

Graduate School Interviewing Tips

The following are tips offered to provide general guidance. For specific assistance interviewing or for a practice interview, meet with a Career Counselor.

Before the Interview

Research the school and program:

Become familiar with the program and faculty and use this information to sell yourself and demonstrate your fit/value in the interview. Utilize program websites and students of the program.

Know what you have to offer:

Do not simply memorize answers to endless interview questions. Rather, think about the qualities you want the program to know about you before you leave the interview. By determining how you will convey these points in a story you can tell, you will be more memorable and be able to answer almost any question that is asked in an interview. See the STAR Method handout in job search resources for additional help.

Graduate programs will ask questions to determine and explore your:

- **Career interests and preparation:** What path has lead you to them?
- **Skills and qualifications:** What evidence can you provide that you will be able to succeed in the program or profession?
- **Awareness of strengths and weaknesses:** Can you utilize your strengths and address your weaknesses?
- **Past experiences:** How do you like to work? What motivates you and has contributed to your successes? What do you do when results do not turn out as you planned?
- **Interpersonal fit and skill:** How do you communicate and what are your preferences when working with others? How have you addressed conflict in the past? Are you trainable?
- **Fit for program:** How do all of the above apply to the goals and nature of the program? Do your interests match those of faculty?

Practice:

Practice with a career counselor and/or other experienced (and successful) interviewers. Record yourself when practicing interview question so that you can see for yourself what you look like and sound like when interviewing.

Common interview questions, depending on type of program, can include:

- Why do you want to be a ____? / Why do you want to study ____?
- What attracts you to our program
- Will you tell us a little about yourself as a person?
- Which of our faculty members do you think you would work with and why?

- What are your future plans and goals? Where do you want to be in 10 years?
- What do you bring into the program? Our applicants have similar qualifications and experiences as you, what are your unique attributes?

Have questions that you want to ask:

Using your research about the program, prepare questions you wish to ask during the interview that will impact your decision to accept/decline a potential offer. Use these questions to demonstrate your interest in the program, your knowledge of opportunities offered, and your fit with faculty interests. Have questions prepared for both faculty as well as advanced graduate students. Example questions, depending on type of program, can include:

- I was excited to learn about ____ opportunity on your website. Can you tell me more about it?
- How common is it for students to be coauthors on peer-reviewed publications?
- When and how am I assigned an advisor?
- What types of research and teaching assistantships are available?
- How active is the Graduate Student Association?
- In your experience, what are the strengths and challenges of this program?
- In what type of settings do most of your graduates eventually find employment?

Ask about the interview process:

When scheduling the interview, ask about the interview process so you know what to expect. For onsite interviews, know exactly where you are going and who you will be meeting when you arrive.

Know how you would like to present yourself:

Your professional appearance matters. When applying for graduate school, it can be helpful to have professional attire prepared and ready to go.

- **Professional attire:** Dressing conservatively is often safest, especially when you are unsure of a program's culture. Generally, it is recommended that you wear neutral colors (navy, gray, black). Suit pants, skirts, and dresses should be neatly tailored and dress shirts and blouses should be ironed. Ties should be tied to hang at the tip of your belt buckle. Shoes should be polished and jewelry should not be distracting.
- **Grooming:** Hair should be trimmed or pulled away from the face, and nails should be neat. Be sparing with fragrances as some people are very sensitive to colognes and perfumes.

Travel arrangements:

Interviewing for graduate school often requires a great deal of travel. While preparing for interviews, you will simultaneously be making arrangements to travel to the interviews. The costs of travel vary widely, and it can be important to consider cost well ahead of applying. Costs can involve factors such as air travel, gas, rental cars, hotels, parking fees, etc. While some programs may reimburse for interview travel costs, many will not. Many programs may also extend an invitation to room with a graduate student in the program the night before the interview. This option may allow you to save money, acquire more information, and gain a sense of student life. If this is not an option or your preference is to stay in a hotel, attempt to find a safe, convenient location at a reasonable rate.

The Interview

What to take with you:

Bring extra resumes/CVs and portfolio (notepad and pen). You can write the questions you wish to ask about the program on your notepad and reference them at the end of the interview.

Arriving:

Arrive 5 to 10 minutes early. Allow enough time to take care of last minute details such as addressing parking, adjusting your clothing, combing your hair, etc.

Conducting yourself throughout the interview:

Be personable as well as professional. You should be polite and respectful with everyone you meet. Do not chew gum, smoke, swear, or use slang. Be aware of your body language and posture, and maintain appropriate eye contact during the interview. Feel free to ask for clarification before answering a question and do take some time to formulate your answers before you speak. Answer all questions honestly, but in the best, most positive light. Provide plenty of examples and tell a story in your responses.

Interview closure:

Indicate your interest in the program and always ask about next steps in the interview process so that you know how/when you will be notified about a decision. Remember to shake hands and thank interviewers at the end of the interview.

After the Interview

Follow-up:

Send a thank you note/email within 2 days of the interview, reiterating your interest in and fit for the program. Thank the interviewers for their time and opportunity. If you do not hear from the interviewers in the time frame that they indicated, feel free to contact them to check in. Do not ask for a decision but simply emphasize you are still interested.