

Keys to a Successful Interview

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PURPOSE: The purpose of a College Interview is two-fold:

1) It gives you the opportunity to find out more about the college, to ask questions, to “sell” yourself to the institution. 2) It gives the college admissions interviewer the chance to get to know a little about you and to “sell” you on his or her college. The purpose of a Job Interview is also two-fold: 1) You will have the chance to let your prospective employer know how your qualifications set you apart from those of other applicants. 2) Your prospective employer will have the opportunity to assess your strengths and weaknesses and to determine if you might be a good match for the job.

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW:

THE COLLEGE INTERVIEW: About 3-4 weeks before your expected campus visit, call the Admissions Office and request an appointment (with the Director or Assistant Director, preferably) for an interview. Also request a guided tour of the campus. It is best to visit the campus when students will be on campus, rather than during holiday or summer breaks. (Note: you probably should cancel your appointment if the weather forecast calls for rain. Most colleges do not “sell” well on cloudy or rainy days. If possible plan your visit for early fall or in the spring. Get specific information about where to park and the location of your interview. (Don’t be late---parking can be a problem on many campuses, so take this into account when planning your arrival time.)

It’s helpful to take an unofficial copy of your high school transcript along on your interview, so that you can show the interviewer what your record looks like so far. In that case, the interviewer might be able to tell you how you seem to measure up against students who were accepted last year. Also, the interviewer might point out ways for you to strengthen your record to help you become a more competitive applicant.

Do some research about the college. Find out as much about it as you possibly can via the college’s web site, view book and other material. Make a short list of questions to take to your interview.

It is always a good idea to make a well-groomed appearance, wearing clean school clothes and having freshly shampooed (possibly recently styled/cut) hair. (You do not need to wear dressy clothes for a college interview.) It’s also not a good idea to wear clothes that might be considered controversial or those that might send a negative message about you. NO perfume/gum/noisy jewelry. Shake hands confidently, with a firm, but not aggressive, hand. Look directly into your interviewer’s eyes. It’s helpful to include your parents in your campus visit. They should participate in part of your admissions interview, but you should speak with the admissions interviewer alone also.

Answer all questions honestly and completely. Don’t simply respond with a “yes” or “no” or with just a few words. Elaborate a bit. Be friendly. Perhaps show a sense of humor. Be yourself! There is no need to have anything memorized. Do not lie. Do not sit down until you are invited to do so. Don’t be too informal. Don’t swear. Smile at appropriate times and sit straight.

THE JOB INTERVIEW: Follow the protocol requested by your prospective employer. If the job advertisement specifies no walk-in interviews, no phone calls, you must honor that. Sometimes employers invite applicants to walk-in or call to arrange for an interview. In other cases, employers

will ask applicants to mail resumes to them for evaluation, and they will select the applicants they want to call for interviewers. If that is the case, you must wait for the call. Try to schedule your interview as soon as possible: “the early bird, etc.” Find out exactly where the interview will take place, where you should park, and arrive on time.

Read up on the job and the company. Talk to other employees you may know who work there. Find out what they think about the company. Do your homework. Try to find out what the employer is looking for in an employee. For example, does he or she want someone who works well with the public, someone who is a team player, someone who has a lot of scheduling flexibility---possibly someone who could work evenings or weekends or odd hours? Does she or he want someone who can pay strict attention to details? Find out what the employer wants and/or needs! Be prepared to discuss your qualifications and how they would meet your prospective employer’s needs.

Arrive on time. Shake hands confidently, with a firm, not an aggressive nor weak, hand. Look directly into your interviewer’s eyes. Dress according to the job. For example, if you are applying for a job where you will interact a lot with the public, dress accordingly----with neat, business-like clothing. If you want a job as a stock clerk, dress in a more casual style. If you want to be an artist’s/musician’s assistant, dress like an artist/musician. Again, have clean, neatly styled hair and NO cologne/perfume/gum/ noisy jewelry. Take another copy of your resume. Answer all questions honestly and completely. Don’t simply answer, “Yes” or “No.” Elaborate. Be natural. Do not lie. Do not swear. Be friendly, but don’t be overly informal. Don’t sit down until you are invited to do so. Sit straight and smile when it is appropriate.

POSSIBLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS/TOPICS:

COLLEGE INTERVIEWS:

Why do you want to attend this college/university. (Answers should avoid the trite or commonplace, such as “I want to get a good education.” Be specific: impress your interviewer by knowing about the college!)

What has been your academic record? (Here is where the unofficial transcript is helpful.)

Do your grades accurately reflect your ability?

What are your SAT or ACT scores?

Tell me about your high school. (Know some details: its location relative to major cities, how many students attend. It’s okay to brag a bit about how competitive it is with AP courses, etc.)

Who has been your favorite teacher? (Volunteer response enthusiastically and tell why.)

What do you like best / least about your high school?

What courses have you enjoyed the most/least?

How would your teachers describe you if they were sitting here now?

What do you plan to study at my college? How did you choose this major?

What are your career goals/ plans for your future? How did you become interested in this field?

What kind of learning environment do you prefer?

What do you think your strengths are? (Think of about 5) and your weaknesses? (about 2-3 not too bad, though.)

What has been the most difficult thing with which you have ever dealt?

What books have you read lately? (Don’t be surprised by this question: you will have to read a LOT in college so this is really important.) (Or Who is your favorite author and why?) (Don’t look stunned!)

Name and problem or weakness that you have overcome. How did you overcome it?

Tell me about your community involvement.

What current issues/events are of interest to you?

What newspaper(s) do you read? (Again, don’t look stunned!)

What do you do during the summer?

Do you have any particular talents or abilities? Awards? How are you unique?

Why do you think you would be a good match for this college?
What extracurricular activities have you enjoyed the most?
What leadership positions have you held?
What activities would you like to participate in at this college?
If you could spend an evening with anyone living or from the past, who would it be and why?

JOB INTERVIEWS:

What are you looking for in a job?
What qualifications do you have for this job?
What has been your experience? (You can use school experience here, too, as well as work.
What would your previous employers say about you if they were sitting here?
How do you work with others?
Do you like to be the leader or follower?
What are your strengths and weaknesses?
How do you plan to work on overcoming your weaknesses?
Do you have questions about this job?
Are you punctual?
Are you a hard worker?
What are your long-range career goals?
Are you looking for advancement?
How does this job fit into your overall career plans?

WHAT YOU SHOULD ASK:

COLLEGE INTERVIEWS:

What distinguishes your college or university from others?
Why do students choose your college? -this major at this college?
Tell me about the faculty in this department.
What internship opportunities are available in my major?
Where have your recent graduates in my major found jobs?
What would most students say are the strong points about this college?
What are some of the students' complaints?
Do most students stay on campus on the weekends?
How secure is campus security? What are the security issues on campus?
Is it going to be difficult getting the classes I want?
Are there any major tensions on campus? Between students? Between administration and students?
What are the most popular extracurricular activities?

JOB INTERVIEWS:

What specific duties does this job require?
What kind of employee are you seeking?
Does the job involve working overtime? Travel? Evenings/weekends?
How many people would be in my immediate work group?
Who are they and what do they do?
For whom would I be working? Who would my supervisor be?
How long has he or she been working for this company?
How can I meet him or her?
What do you think will be the challenges in this job?

AFTER THE INTERVIEW:

At the conclusion of your interview, thank the interviewer. Also, send a short thank-you note after you get home. Ask if the interviewers need any follow-up information. If they specify that they need additional information, supply it immediately. Ask when they will notify you (in the case of the employment interview.) If it is a college interview and the college operates under “rolling admissions”, ask when you might receive a decision letter. Ask about follow-up visits to campus—to sit in on a class or spend a weekend.