING: Many colleges will hold meetings to acquaint students and their parents with the college. Although members of the admissions staff conduct these meetings, they are not opportunities for interviews.

WHEN YOU HAVE AN INTERVIEW

What is it? A 30-minute to one-hour conversation between two people to exchange information.

How important is it for the student? Most colleges do not require an interview and therefore do not weigh the interview in their admissions decision. Otherwise they would be rewarding those students who have interviews and penalizing those who do not. At those colleges where the interview is required or recommended (usually small private colleges, highly selective colleges, and nontraditional colleges) the interview is one of many factors in the admissions decision. Bear in mind that the interview can leave either a positive or negative impression. It is important to prepare for the interview. Typically, interview notes are placed at the end of the applicant's folder, and the admissions committee reads them last. The notes are used to confirm all other material. If there is a discrepancy between a teacher recommendation and the interviewer's perception, the admissions counselor usually goes with the teacher's report. They assume that the teacher knows the candidate that much better. The interview does, however, personalize the whole application.

How to interview well:

1. Be prompt. Be polite. Be upbeat. Try to practice or simulate an interview ahead of time.
2. Dress appropriately. Look and feel your best.
3. Be well prepared; read the college catalog prior to your interview and prepare questions based on what you read. Counselors admit that their best (and most impressive) conversations have been with students who come prepared and who know something about the college. These students are ready to talk and ask meaningful questions and indicate why they feel that the college is an appropriate place for them. Don't "blow it" by asking questions that are obviously in the catalog. The interviewer is looking for reasons to accept you and your job is to provide those reasons.
4. Answer questions to the best of your knowledge and ability- do not be afraid to admit you don't know something.

5. Be ready to volunteer information - know your scores, latest grades, the fact that your school does not rank, and what courses you are enrolled in. Bring an unofficial copy of your transcript with you if your application has not yet been submitted, but don't hand it over unless it is requested. Accentuate the positive!
6. When the admissions counselor answers your questions and tells you about the college, listen. Give the interviewer your full attention. Nothing turns an interviewer off quite as much as a student who is merely showing off and only asking questions for effect. Also, don't be negative.
7. Sometimes the interviewer will counsel you. If there are indications during the conversation that the college will not work in your best interest, the counselor may suggest other colleges that would. The counselor may indicate to you the appropriateness (or inappropriateness) of your attendance at that college. Also the counselor may suggest to you areas that you might improve to make yourself a more viable candidate. Listen carefully.
8. Be yourself - do not pretend to be something or someone that you are not! Keep your responses honest.
9. ABOVE ALL, RELAX! ! Interviews are meant to be informative to both parties. Try to get as much out of an interview as you provide for it.
10. After the interview is over, review how it went. Make adjustments for the next interview. Schedule your most desired colleges for the end of the line when you will be "interview seasoned." **NOTE:** Do not be upset if you meet with an admissions counselor or student other than the Dean or Director. If the interview is an important part of the admissions process at a college, all interviews given on campus have equal weight. An interview with a senior staff member is not essential.

When you get home, write a thank-you note to your interviewer or your guide.

ALUMNI INTERVIEWS

A few colleges have developed elaborate alumni networks throughout the nation and use these well-organized alumni groups as interviewers of applicants. Several colleges require alumni interviews regardless of whether or not you have had a campus interview. If you are unable to have an interview on campus with an admissions officer, and if you feel that you have something to gain from an interview, you might write to the college or telephone the admissions office and inquire about the possibility of having an alumni interview in your area.

THE AUDITION

Music conservatories, drama schools, and dance departments hold auditions rather than interviews to evaluate candidates. The audition is held on specific dates at the college or in centrally located cities around the country. It is best to know well in advance when you will audition for a particular college and what is expected. A music school may ask you to perform several types of music representing different styles and periods and to take a theory test. A drama school may ask you to present several types of memorized selections, some perhaps in musical theater. A dance department may ask you to demonstrate your technique in a dance class. You should prepare your audition and rehearse your pieces with your teacher or group well before staging the real thing. The school may ask you to submit an audition tape in lieu of an audition in person.

Art schools have their own version of an audition- the portfolio. Each art school has special requirements, so check with each school well ahead of time to make sure you have appropriate material.

Auditions and portfolios are different from interviews in that they are usually required and play an important role in the admissions decision. Architecture schools also require a portfolio. Freehand drawing and painting are even more important than samples of drafting.

SPECIAL INTEREST INTERVIEWS

If you are an athlete and want to play on a college team, talk to the college coach in your sport. Arrange this ahead of time with the admissions secretary or the athletic department and bring along your scrapbook, statistics or other pertinent information that may help the coach learn about your talents. Your high school coach may want to send a letter in advance or you may bring it with you. Check with your counselor about special requirements for the college-bound athlete and how to put together an athletic package. Try to watch the team practice or play a game to get an idea of its caliber and spirit. Also find out from your high school coach if you are appropriate for that particular division. Be familiar with the NCAA recruiting rules so that you do not inadvertently break them. For questions about the rules, and to register with the NCAA Eligibility Center, visit their website at <https://web3.ncaa.org/ecwr3/>. Coaches may not approach you until your junior year is over, however you may approach them.

If you are interested in a particular field of study and want to find out more about it, speak to students who are majoring in that subject and make an appointment with a faculty member in the department. Speak to the people who are directly involved.

If you are interested in any extracurricular activity, such as the newspaper, orchestra, radio station, or intramural sports, speak to participating students and faculty sponsors.

PREPARING FOR AN INTERVIEW

It's always wise to prepare for an interview. Though it's impossible to know all of the questions that will be asked of you, it's a good idea to spend a little time reflecting on how far you've come, and thinking about how you would answer some of the more common (and uncommon) questions. Below are some of those questions. Spend some time thinking about how you would answer them, and even ask friends or family members to interview you...the more practice you get, the better you'll do!

- Which subjects interest you most?
- Which extra-curricular activity is most rewarding to you?
- How do you spend a typical afternoon after school? Evening? Weekend?
- How do you spend your spare time? Vacations?
- Tell us about your family?
- What books (other than assigned by your classes) do you enjoy?
- What are your favorite books? Magazines? Newspapers?
- What have you disliked about your high school?
- What is the most important thing you learned during high school?
- What three adjectives would you use to describe yourself?
- What would you like to tell us about yourself?
- Why is a college education important?
- What do you want to get out of your college experience?
- What are your career plans?
- What do you expect to be doing in ten years?
- Why do you want to go to this college?
- How did you come to include this college among your choices?
- What makes you think this college is a good match for you?
- Where else are you applying and why?
- What are your major weaknesses? How can you overcome them?
- What are your major strengths?
- What is the most significant contribution you have made to your school or community?
- If you could change something about yourself, what would it be? Why?
- If you decided not to go to college now, what would you do instead? Why?
- If you had a million-dollar grant to give away, who would get it? Why?
- What have been the most important events in your life?
- What's the one most important impression of yourself that you would want me to report to the admissions committee?
- Before we finish, is there anything else you would like to share about yourself?

Additional interview questions from a prominent college in the northeast:

1. What brings you to _____ today?
 - a. We always hear, "small liberal arts college in New England" but the good ones go beyond that. This goes for any school you are interviewing at, do your research. The student should know at least one small thing that is beyond what the College Board site tells you just to say they didn't pick you out of a hat or off a list of otherwise similar schools.
2. Tell me about yourself...
 - a. Students need to be prepared to answer this well because too many say, "well what do you want to know?" and that doesn't start an interview well. They can really take it any route, but answering with confidence is huge.

3. Tell me about your high school environment...
 - a. This can be in or outside of the classroom but sometimes this helps us understand if it is a very high-stress academic school, sports school, big school, small school etc.
4. Follow-up with how do you fit into that environment? What roles do you play in your school community?
 - a. Again academic or non-academic roles.
5. Depending on whether or not that addressed inside the classroom or not, ask the student to look back on their high school experience in the classroom and tell us what their favorite subject has been and why? Are they looking to major in that topic?
6. What has been your least favorite subject and how have you overcome having to take that subject?
 - a. Was it hard and you had to adjust study habits? Or was it just uninteresting, and if so, how did you stay engaged?
7. It takes us only a minute or two to look over your transcript, is there anything related to academics that you don't think we would get from the traditional review?
 - a. Sometimes a student will talk about a class that was really hard and they worked harder than ever to do well. Or maybe it's a specific paper that they are most proud of.
8. Looking back would you change anything about your experience in the classroom?
9. Looking ahead, do you know what you want to major in? If yes, how did you get to that point?
10. Shifting to outside of the classroom, how do you spend your time when you aren't in class or doing homework?
 - a. Students tend to only tell us about their resume stuff, but when we hear about them spending time with their dog, or their sibling, grandmother and so on. Or about their passion for collecting old buttons from thrift stores (yes I got that one once) or some other quirky habit/hobby, they become more real. We get most of the information from the resume, but its great when we get something a little bit more human from them in the interview.
11. What has been your most rewarding experience and why?
 - a. This sets them up well to answer this question on the common app, and I usually talk about that after they answer.
12. What activities that you have done in high school are you looking to continue in college and conversely what are some new activities you have thought about?
13. College is a big transition academically and extra-curricularly (clearly not a word, but generally they get it), what are you looking forward to the most about college and why?
 - a. We always get "independence" but we like it when we get something different.
14. What will be the hardest thing to leave behind from high school?
 - a. Again we get "friends" all the time, something different can be refreshing. Maybe it is something as simple as the security of knowing right where your locker is, or something bigger like knowing that your teachers understand perfectly the coach of the soccer team and how that affects you as a student and as an athlete.
15. Shifting outside of school entirely, tell me about your family. Are you the oldest child? Only child?
16. If they are the first one going to college, ask how that is going for them and their parents.
17. How is the application process going in general? Do you have questions regarding the general process, or specifically the _____ process?
18. The rest really depends on where the conversation has gone...have they visited _____ before? Are they thinking of applying ED? Have they started their essay, if not, lets talk about it. Etc.