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# College Interview Questions to Prepare For

Interview questions tend to focus on student interest, experience, academics and extracurriculars.

By Josh Moody, Reporter March 5, 2019, at 10:48 a.m.



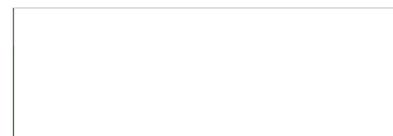
The college admissions interview is a balancing act of students learning more about the school and selling themselves. (GETTY IMAGES)

**FOR STUDENTS FEELING** the pressure of college admissions interviews, a little preparation can go a long way.

Experts say students should come into the interview with a sense of what they'll be asked and bring some questions of their own. This preparation allows the student a chance to impress the interviewer while also learning more about the institution and whether it might be a good fit. Students gain insight into the academic and social culture of colleges they're applying to while also allowing them to explain their interests and goals to the interviewers.

"A good interview is going to be a conversation. Let the conversation flow back and forth," says Eric Pedersen, chief enrollment officer at [Evergreen State College](#) in Washington.

At Evergreen, admissions interviews are optional but available by request. However, many colleges have done away with interviews, experts note. Students should check with individual schools to see if an interview is required as part of the admissions process.

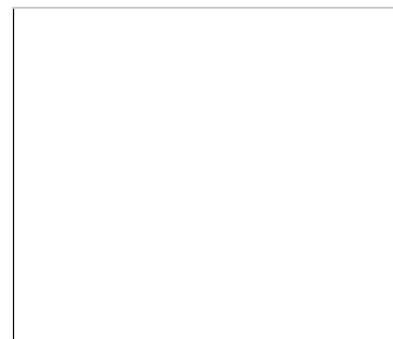


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College interview questions typically fall into several categories, says Sean Logan, dean of college counseling at Phillips Academy, a private high school in Andover, Massachusetts. According to Logan, an interviewer is likely going to ask students about their interest in the institution and why they want to attend the school, their academic and intellectual interests, extracurricular activities and "how they think on their feet."

[ **READ:** [Avoid These Top College Admissions Interview Mistakes.](#) ]



Below is a list of general interview questions U.S. News has compiled based on input from admissions officials and college counselors.

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**How will attending this institution help you reach your academic or career goals?**

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**What do you think are the benefits of an education from this school?**

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**Without telling me your GPA, what do your transcripts say about you as a student?**

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**Does your academic history reflect the type of student you hope to be at this school?**

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**If you could change one thing about your past education in high school or college, what would it be and why?**

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**What do you think is the most important thing to consider when deciding where to attend college?**

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**What kind of school are you looking for?**

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**What are you hoping to get out of your college experience?**

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**What are your academic interests or potential areas of study?**

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## What activities are you hoping to be involved in, either continuing from high school or trying new?

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The questions, experts say, are designed to help the college get a picture of who the student is, their interests and motivations.

At [Georgetown University](#) in the District of Columbia – where interviews are required – senior associate director of admissions Melissa Costanzi says, "Many times we learn things in interviews that we wouldn't have learned from anywhere else in the application ... We think a really important part of holistic admissions is to give the applicant the opportunity to tell his or her story." Holistic admissions refers to a review that incorporates academic and nonacademic factors to gauge an applicant's potential for success.

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## College Interviews Are Two-Way Conversations

The need for students to ask their own questions is among the college interview tips offered by admissions officials.

"It's not just the college interviewing the students, but the student has a chance to interview the admissions officer at the same time," says Tim Gallen, director of college counseling at Solebury School, a private school serving grades 8-12.

The questions, experts emphasize, should be specific and not something that can be answered easily by looking at the school's website. Students should ask about faculty teaching and mentoring, campus life on weekends, the largest classes they'll be in and average class size, successful alumni, [employment opportunities](#) at the school and in the community and other specific questions that help them to understand the institution.

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Experts say an interview is often a balancing act of students learning more information about the school and [selling themselves](#).

"Let your responses to the questions do most of the selling," Pedersen advises.

He also encourages students to take mental notes as they go and to make sure they are heard. "If the interviewer is talking too much, step up and get your voice in the conversation," Pedersen says.

[ [READ: 3 Ways Parents, Students Can Prepare for College Interviews Together.](#) ]

As far as general etiquette goes, experts encourage students to be punctual, well dressed, genuine, relaxed and courteous, and to answer questions thoughtfully and honestly. Costanzi also suggests students send a thank-you note to the interviewer afterward.

To prepare for an interview, Logan suggests students rehearse with friends or family so they have practice answering the questions out loud. He also encourages students to reflect deeply on their lives and academics in order to be able to accurately tell their story.

Pedersen says interviewers will notice if a student had a [bad academic year](#) in high school, so he or she should be prepared to discuss it.

When it comes to the interview, who students will be sitting across from varies by school. At Evergreen State College, for example, all interviews are done by admissions staff, while Georgetown deploys thousands of alumni. Other schools may use student interviewers.

[Alumni interviewers](#) may offer students an understanding of school culture based on their own experience while admissions pros can answer detailed questions, Costanzi says. One advantage of the alumni model, she adds, is that "we reach students all over the world."

Generally, interviews are conducted in person, though phone or video calls may be an option if the student is unable to travel to campus.

"I think the phone (interview) is a little more challenging, just because there isn't the face-to-face and you have to be a little more thoughtful about pacing," Logan says, urging students to carefully weigh how much time they should devote to their answers.

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[ [READ: Master the College Video Admissions Interview With These Tips.](#) ]

## How Important Are College Admissions Interviews?

The purpose of a college interview may also vary. For some schools, it's merely informational while at others it is evaluative.

"The interview can be one of many factors," Logan says, adding it is rarely a "high-pressure, high-stakes situation."

According to a [report](#) from the National Association for College Admission Counseling, only 3.6 percent of colleges surveyed agreed that interviews are of "considerable importance" while 53 percent of respondents declared those conversations to be of "no importance." Instead, the emphasis is placed on grades in all courses and in college prep courses, [admissions test scores](#) and high school rigor.

While counselors say an interview is unlikely to seriously boost an applicant's odds for admission, students should think of it as another data point colleges are collecting, particularly as some are putting [less emphasis](#) on SAT and ACT scores.

"I think that for some of the colleges, especially the ones that are downplaying the role of

standardized testing in the admissions process, that interview just becomes another facet that they consider when they're building their university community," Gallen says.

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## 10 Ways to Ace College Interviews



**Josh Moody, Reporter**

Josh Moody has covered college admissions and international education for U.S. News since 2018.... [READ MORE »](#)

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