
COLLEGE GOALS

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Are you applying to college soon, and feeling anxious about facing college admissions interviews? Many of the highly selective American universities and colleges no longer schedule interviews on campus. Instead, you may have the opportunity to talk with the university's regional admissions representative if they visit your very own school, or attend a regional college admission fair. After you apply, you may also be offered the opportunity to have an interview with an alumnus representative of the college. Those interviews are important, of course, though they do not bear the weight of an official admissions representative. In any case, seek out and accept any opportunity for an interview that you can get! Here's why, and how . . .

Building Interviewing Skills

Take every opportunity you can to participate in an interview, no matter which 'side' you'll be on! If you're the interviewee, no doubt you will have a much clearer idea of how you think a good interviewer could 'see' you well. And having interviewed a few people, you will surely know more about how you will want to prepare and present your self, when you have an opportunity to take that role.

Being interviewed and being an interviewer, either formally or informally, are functions we perform much more frequently than we think. Many of your daily interactions and conversations could be considered to be 'interviews'. If you can begin considering some of your interactions as mini-interviews, you will begin to gain greater control over the way you portray yourself, and the way you are perceived.

And then, of course, there are and will be those 'BIG' interviews – the college admissions interview -- the job interview -- or even, someday, the first meeting with your future fiancé's family! Making conscious choices about how and what you want to reveal about yourself will also help you to better explore and evaluate your personal, social and future personal & professional relationships.

Here are a few things to consider when preparing for an interview . . . and always prepare. Do not go into an interview thinking that all you have to do is answer the interviewer's questions honestly and skillfully. That is never enough! First, remember that an interview is always a two-way street – potentially a memorable event in which both parties build together to an agreement or conclusion that meets both their need for information. That's a great interview, and both parties leave feeling satisfied and remember what they learned.

The interviewer usually has some qualities, attributes, abilities and skills that s/he is looking for. The interviewee is wise to ask for a clear statement about the interviewer's goals. In fact, I want to stress the point about *asking questions*.

Take this little quiz:

Of the following five behaviors that candidates exhibit in interviews, which one do you think recruiters find most unforgivable?

1. Poor personal appearance
2. Overemphasis on social aspect of college
3. Failure to look at interviewer while interviewing
4. Doesn't ask questions
5. Late to interview

Well, yes – any of these five behaviors can be deadly – but the answer, according to professionals, is #4. If you do not **ask questions**, interviewers or recruiters lose confidence in your interest and abilities. If you don't have anything to ask, how vested are you in the interview? So prepare yourself with some (not too many! not too few!) well-considered questions. That way, you can also gain a measure of control over the flow of the dialogue, as well as demonstrate your knowledge of and interest in the university or organization. Furthermore, you can make sure that they have really understood what you put in your written application. Most of all, you need to ask enough questions that the recruiter/interviewer can feel confident **you know what you are getting into**, if you get selected for admission to that college, or if you are chosen for the position, after a job interview. Nobody, on either side, wants surprises after the choices are made! So ask away – it is your chance to shine and set yourself apart from the other applicants.

AND be sure to avoid the other four pitfalls!

Interviewers will be looking to see if you, the applicant, appear to be comfortable and at ease, while still being respectful, polite and interested. They will be watching your **'body language'** as well as listening to your words. Sit straight, and be sure to look your interviewer in the eye, and **smile!** It's fine to let the interviewer know you are nervous – it shows that the experience really matters to you! This is also a chance to give them a sense of your **stress management style**, which is very important, considering the very high levels of stress that exist on college campuses at different times of the year.

Be sure to talk about how your goals and philosophy blend and are strengthened by the goals and philosophy of the college/university . . . and that means doing your preparation so you **KNOW DETAILS** about what is unique regarding each university's nature and style.

A review of your courses, grades and extra-curricular involvements (your 'brag sheet') are usually in order to make sure that all your abilities and achievements are clearly understood, but do not spend too much time on this process! Above all, let the interviewer see that you know about his or her college, and explain why your interests and skills will contribute to the goals and style of the university. **Be a person, not a transcript!** What's interesting about you?

You may be surprised to learn that **communication skills** can and do often outweigh specific skill criteria. Being able to talk cogently and comfortably and to write clearly, concisely and interestingly are the most important qualifications that interviewers are seeking. Practicing your interview skills can really help here. Take every opportunity you can – and if you are nervous, uncomfortable, and feel you just did not nail the interview, practice more!

Here's a quick list of the attributes and qualifications that any interviewer is seeking, and which every candidate should learn to portray or demonstrate with past experiences:

Commitment

Knowledge about the university's expectations and unique offerings

Ability to work independently or as part of a group

Leadership experience

Organizational abilities

Detail-oriented, but able to see the big picture

Creative (not flamboyant!)

Comfortable with older and younger colleagues

Flexible!

Pro-active, motivated, able to initiate

Responsible, reliable, respectful

Knows how to obtain information and willingness to seek it out and learn

Appropriate sense of humor

How would this person represent this university/college, as a graduate?

It's up to you to make sure your interviewer can see or sense these qualities, or that s/he is informed by you about situations that demonstrate these abilities.

Above all, the interviewer wants to know if the candidate **can easily and rapidly learn to contribute to the effort of the university**, and that s/he's **eager to do so. Smile!** Introduce your parents, if they are with you, but remember, this is *your* interview. **Finally, be gracious, and grateful. Shake hands!**

I've intertwined comments about both partners in an interview— because that's the nature of the situation. You can't have a one-handed clap; interviewing is not a solo performance, but it is a dance for two, or more! -- and you can indeed learn to enjoy it – to lead and to follow, to be flashy and to make your partner feel you've helped her or him to strut his stuff well. **Enjoy the dance!**