



College Connections

THE ART OF THE COLLEGE INTERVIEW

For the student, the college interview is an opportunity to show more than what was revealed by the transcript or list of extracurricular activities; for the interviewer, it's a chance to attach a face and personality to the application. Arranging for and going to an interview, especially when the college does not require one, demonstrates the student's serious interest in the college.



Students often dread interviews, but should keep in mind that the interviewer, usually an admissions officer or an alumnus, also wants to make a good impression. The interviewer is unlikely to go out of the way to ask "trick" questions or put the student on the spot and will more likely ask about the student's family, interests, and ambitions. The interview isn't an interrogation, but a conversation, with the main subject being the student. Students should be prepared to ask as well as answer questions.

Steps to Prepare for a College Interview:

- **Do your research.** Find out as much as you can about the college. Visit its Web site, read its brochures and catalogues, and learn about its history. Be ready to ask and answer questions based on your knowledge of the institution. Revealing your ignorance of the college or university will only make the interviewer wonder why you chose to apply to the college.
- **Practice.** Do mock interviews with a parent, teacher, or other mentor. Stand in front of a mirror and ask questions of yourself – and answer them. Go to a college fair – even though there will be crowds and little time to converse at great length with any one college representative, it's an opportunity for more practice.
- **Make your appointment for the interview well ahead of time, and keep it.** Be sure you know how to get to the interview location and allow extra time to get there. Be punctual, even early; arriving late will leave a bad impression.
- **Choose your clothing carefully.** Be yourself, but dress as a conservative version of yourself, the way you would if you were going to a job interview and wanted to make a good first impression. It's always better to be neat and conservatively clothed in a dress or a suit than to be casual — no T-shirts, flip-flops, halter tops, jeans, shorts, baseball caps, or hoodies.

Sources: "The College Interview," <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/apply/the-application/135.html>; "College Interviews: A Two-Way Street," https://www.collegedata.com/cs/content_getinarticle_tpl.html?articleId=10058

Questions You Might Be Asked at a College Interview

What can you tell me about yourself? Avoid clichéd responses such as "I'm a good student" or answering with information that's already included on your application. Think of what is distinctive about yourself. Do you have a passion for a particular subject? Do you have an unusual hobby? Has a recent experience made a deep impression on you? Focus on two or three things about yourself.

Why are you interested in this college? You should have a more appealing answer than "This school has major prestige" or "Your grads get good jobs, and I want to make big bucks." What really distinguishes this college from others you're thinking about? What specifically attracted you? What programs especially interest you?

What are your strengths? Your weaknesses? Be honest about your strong and weak points; chances are that your application already reveals areas in which you may be stronger or weaker.

What do you enjoy in your free time? "Not much" is not the way to answer this question. This is the time to talk about your special interests – hobbies, athletics, the arts, outdoor activities, or any other pursuit you really enjoy.

Who is your favorite author? Can you recommend a good book to me? Don't take this as a "trick" question. The interviewer is trying to explore both your level of reading and your ability to think about it in a critical way.

What challenge or difficulty did you overcome? Be ready to discuss a problem you've had and were able to solve. College will be full of challenges, and the interviewer wants to get an idea of how you might handle them.

In what accomplishment do you take the most pride? This question resembles the one about overcoming challenges. Perhaps overcoming a particular challenge is in itself an accomplishment, but be ready to talk about what you're especially proud of doing without bragging or boasting.

Does your transcript and college application accurately reflect your ability? This can be a difficult question to answer. Don't go out of your way to blame others for bad grades or to whine about an injustice done to you. Do be honest about special circumstances that may have interfered with you doing your best.

What was your biggest mistake in high school? Try to answer this question positively rather than negatively. Instead of dwelling on something you deeply regret, discuss something you wish you had done or an opportunity you might have taken but missed. Maybe you wish you had joined your school's drama club, put in some time on the student newspaper, or taken Chinese instead of Spanish.

What will you bring to this college and its community? Avoid generic answers such as "I'm a cool guy" or "I work hard." Focus on your specific background, interests, unusual life experiences, or talents, any qualities that distinguish you from others at the college.

Where do you see yourself 10 years from now? The interviewer won't expect you to have this completely worked out, but you should have considered at least two or three alternatives. If you're not sure, say so; this will show an open mind. But talk about possibilities; the interviewer also wants to see that you've given some thought to the future.

What would you like to ask me? Be prepared with a question or two about the college that cannot be answered at its Web site or in its viewbook. You might ask about what students there value most about their college experience, about a particular professor in a subject that interests you, certain college traditions you've heard about, or a notable academic program.

Obviously these aren't the only questions an interviewer might ask, but being prepared to answer them will help you be what you should be during the interview: the best advocate possible for yourself.

After the Interview: Write a short thank-you note to the interviewer(s). Thank them for their time, and mention one or two high points of the interview.

Sources: "College Interview Questions," <http://collegeapps.abou.com/od/theartofgettingaccepted/tp/college-interview-questions.htm>; "Quintessential Careers: Acing Your College Interview," <http://www.quintcareers.com/college-interview.html>; "College Admissions Interviews: Putting You with Your Name," http://www.collegeview.com/articles/CV/application/college_interviews.html.

GETTING THE MOST FROM A COLLEGE FAIR

A college fair offers students an opportunity to meet admissions representatives from a number of colleges and universities at one time in one place. Fairs can be overwhelming; getting the most out of a them requires some advance planning. Here's some advice on what to do before, during, and after a college fair.

Before the Fair

- Ask yourself what kind of college might suit you. Two years or four? A large university or a small college? Urban, suburban, or rural campus? What kinds of academic programs? Any special needs, such as tutoring or ESL programs?
- Research colleges that interest you on the Internet and in your school or guidance library. Discuss college hopes and plans with a school counselor, teachers, family, and friends.
- To save time filling out college information cards at each table, print out some self-stick labels with your name, address and phone number.
- Study the list of colleges and universities whose representatives will be at the fair and note which institutions interest you the most. Also check out the schedule of information sessions on such typical topics as the college search process, the FAFSA, the SAT and ACT, financial aid, and admissions procedures.
- Make a short list of questions to ask admissions staff, and make sure they are relevant to *your* interests. You don't want to waste your time, or the representatives, by asking questions already answered on the college's Web site or in its brochures and catalogue. Some questions you might ask:
 - ▶ *What distinguishes this college from others like it?*
 - ▶ *How would you describe the personality of a typical student at your college?*
 - ▶ *Do the professors make time to meet and work with students?*
 - ▶ *How many students transfer to another school during or after their first year? What reasons do they give for wanting to transfer?*

Each college campus has a personality, revealed through its student body. It is important to find a college that relates to your interests. These types of questions will give you a sense of the campus atmosphere.

At the Fair

When you do approach a college table, be calm and professional. The college reps are eager to speak with you. Don't be intimidated, your goal is to gather information about the colleges that interest you.

- Casual, comfortable clothing is fine, but dress neatly. Bring a pen, notebook, any questions

you've written down, and a bag to hold any brochures and other materials you pick up at the fair.

- If your parents or other family members are coming with you, discuss your plans ahead of time. Having a family member at your side will allow you to get a second opinion about a college or splitting up will allow the family member to attend an information session while you talk to college representatives.
- Before, or when you arrive, review the list and locations of colleges at the fair and where each college's table or booth is located and map out an efficient route. Check the list of information sessions offered and allow time to get to any that interest you.
- Allow extra time to stop at the tables of colleges that catch your attention at the fair. You might discover a fine college you hadn't previously considered.

It's important not to simply swing by the table of a college you're interested in attending only to pick up a brochure and smile meekly at the admissions representative before shuffling away. Take the time to talk with the representatives. The college reps will appreciate someone who appears to be taking the fair seriously. Show your initiative by talking notes. In addition, ask the admissions representative for their business card and follow up with him/her after the fair. Those ongoing conversations can help provide you with information you might never find in guidebooks or on Web sites.

After the Fair

- Review your notes, brochures and any information you picked up. Start weeding out material from colleges that aren't a good fit.
- Find out more about the colleges that impressed you. Research them on-line and in libraries, and fill out any information cards in their brochures. Begin to schedule visits to their campuses.

Sources: "College Fairs: Booths, Crowds, Noise, and College Admissions," <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/csearch/where-to-start/28841.html>; "Tips for Attending a National College Fair," <http://www.nacacnet.org/EventsTraining/CollegeFairs/ncf/Pages/NCFTips.aspx>; "5 fabulous questions to ask a college," http://www.embark.com/Articles_old?pages/5fabulousquestionstoaskacollege.aspx; "The College Fair" <http://homeworktips.about.com/od/juniors/a/collegefair.htm>

Top 10 College Interview Mistakes

10. **Volunteering unnecessary information.** This is not the time to talk about eating disorders, weird or wacky beliefs, totally unrealistic hopes, dysfunctional family members, or experiences with alcohol or drugs.
9. **Making a prepared speech.** Be prepared without being overly prepared. Canned, memorized speeches and responses will make you seem phony or insincere.
8. **Chewing gum.** This extremely common habit will only distract or annoy the interviewer.
7. **Being fake.** Don't try to act like someone you're not, and stick to the truth about yourself when responding to questions. Be yourself!
6. **Being silent.** Don't answer questions with only a "yes," a "no," or a shrug. Be ready with a couple of questions about the college to fill any awkward silences.
5. **Bringing your parents to the interview.** Even if they've traveled to the college with you, the interviewer will want to talk to you alone. Leave your parents in the waiting room or somewhere else on campus.
4. **Being rude.** Don't put down the college, and don't be nasty or unmannerly to the admissions staff. Do shake hands, look the interviewer in the eye, remember their name, and say "thank you" at the end of the interview.
3. **Being sloppily dressed.** Dress neatly in conservative clothing, such as a sports jacket, a suit, or a dress. Leave the "bling" at home, and avoid overpowering perfumes or aftershaves.
2. **Being unprepared.** Be ready to answer basic questions about yourself and why you're interested in the college.
1. **Being late.** Wasting the interviewer's time and disrupting her schedule is guaranteed to leave a bad impression.

Sources: "10 College Interview Mistakes," <http://collegeapps.about.com/od/theartofgettingaccepted/tp/college-interview-donts.htm>; "The College Interview," <http://www.princetonreview.com/college-interview.aspx>; "Most Common Mistakes in College Interviews," <http://www.bookrags.com/articles/40.html>.

2nd Annual Latino College Fair
November 21, 2009, 11:45 am - 4:30 pm
at Fordham University Rose Hill, the Bronx
For information: http://capwiz.com/cicu/go/2009_Latino_College_Fair

Join us Saturday, November 21, 2009, from 11:45 am to 4:30 pm at Fordham University's Rose Hill campus in the Bronx. The Fair is free and will offer helpful information for Latino families: Meet representatives from more than 50 private colleges and universities and learn about finding, getting into and paying for college. For more information, a schedule of the day's events, and how to RSVP to attend the fair, go to http://capwiz.com/cicu/go/2009_Latino_College_Fair. Or e-mail colleges@nycolleges.org; call 518.436.4781.

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