



Ocean Educational Consulting

Interview Preparation Kit

Importance of Interviews

Now, many schools do not require an interview for the admissions process. Others do require it, while some schools make it optional. If your schools do offer interviews (even optional ones), I recommend that you arrange for one. Interviews can be a good opportunity to show why you are a good fit for the college. Also, at some colleges, doing even an optional interview can boost your chances of admission because it shows that you are seriously interested in that college. To sum up, if the college offers any type of interview, it is a good idea to do on

Do I Even Have Any Interviews?

Your first task is to figure out if your colleges do interviews and if they are optional or required. The quickest way to find this out is type “Name of College admissions interview” into Google or some other search engine. You will find information on each school’s website about whether they do interviews. Take a close look to determine if the interview is optional or required. Make a note of which schools interview and which types of interviews they do.

Types of Interviews

Generally, there are two different types of interviews: informational interviews and official admissions interviews. Informational interviews are designed to help recruit applicants to colleges. These informational interviews are pretty low key and give you a chance to learn about the college. Moreover, admissions committees do not consider informational interviews. Oftentimes, there’s not even a record that you met with a representative from the college.

Official admission interviews, by contrast, can impact your chances of admission. Notes and assessments from admission interviews do wind up in your admissions file. Official admissions interviews can take place at the college by admission staff or can be conducted by college alumni living in your city or town. Recently, some schools—like Wake Forest—have started doing interviews via webcam. No matter which type of interview you are doing—informational or official— it is important to prepare before you meet with college representatives.

Scheduling Your Interview

Once you have determined if any of your schools offer or require interviews, you'll need to do the research to figure out the different procedures used by different schools. There should also be information available about when interviews are scheduled. Finally, you need to determine the location of these interviews, with local representatives, via webcam, or on the college campus.

In many cases, you can schedule interviews online. It's very important, however, that you pay close attention to deadlines. Many schools only offer interviews for a limited number of weeks. Moreover, interview slots can fill up quickly. It is therefore advisable to schedule interviews as early as possible.

Interview Rules to Follow

Here are some strategies for having a good interview:

- Go alone. No parents allowed. The folks can wait outside.
- Make sure you are on time.
- Bring a copy of your activity sheet from Worksheet 9 (Figure 2.5) to refresh your memory.
- Dress nicely. No need to wear a suit, but make sure you look decent.
- Shake hands firmly and make eye contact.
- Sit up straight and smile.
- Try to answer in more than one-word answers.
- Focus on academic interests first and foremost. Extracurricular activities are secondary.
- Make sure that you prepare. Have a list of questions to ask the interviewer (see below).
- Follow up with a thank you note. Make sure that you get the interviewer's business card or e-mail address when you are finished.

Practice, Practice, Practice

The most important piece of advice for giving a good interview is to prepare well. Careful preparation will also make you less nervous during the actual interview. Here are five things that you should do before your interview. And please don't wait until the last minute. This whole thing is stressful enough. Give yourself at least a few hours to complete these tasks and try not to make it the few hours the night before the interview.

1) Visit the school's website once again. You have already done a good deal of research about the school, but it is time to go back to the website and dig a bit deeper to learn even more about the college. Poke around the website to see what the college promotes about itself. Does it heavily emphasize its academic programs? If so, which one? Does it highlight its sports teams? What about faculty research interests? Is the college interested in helping graduates find careers after graduation? Make sure that you learn how the college defines itself and how it differs from other schools.

2) Think carefully about your strengths and weaknesses as a student. Refer to your Academic Assessment worksheet. Go through line-by-line and think about the positives and negatives for each one. Highlight any specific strengths that you bring to the table. For example, if your math test scores are sky-high and you want to pursue an engineering major, make sure you jot that down. By the same token, you should examine any weaknesses that you have that might pose challenges when you arrive at college. Perhaps you struggle with writing and it shows in your test scores.

Because you are thinking about this now, you can strategize about how you might address this challenge. In particular, perhaps you will seek out help from a writing tutor before your first papers are due. Everyone has weaknesses in their academic background and it is important to think about them now and strategize about how to deal with them.

3) Prepare answers for practice questions. Write down answers to the practice questions on the worksheet below. This worksheet includes ten of the most-common college interview questions and you are bound to get at least some of them in your interview.

4) Practice your responses. Now, this is important. You need to practice your answers out loud. Keep practicing until your responses sound totally natural when you open your mouth. If you are self-conscious and don't want anyone to hear you talking to yourself, go sit in the empty, dry bathtub and practice them. The important thing is that you practice saying your answers out loud. It isn't enough to do them in your head. You need to say the actual words. This exercise will help you gain confidence for the actual interview.

5) Make a list of your own questions. Almost all interviewers will ask if you have any questions. Make sure you don't ask questions that you could easily find the answer to on the college's website. Rather, think about questions that demonstrate your true interest in the college. It is important that you have some ready to go. It looks bad if you don't have anything to ask them. For a list of sample questions, see the following worksheet.

Mock Interviews

It is also a good idea to do at least one mock interview with family or friends. By doing a mock interview, you will gain a tremendous amount of confidence that will come through during your real interview. Block off 30-45 minutes of time and give the list of practice questions to a trusted friend or relative. Don't ask anyone that is hypercritical or laughs too easily. Ask your mock interviewer to run through the questions and give feedback on your answers. Yes, this is extremely dorky and you will feel like an idiot while you are doing it. But if you want to give a strong interview, you cannot go into it cold. You have to practice and prepare to give your best performance.

Worksheet: Interview Practice Questions

Make sure that you can answer these practice questions.

1. Why do you want to attend this college?
2. What are your academic strengths? What are your academic weaknesses?
3. How have you prepared for college?
4. What are your future career plans?
5. What can you tell me about your extracurricular interests?
6. Do you have a favorite book? A favorite author?
7. What accomplishment are you most proud of?
8. What personal qualities can you contribute to the student body?
9. What do you do for fun?
10. Who is your hero?

Script: Questions to Ask the Interviewer

These are some good questions to ask in the interview. They are strong questions because they show that you are really interested in the school and you have thought about how you can get the most out of your experience there.

Academic Questions

1. Are classes primarily taught by professors or teaching assistants?
2. How does the college promote student/faculty contact?
3. How do students receive help selecting classes?
4. What kinds of special projects, seminars, or other experiences are offered?
5. What opportunities are there to do research for faculty?

Social Questions

1. What are the students like at your school? How would you characterize the student body in general terms?
2. What do students do for fun at this school?

Career Questions

1. What kinds of internships are available through your college? What types of internships have other students participated in?
2. Do many students participate in service-learning classes (i.e., classes with required internships)? If so, what kinds of service opportunities do they have?
3. What kind of career placement opportunities does the college offer?