

THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

Tips, Tricks, and What to Prepare

Many colleges engage their alumni to perform off-campus interviews with prospective students, in order to learn more about the applicant and dig deeper than the application and supplemental essays sometimes can. The majority of colleges and universities will have a disclaimer that because not every student has access to alumni interviews that the interview only **helps** the application but doesn't hinder it negatively. That said, a terrible interview will certainly give the admissions officers pause, so we want to best prepare for the interview process to make sure you maximize your time and make the strongest impact.

If you do not have access to an alumni interviewer, some admissions departments allow students to schedule an on-campus interview with a member of the admissions department staff. If you are going to be visiting your school during the summer/fall before your application, reach out and see if this is a possibility. This is always more advantageous over an alumni interview, because the AO (admissions officer) is more keyed into the process.

For summer programs, the idea of how to approach the interview is the same — it's all about conveying strong passion for your strategic positioning / positioning major and communicating your deep interest in the program. And addition, you should be able to specifically discuss how that summer program will help you reach your academic and intellectual goals.

How to Prepare for an Interview:

1. **Know the material**, whether that's the college/university, research professor, or summer program. This means spending time going through the website, social media, and publications, so you can speak most effectively, and best understand how you could fit into the institution.
2. Be prepared with an **introduction** that sets the foundation for who you are. This should be fairly brief — don't lose them at the beginning! You want to make sure you have 2-3 vital points about who you are and your passion for your strategic positioning. As the interview progresses, you can flesh out those points, but make sure you lead with these at the beginning, as that's how you set the tone.
3. **Be familiar** with your key points and the material, so you can reduce your nerves and anxiety and increase your ability to be engaging, affable, thoughtful, and sincere.
4. **Never** be negative in an interview — even if it's about an experience, moment of growth, or class that was difficult — ALWAYS find the positive in a situation.
5. **Understand how your strategic positioning fits in**. Do the research to understand why you would be an asset to that department, if the interview is for a college/university, how you would be a perfect fit for that research project (if you're meeting a professor), or how that summer program will help you reach your academic goals. Be able to talk about where you've been, where you are now, and how that program/school/research will help you take it to the next level and continue your intellectual journey.

6. **Bring your resumé for your interviewer**, but do not rely on it yourself. You should already have identified the courses you've taken, the research you've conducted, the extracurricular experiences you've had, the jobs/internships/volunteering you've done, and the life experiences you've had that align with your strategic positioning.
7. **It all comes down to FIT.** Be sure you're able to eloquently and thoughtfully discuss why the school/research/program is a perfect fit for you, and why. BE SPECIFIC.

MOCK INTERVIEW FORMAT

Every interview is different, but here are some fairly standard questions that you should prepare and be able to answer eloquently. Do not give one sentence answers – make sure you create notes for each of these, so you know what to pull from when the questions arise.

Questions you should prepare to be asked:

1. **Tell me about yourself?**
This is very open-ended, which is why you should prepare an introduction for yourself (see #2 above) that aligns with your strategic position.
2. **How did you get interested in [MAJOR]?**
Again, provide a clear history that's easy to follow about your passion for your strategic position and why it's had an impact on your life.
3. **What are your goals for college?**
You want to make sure you've done the work and research – talk about programs, professors, classes you want to take, groups you want to join/start, etc.
4. **What has been your favorite class in high school? Least favorite?**
Be specific about why that class is your favorite. Don't give a cliché or boring answer. Try and engage the interviewer with a story that illustrates the class you find most captivating. If you enthrall the interviewer, they will believe you. If you bore them, they will be bored too and will not invest in your future. And for your least favorite class, as mentioned above, do NOT be negative! Every negative has a positive spin you can put on it. Make sure you do that, otherwise you'll be seen as a complainer.
5. **What's been your most exciting intellectual experience?**
Make sure it aligns with your positioning. Be specific. Do not use any clichés here.
6. **Why are you applying to [INSERT SCHOOL]?**
Like mentioned above, do your research to be able to talk about your passion for the school with specificity and power. Highlight why it's a perfect fit.

7. **What are your career goals?**

Avoid answers that make it seem like you're only interested in the strategic position so it can help you leap to a better situation, or make a lot of money, etc. You should demonstrate a very intense — and believable — passion. If you're lost, say you're interested in pursuing a Ph.D. and continued study in your field.

8. **What do you do for fun?**

Give them a sense of who you are as a person. One of the things interviewers lead with in their assessment is what TYPE of person you are — are you kind, thoughtful, genial, and a deep thinker? Or are you contrarian, don't speak that much, and seem completely resigned from the process? You want to be the former. So, highlight things you like to do that show your best qualities. Show them a different side of you than the intellectual one — give them something more about who you are.

9. **Do you have any questions for me?**

This is always the area where most students falter. You should prepare some thoughtful questions for your interviewer about the college/research/summer program. If you're stuck, here are some ideas:

- Ask them about their experience at the college/research/program. Alumni (etc.) love to talk about their experiences, and to give you a sense of who they are. Make it seem like you're genuinely interested.
- Ask them about their favorite memories as a student. If you're talking to a research professor, ask them the parts of the research they find most engaging and interesting. If it's a summer study program, ask what they've seen be the main takeaways for students who enroll in the program — what are their favorite parts?
- What is the availability to faculty? Did they have any teachers in particular who helped foster their intellectual growth? What's the access to research like?
- Dig into the strategic positioning again — how does your interviewer see how the college/research/program could help your growth in this area?
- Ask how the college/research/program helped prepare them for their career(s).

LAST MINUTE CHECKLIST

- **Dress thoughtfully** — you don't always need to wear a coat and tie, but assess the situation and the venue in which the interview is being conducted, and make sure you dress appropriately.
- **Bring a copy of your resumé.**
- **Thank the interviewer for their time**
- **If possible, get the interviewer's email address/home address so you can immediately send a thank you note afterward.**