

The College Interview

The Basics

A college interview is a chance to show that you're more than just test scores and grades. It's an exchange of information—you learn about the college and the college learns about you. It can last anywhere from 30-60 minutes.

There's More Than One Type of Interview

Interviews vary depending on the school, student, and particular situation. You could find yourself interviewing with an admissions officer, a student, or an alumnus. Other, less formal, interview situations include group information sessions with admissions staff and current students, and high school and local college fairs. If you plan on attending a music, drama, or dance school, plan on performing an audition or submitting a portfolio.

Special-Interest Sessions

If you plan to pursue specific interests in college, such as sports or clubs, you might find it helpful talk to current students and faculty members.

- **Sports:** If you're an athlete and want to play on a college team, arrange a meeting or a phone call with the coach. Bring your scrapbook, statistics, or other information that will help give a clear picture of your talents. Consider asking your high school coach to send a letter to the college on your behalf.
- **Specific fields of study:** Talk to students who are majoring in your desired field and make an appointment with a faculty member or advisor in the department. If you schedule a campus visit, be sure to sit in on a class.
- **Activities:** If you plan to participate in an activity, such as the newspaper, band, or radio station, speak to students who take part. It's a good way to find out what the people are like and what your chances are of getting involved.

Why You Should Interview

The interview is one of many factors in the admissions decision. Most colleges don't require an interview; however, there are many benefits to meeting face-to-face with an admissions officer. For example, perhaps you:

- Feel your college application can't possibly convey your warm and shining personality.
- Are interested in the college, but want to learn more about its study abroad opportunities, science program, or whatever else interests you.
- Want to explain why your grades slipped.

Interviews and the Admissions Process

The interview is just one of many factors in the admissions decision. Admissions directors usually say that the interview is rarely the deciding one. Still, if a borderline student turns out to be impressive, the interviewer has the authority to write a letter in support.

Nervous? Don't Be.

It's not the third degree and there's no pass or fail. Unless you show up in a t-shirt and cut-offs and spew profanities, chances are the interview is not going to make or break you. As long as you've prepared and practiced, you'll probably make a good impression.

Be Your Own Best Advocate

The staff learns about you from a slew of papers: your transcript, test scores, and application. While your essay and recommendations can offer an impression of who you are, words on paper can reveal only so much. The interview is your chance to be your own advocate by talking positively about your interests and enthusiasms, to show your personality, and to boost your chance of admission.

Discuss Special Circumstances

The interview is a good time to explain a hitch in your transcript or discuss any personal circumstances that affected your studies. Problems that you may find difficult to write about in the application are often easier to discuss with a sympathetic admissions counselor. For example, perhaps:

- You may not be the best math student, but it never stopped you from taking AP[®] Calculus—tell the interviewer why you persisted despite such difficulties.
- During sophomore year, your parents divorced, and your academic work took a downturn.
- You have a learning disability and need to make extra effort with every assignment.

It's Okay to Ask Questions

Asking questions shows that you're interested in the college and what the admissions officer has to say. You should always have a question in mind about the college or your major field to show that you have a deep interest in attending the school. The interview is your chance to

be your own advocate You can also ask a general question, such as, "Do you have any advice for me?"

Plus, asking questions can help you discover characteristics that colleges can't convey in a catalog. If an interviewer asks, "Why did you choose Florida University?" ask back, "What do you think draws students here?"

Things to Avoid

Don't ...

- Be late
- Memorize speeches—sound natural and conversational
- Ask questions covered by the college catalog
- Chew gum
- Wear lots of cologne or perfume
- Swear or use too much slang
- Be arrogant—there's a fine line between being confident and boasting
- Lie—it will come back to haunt you
- Respond with only yes or no answers
- Tell the school it's your safety
- Be rude to the receptionist or any other staff you meet
- Bring a parent into the interview
- Refuse an interview—this is usually noted