
MAKING A GOOD COLLEGE VISIT AND INTERVIEW!

How important is an interview?

There are several reasons why an interview is important.

1. When you make time and effort to be present for the interview, you show sincere interest in the institution. You are saying, "I respect you and value your school's education. I want to learn more about you and I hope you want to learn more about me."
2. The interview is an opportunity to learn firsthand about the school's philosophy and admission policy. Rumors you may have heard can be dispelled.
3. The interview is an opportunity for you to present yourself in a very personal manner. It is especially true if you are someone who makes a very strong physical impression, or you are articulate and outgoing with depth of personal insight that makes you an attractive candidate. You should make certain to interview at every college in which you have a strong interest. If, however, you come across as either arrogant, or shy and retiring, typically ill at ease in the presence of authority figures, you may wish to forego the interview experience because of its possible damaging effects on your candidacy. Most colleges will tell you that the interview is not an important part of the selection process, and that its only real use is to confirm the recommendations of teachers and counselors, and that it is an imperfect method of evaluating a student. This is not to say that they care any less about the student as an individual. Rather, these schools feel that students should take the time that otherwise would have been devoted to the interview process and use it to extend their campus visit. The admission staff would use the time they save to run additional information sessions.

All this aside, a study once conducted by College Board, Educational Testing Service, at nine selective private institutions concluded that interviews can be very important, especially for those who fall in the broad middle range of candidates who are qualified but not exceptional (Personal Qualities and College Admissions, College Entrance Examination Board, 1982). At the same time your interview may provide important information, which will help you in the first decision regarding your choice of colleges. Therefore, plan to have personal interviews and take the steps necessary to make your interviews highly productive and extremely worthwhile. Don't not be like most people who waste the opportunity to make their interview a critical factor in the decisions made by them and the colleges of their choice.

Introductory protocol of an interview.

Typically, you and your parents will be seated in the lobby of the admissions office waiting for your interviewer to come out and introduce him or her. When you hear your name called, stand and greet the interviewer with a firm handshake and a friendly relaxed look on your face. Be prepared to introduce the interviewer to anyone who has accompanied you on the visit. The interviewer will chat for a moment with your parents before excusing the two of you to go into an interview office for the private one-on-one phase of the process. It is important that you speak with your interviewer alone and not let your parents do your talking for you.

What does a good college visit include?

A productive visit depends upon your being able to schedule enough time to absorb something of each campus, especially if you are traveling a great distance and going too much time and expense in making the call. The ingredients of a successful visit include the following:

- Personal interview
- A campus tour
- A visit to at least one class in an academic area of interest
- At least one meal in the campus dining hall
- An overnight stay in a dormitory
- A thorough study of college information
- Reading a recent copy of the student paper
- Plenty of free time to stroll the campus and observe all activities

Not all these ingredients are available or possible all the time. For example, classes are not usually held on Saturdays and some institutions frown on strangers spending the night in dormitories. Many colleges, however, will offer incentives (for example, free meal tickets and an overnight host program) to make certain that the prospective applicants do visit and make the most of their opportunity. Again, your telephone call to the appointment secretary should include the question “what opportunities do you offer to visiting prospective applicants?”

What are they looking for in an interview?

The admission staff wants to gather information on the “total” student: academic and educational potential, motivation, and personality traits. More specifically, the skilled interviewer will be collecting evidence of the following:

Intellectual Promise

This is a favorite area of faculty interviewers who see in prospective students a potential colleague, one who will join with them in the pursuit of knowledge. Questions about favorite books or favorite courses

are often attempting to measure your level of intellectual curiosity or determine your interest in learning as an individual in itself.

Motivation

Your interviewer will try to measure your inner drive and probably determine this by asking you to list some of your important accomplishments. When doing so, you should explain why each accomplishment was important.

Energy Level

Are you laid back or high-strung? Do you bounce out of bed in the morning, or do you need a blast of caffeine? Are you out dancing until midnight, or do you run out of gas before sunset?

Stability

This is your ability to control your emotions and demonstrate consistent unflappability while on display throughout the interview. In other words don't curl your upper lip when asked a particularly difficult question.

Sense of Humor

Be ready to crack a smile if your interviewer is in a good mood or detects that you might be a little too tense and tries to loosen you up a little bit. Don't be afraid to laugh, if something amusing is said.

Values

There is no "right" or "wrong" being tested. Your interviewer simply wants to know what values you will bring to the campus. Be relaxed and prepared to state your beliefs with firmness and conviction.

Interest in the Institution

This one is hard to fake. You are here either because it was your idea or because it was someone else's. There is nothing wrong with admitting that you are here on a fact-finding mission and have yet to develop any strong desire to attend any college.

Getting the interview started.

The first three to five minutes of most interviews are used to “break the ice”. Let the interviewer speak the first words, to set the tone. You will be asked a few questions of a general nature that do not require a great deal of thought. Just allow the conversation to flow. Be careful to monitor your answers to a moderate length. As you begin to relax and enjoy the process, the interviewer will move into topics that are relevant to the college selection process, questions that delve more deeply into your personality and give you an opportunity to think on your feet. This should be fun if you have done some thinking about yourself and the topics that might be discussed. Answer the questions to the best of your knowledge and ability. Here are a few questions that a college interviewer might ask:

- What are the most recent books you have read outside of school?
- If you could read the evaluation that your teacher has written about you, what would it say?
- Are your standardized test scores an accurate reflection of your true abilities?
- Are you satisfied with your academic record to date?
- What has been your greatest contribution to your school?
- How would you describe your two best friends?
- Do you have any anxieties about going to college?
- What three adjectives would you use to describe you?
- What do you want to learn during your college experience relative to your career goals and objectives?
- What have you done in the last six months to help another person?

Good questions to ask in your admission interview.

As soon as the interviewer feels you have had enough time to present yourself, he or she will ask if you have any questions. Here is where your preparation becomes very apparent. Good questions to ask can be the following:

- How would you describe the relationship between the college and the community?
- Is the undergraduate program compromised in order to advance the graduate and professional schools?
- Why do students leave this college?
- Every institution has dropouts. Why do some people fail to persist until graduation? What do they discover about their choice that they did not realize before matriculating?

Beginning the interview and a word about body language.

Upon entering the interview room, take whatever chair is offered. DO NOT ATTEMPT TO MOVE THE CHAIR ANY CLOSER TO THE INTERVIEWER. In all probability the chair has been strategically placed at a distance the interviewer is comfortable talking with you. Just as “actions speak louder than words” the non-verbal behavior you exhibit will be the yardstick which the interviewer measure your words, attitude, and intentions. Be aware of your sitting posture. Assume a natural sitting position, one that is comfortable but appropriate to the situation. Sitting rigidly on the edge of the chair indicates uneasiness or over anxiousness. Slouching conveys disinterest. And sitting with arms and legs tightly crossed suggests hostility or over-aggression. Holding your body alert, hands rested easily on the chair or in your lap and legs crossed comfortably at the knees or ankles suggest a receptive “open” attitude toward the interviewer and the interview process.

An interviewer's worst nightmare is trying to sustain a conversation with someone who responds monosyllabically or who stares disinterestedly out the window or at a wall. Eye contact implies forthrightness and is perhaps the single most expressive non-verbal message you will send. Take care to meet the interviewer “eye to eye” both as he or she speaks to you and as you respond to questions. The interview is your opportunity to add depth through the written word. There is something in the cliché “ it’s not what you say but how you say it”. The tone of your voice, it’s volume and the inflection you use can either hold or lose the listener’s attention. Avoid mumbling, speaking in monotone and giving one-syllable responses. You deserve to be heard. Attentiveness, posture, appropriate eye contact and the overall quality of verbal expression will help to ensure that you hold your attention.