

The College Admissions Interview

Admissions interviews often instill dread in students. On one hand is the fear that you will somehow blow the interview; on the other hand you are thrilled that you were even asked to interview. Calm your nerves and keep reading this article. If there is anything more personal in the application process than the personal essay, the interview is it. Admissions interviews come in a number of varieties; in-person at the college admissions office, via Skype with an admissions representative, in-person with a local alumni interviewer, and when all else fails, by telephone. Much of the stress that a student endures prior to the interview actually dissipates during the interview itself. The fact is that most students walk away from an admissions interview feeling that they did a good if not a great job. Part of this feeling is pure relief that the interview is over but much of it is real – students generally do a fine job in the admissions interview. Those that don't do so well were probably not destined for admission to that college anyway.

Most college interview questions are meant to help you and the interviewer find out if the college is a good match for you. Rarely will you get a question that puts you on the spot or tries to make you feel stupid. Remember, the college is trying to make a good impression too. Use the interview to show off your personality in ways that aren't possible on the application. Here are my top 12 admissions interview questions. Unless your interviewer is very creative or just winging it, these questions should cover most of what you will be discussing. I have not given you the answers to these questions because the answers need to come from you, not me. I use Harvard as the school in this interview protocol in honor of Mercyhurst Prep student Jennifer Cho who scored an admissions interview with the big “H” this year. I'll leave some space after each question so you can make notes.

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What is it about Harvard that makes this your school of choice?
3. I notice from your application that you have a special interest in nuclear biology. How do you see yourself developing that interest here at the college?
4. Tell me about a special challenge you have faced in the past several years and how you met that challenge? What did you learn from dealing with this challenge?

5. Where do you see yourself ten years from now? What would you like to be doing and where?
6. Harvard is becoming an increasingly diverse campus. How do you see yourself contributing to or enhancing diversity on campus?
7. Tell me about some individual who has contributed to your success as a student and has, perhaps inspired you.
8. What would you like to accomplish during your four years as a student at Harvard?
9. On a related note, rather than what you would like to accomplish, what do you believe you can bring to Harvard during your four years on campus?
10. What do you do for fun in your free time?
11. Tell me about the last great book that you read.
12. What can I tell you about our college?

Final Tips on the Admissions Interview

- Rehearse these questions and your answers with someone who can give you good feedback.
- Tailor your clothes for the venue. A classier setting (admissions office, business office) requires dress-casual; the corner Starbucks interview allows you to wear school-casual. Just don't wear sneakers!
- Be yourself, not some other person. Let your true personality show.
- If you are not sure what a question means, ask the interviewer to rephrase the question.

- Exhibit your familiarity with the school – do your homework before the interview, not after.
- Be prepared with your own questions for the interviewer about his/her college.
- Avoid using slang and especially avoid vocal pauses such as “uh” and “like.”
- Do not whine or complain about your high school or teachers.
- Avoid talking about financial aid or scholarships unless the interviewer brings up the topic.
- Send a follow-up thank you card or e-mail to the interviewer.

These are prototypical questions for a college admissions interview. But admissions interviewers can also get creative so keep your options open for almost anything. The Final Tips are merely common sense suggestions and apply to many interview situations. Prepare well and I am sure you will do an outstanding job in your college admissions interview!