



## How to Approach the Personal Interview

An interview might be on-campus with an admissions officer or admissions associate (student), or off-campus with a traveling admissions representative or an alumnus. It usually involves 30 minutes to an hour of *conversation* – that means a back-and-forth exchange, not a grilling or a fillibuster! Your approach will be slightly different depending on the setting, but the basics are the same. Your goal is to help the interviewer find out

- how articulate, put together, intelligent and friendly you are;
- what you have to offer the college;
- whether you're the kind of person others would like to interact with; and
- how knowledgeable and interested you are in this particular college.

### Before the Interview

Before the interview, you should research the college to uncover at least five reasons why the school interests you, such as atmosphere, students, specific departments or professors, activities you'd like to get involved in, etc. Also think of three concrete ways you would be an asset on campus. From this information, develop a couple of stories about your life in and out of school – using plenty of details – that show how you would fit in well. (Unique stories will help the interviewer remember you later.) Choose at least two open-ended questions to ask the interviewer.

Bring a single 3x5 card that includes the questions you want to ask and a few notes to jog your memory about the stories you want to tell. You may also bring a resume and notebook.

### Arriving at the Interview

Begin with confidence and convey openness:

- Dress appropriately and act appropriately. Don't chew gum. Don't wear your earphones. Cell phones off.
- Arrive five to ten minutes early.
- Smile even when you are waiting in the coffee shop or outer office. Be that friendly, approachable person even before the interviewer gets there.
- Decline any offers of food; water is ok.
- When you meet the interviewer, shake hands. Begin with your hand open, watch the two hands clasp, then look up and smile.

### During the Interview

After the first open-ended question (which you have prepared a story to answer), the conversation should naturally slip into less rigid territory. Some things to keep in mind:

- Appear comfortably engaged and interested throughout. Lean forward, smile, make eye contact, be positive. No blank stare or looking at your watch.
- No one likes long, awkward silences, but student and alumni interviewers might be especially worried about keeping the conversation flowing. Be sure to ask questions to give them a



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chance to talk about themselves. They will remember you favorably if you help make the interview a success!

- Bring the conversation around to the great things you have uncovered about the college and the stories you have to tell. Be expansive and detailed in your answers.
- Convey energy and enthusiasm. You are excited about what the college has to offer! The interviewer should conclude that this college is one of your top choices and would be a really good fit for you.
- In fact, if the college *is* your first choice, tell the interviewer. If you are asked if a college is your first choice and it is not (or if you are unsure), state that it is among those you are considering.
- Be yourself. Remember that confidence? You, yourself, have a lot to offer!

### **Ending the Interview**

Know when the interview is over by paying attention to when the conversation is winding down and you have asked all your questions. Final words:

- “I really enjoyed our conversation and learning about College X”
- “Did I answer everything you wanted to know?”
- “Great! Well, thanks again.”

Be sure you have a business card or contact information before you leave. Shake hands again.

### **After the Interview**

- Write up your notes as soon as you can, and add them to CPP. How did you feel about the interview? What did you talk about? What questions did they ask?
- You got the interviewer’s business card, right? Send your thankyou note (e-mail or handwritten) within 24 hours, alluding to specific details from your interview. You might say
  - “I really enjoyed our talk”
  - “Your love for the school certainly came through”
  - “My excitement about Y aspect of College X is even greater now”
  - “I appreciate your time and efforts to get to know me.”
- If you interviewed with an admissions officer or associate, you may choose to use follow-up questions to start a dialog.
- If you interviewed with an alum, the thankyou note should be the end of it.