
HOW TO ACE YOUR

College Interview



The key to a successful college interview, or any interview for that matter, is preparation. A college will ask for an interview to see if a student would be successful amongst the students already enrolled in the school, as well as to assess if the prospective student's objectives and interests fit in with what their school offers. While there are opportunities for a student to show their individuality on their application, the interview is a real opportunity to be a distinctive candidate.

The first step to prepare for your interview is to review potential interview questions. The types of questions that might be asked can be divided into four categories:

- **Who are you?**
- **Why our college?**
- **What is important to you?**
- **What kind of thinker are you?**

Being able to answer these questions will prepare you for your interview process by not only having outstanding answers, but also giving you a boost of confidence when engaging in the overall process.



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WHO ARE YOU?

The **who are you** questions exist to evaluate your sense of self. In other words, the interviewer will want to gauge whether or not you can communicate who you think you are.

These questions can range from broad, **tell me about yourself**, to specific, **give me three adjectives that best describe you**. This is also where they might ask the common interview question: **What are your strengths and weaknesses?**



**Avoid the
predictable.**

When it comes to the broader question of **tell me about yourself**, try to stay away from the predictable. Consider how each student interviewing with that school is likely to say the basic “I’m responsible” or “I’m outgoing.” Even avoid such answers as “I’m Greek” or “I’m Irish,” unless you have a good rationale to add for why that speaks well of who you are as a person. These traits are positive, but they aren’t saying much about who you really are. Consider preparing an answer that delves deeper:

- **Unusual interests** (unicycling, hiking, illusionism, auto rebuilding)
- **Examples of accomplishments** (reading a book in another language, climbing a mountain, starting a charity)
- **Your passions** (cooking, reading, writing poetry, collecting bugs, politics, fixing computers)
- **Your idiosyncrasies** (compulsive labeler/organizer, ability to fix any gadget, etc.)

For the question about **adjectives that describe you**, be sure to avoid words you don’t know. Sure, the interviewer will be impressed with a broad vocabulary, but they will not be impressed if you attribute an adjective to yourself and you don’t even know what it means. Before your interview, select 3-5 adjectives that you feel confident explaining.

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The **Strengths and Weaknesses** question is always intimidating.

For **weaknesses**, you want to ensure that this is something you are either accommodating or attempting to overcome. If you have trouble with math, for instance, you don't want to tell the interviewer that you hate math or that you are really bad at it. Use this weakness to explain how you have learned to seek support in your academics for those subjects you are less confident with.



For **strengths**, remember there is a delicate line between bragging and a sense of pride. Be honest. In a nervous environment like an interview, being honest here can pay off. Prepare a list of a few strengths before the interview and consider how you have used them to accomplish any feat. For instance, if you choose persistence as your strength, be sure to have a story where your persistence paid off.



WHY OUR COLLEGE?

The **why our college** questions are meant to assess whether you think you are a good fit for the school and whether they agree. This is also an opportunity for the school to impress you, so don't be shy to ask questions about the school if an opportunity presents itself. Overall, you are most likely to hear questions like the following:

- **What do you bring to our campus and/or community?**
- **Why did you choose to apply to this school?**
- **How can X department/program help you to accomplish your academic goals?**

When they ask you how you can add to the community/campus, they want to see that you have thought of how your interests would lead to your involvement in student life. Would you join a club, fraternity, government? Would you like to find a research assistant internship in the science department? The interviewer can gauge a lot about how you view your future college experience with questions like these.

**MAKE SURE YOU HAVE
RESEARCHED WHAT THE
SCHOOL CAN OFFER YOU**

When you are asked why you applied to a school, make sure you have researched what the school can offer you. Certainly don't lead with "I like your basketball team" or "My cousin went here, so I thought I would too." Absolutely never say: "My boyfriend/girlfriend is applying here so I decided to join him/her." These examples are too superficial and don't give a clear enough picture as to why their school is the right fit for your academic pursuit. Do your research! Spend time on the school's website and the department websites. Look for specific accomplishments the school has made (research in an area you are interested in, publications) or accomplishments of alumni.

When asked to explain how their school can aid you in your academic goals, consider how their programs specifically would help. In other words, if the school offers internships, helps with job placements, or has an accomplished professor in the field, make sure to mention that.

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**WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO
YOU?**

The category of **what is important to you** is focused on simply getting to know you better and what you consider to be important in your life.

These questions can also range vastly from one to another:

- **What interests you? What/Who are your influences?**
- **What sort of activities do you enjoy or are the most rewarding to you?**
- **Name a book that you particularly like.**
- **What are your plans after graduating college?**

These questions aim to answer a bit more about who you are and who you want to be. Honesty is the key to these questions. To answer what interests you, prepare an honest answer. Often times the interviewer won't ask **who influences you** and then be satisfied with a one word answer. Prepare your rationale for the answers you give. If you answer that Madeleine Albright has influenced you to enter into politics – make sure you know why the first female Secretary of State specifically has encouraged you to do something.



**HONESTY
IS THE KEY TO
THE QUESTION**

When answering a question about your favorite or most rewarding activities, consider how this is an opportunity to stand out. If you find charity rewarding, for example, explain how it has influenced your decision making later on. If playing soccer is particularly rewarding, explain how.

For the famous **favorite book** question, make sure to answer with a book you have actually read. Once again, prepare a secondary answer

for why you think that book is so great. “I just really liked the story” or “Captain Ahab is just really cool” are insufficient answers. Consider the theme of the book you have chosen, and how that theme speaks to you and your interests. For example, if you were to choose the book *Persuasion*, by Jane Austen, you might explain how you enjoyed discovering how patience can manifest the greatest rewards in life.

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**WHAT KIND OF THINKER
ARE YOU?**

What kind of thinker are you questions are sort of a catch-all. These questions exist to see you “think on your feet,” as it were. Therefore, you might not be able to prepare for the exact question, but you can certainly strategize how not to answer these questions.

They can range from hypothetical situation/problem solving to specific real world topics and your opinions on them. Some examples might be the following:

- **If you could be mayor of your town for a day, what would you try to accomplish?**
- **What, specifically, is your opinion of requiring foreign language proficiency for college students?**
- **In your opinion, what can be done about failing schools in America? Or, how would you change your own high school for the better?**
- **If you were to witness a fellow student cheating on an exam, what steps would you take to remedy the situation?**

These questions are meant to throw a wrench your way and watch you react. Whatever you do, don't rush to answer the question. The interviewer will understand if you need a few seconds to consider your answer. The best way to prepare for these questions is to have a friend or parent prepare similar questions that you are not privy to. The unexpected questions will allow you to practice how you might react in similar circumstances.



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FINAL THOUGHTS

Overall, the lesson here with regard to college interviews is to prepare. Prepare answers to questions such as:

- **Tell me about yourself.**
- **What are your strengths and weaknesses?**
- **What adjectives best describe you?**
- **Why did you apply to this school?**
- **What do you bring to our campus or community?**
- **What interests you?**
- **What are your plans after graduating college?**
- **Who influences you?**
- **What kind of thinker are you?**

These are just a few questions that could possibly be asked during the interview. Consider each of these questions ahead of time so that you feel confident in your delivery later. Be sure to research the school in question! Also, ask a friend, parent or teacher to practice with you. Have them ask you a selection of these questions and practice using your answers. You might just get some valuable feedback!



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