GRADUATE SCHOOL INTERVIEWS

Graduate schools conduct interviews to evaluate a candidate’s academic preparation, related experience, personal qualities, communication skills, career goals and fit with their educational program. Interview formats vary, but usually include interviews with faculty, meetings with current students and student affairs staff, and tours of the facilities. It is critical to evaluate ahead of time what is most important for the interviewers to know about your background and preparation for graduate school, your experiences and your career goals.

Interviewers develop an impression of how you look, dress, speak, and act in order to provide their feedback to the admissions committee. You may increase your chances for interview success through preparation, reflection and evaluation. When preparing, keep in mind the skills and qualifications that schools are seeking in candidates. Practice talking about your skills, accomplishments and career goals. You need to inspire confidence in your ability and potential to be a successful student and to become a professional in this career field.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW: PREPARE AND PRACTICE

Schedule plenty of time to practice before interviews. Evaluate and know yourself.

- Practice describing your accomplishments, experience, education, skills, career goals...
- Review your written application – know it well and incorporate it into your verbal answers.
- Answering typical practice questions will help you to be ready for other possible questions.
- For each skill you have, prepare detailed examples of where you demonstrated that skill.
- Prepare to describe yourself and to state your value as a candidate. Why do you want to study this topic in graduate school? What are your abilities? How have you prepared?
- Practice answering interview questions out loud with someone else and in front of a mirror.
- Use a web cam to practice with hundreds of interview questions on UA Interview Prep: http://www.career.arizona.edu/student/jobs-and-interviewing/ua-interview-prep
- Career Services provides individual mock interviews and career counseling by appointment.

Research schools and current issues in the related career field.

- Conduct your research to develop questions you will ask about the school during interviews.
- Research every school you are applying to: curriculum, faculty, resources, size, facilities, rankings, student services, specializations, history, reputation, location, costs...
- Be prepared to speak about specific reasons for why you want to attend a particular school.
- When possible, talk to faculty, current students, and admissions staff.
- Learn about the research focus and career field specialization of faculty
- Keep up with and practice discussing current topics and issues in your career field.
DURING THE INTERVIEW: PRESENTATION AND PERFORMANCE

You must articulate your preparation for graduate study, academic ability, and motivation for their program. Be honest, sincere, confident, and positive.

Arrive early, check in and wait for your interviewer.
- Your body language, facial expressions, poise, mannerisms, clothes, grooming, and overall presentation and appearance are being evaluated during an interview.
- Turn cell phones off throughout interview (don’t text in the lobby or waiting area).
- When called, stand up, smile, offer a handshake and greet your interviewer by their formal name. (“Good morning Dr. Rose. I am Zoe Wildcat and it is a pleasure to meet you.”)
- Be poised, listen attentively and be aware of your body language: maintain eye contact, nod your head appropriately, sit up straight, unfold your arms, lean forward. Be expressive.
- Avoid distracting hand movements, squirming in chair, and touching your face or hair.

Listen attentively. Be concise, to the point, and answer the question that is being asked.
- Provide detailed answers and specific examples - avoid yes and no responses.
- Demonstrate knowledge of yourself and your interest in their particular school.
- Give specific examples of past situations where you demonstrated the skills and desired behavioral competencies required for this type of graduate program and related career.
- Be confident, honest, friendly, cooperative, enthusiastic, positive and professional.
- Speak clearly and concisely. Use proper grammar and professional language.
- Avoid saying filler phrases: um, uh, like, you know, in other words, to be honest with you...

Ask quality questions (prepare at least 10 questions in advance that you might ask).
- Decide what you want to know and what you will ask before you go to your interview.
- Possible topics to ask your interviewers about include: curriculum, faculty, staff, rotations, student support services, research, evaluations, facilities, funding and research grants, resources available for students, and the interviewer’s background.

Thank the interviewer(s) at the end.
- Express your appreciation for the interview and summarize your skills.
- State your interest in being admitted, stand up and say thank you as you shake hands.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW: REFLECTION AND EVALUATION

Keep written notes of all of your interviews. Who interviewed you, when, what was discussed...
Evaluate your performance to determine your interviewing strengths and weaknesses.
- How did the interview go? Did you highlight your education, experience, and skills?
- Did you ask good questions to show interest in and knowledge of the school?
- Did you support your skills and accomplishments with specific examples?
- Closed interview well with a short summary of skills? Stated interest in school and said thank you?
- After interview, made detailed notes of questions you were asked and everything discussed?
- What worked well for you?
- How could you improve your preparation for and performance during your next interview?
WHAT WILL INTERVIEWERS ASK YOU?

Interviewers ask questions to assess your educational preparation, relevant skills, work experience, campus involvement and personal characteristics. No two interviews will be the same, although preparing for common interview questions may help you to learn to focus your answers on the information most important for you to convey. Practice describing your related background, why you want to go to graduate school, and your career intentions. You must inspire confidence in your ability and motivation to be a successful student and career professional.

Skills and topics interviewers question students about:
- excellent academic record and related experience
- communication skills: verbal and written, listening, conversational ability to articulate ideas
- professionalism, character, integrity, maturity, flexibility, ethical decision-making and behavior
- logic, critical thinking, analytical reasoning, problem solving, accepting feedback
- teamwork and interpersonal skills: able to get along with and work well with others
- time, stress, change and project management
- sensitivity to studying with, working with and serving diverse populations
- knowledge of and ability to speak about issues and current trends in your career field
- knowledge of school’s curriculum, faculty, specialties, research, student resources, etc.
- knowledge of the research and expertise of faculty in their program

ASSESS YOUR SKILLS

Identifying your skills will help you prepare for the questions of admissions interviewers. Describe your experiences, skills, knowledge and qualifications as they relate to the program you are interviewing for now. Analyze the skills and qualifications the schools are seeking and prepare to talk about how and where you have demonstrated the required skills, strengths, competencies and characteristics through your education and experiences. Focus on measurable skills and specific examples where you can cite evidence of your skills and knowledge using STAR.

STAR: skills focused approach to answering interview questions
- Recall 10 successful experiences where you liked what you did and you did it well.
- Identify 10 challenging experiences where things did not go as planned or you were not pleased with your performance or the outcome.
- Use various situations to describe your experiences from college, jobs, internships, community service, campus activities, student involvement, class projects, teamwork, research, labs, volunteer roles, leadership roles, committees, hospitals, clinics, clubs, etc...
- Evaluate the skills you used and how you were effective during each experience.
- A strong story demonstrates use of multiple skills in one situation.
- Practice telling detailed stories about your experiences, describing:

 Situation: challenges, problems, concerns, issues, conflicts
 Tasks: your responsibilities and role in the situation
 Actions: your behaviors, focusing on skills and competencies you used
 Results: outcomes, accomplishments, what you contributed, how you were effective

Create a list of your top 10 skills with at least two situations where you demonstrated each skill, using the STAR method to describe what you did and how you were effective in 20 varied situations.

Skill: ______
Situation: __________________________________________
Tasks: __________________________________________
Actions: __________________________________________
Results: __________________________________________
INTERVIEW PRACTICE QUESTIONS

You need to inspire confidence in your ability to succeed in graduate school. Keep in mind the skills and qualifications that schools are seeking in candidates. You communicated your skills, qualifications and motivations in your application to get invited to an interview. Now you must present your case verbally and communicate why you believe you are a qualified candidate for this program and the related profession. Before every interview, practice talking about your motivation, influences, skills, accomplishments, and career goals.

- What areas of graduate study are you considering?
- Describe how your education and experience has prepared you for graduate studies.
- What are your career intentions?
- What is your experience outside the classroom in this field?
- What are your research interests? Describe your research experience.
- Describe your career related work experiences.
- What skills have you developed relevant to this career field?
- What challenges do you think you will face during graduate school?
- What criteria are you considering in selecting a graduate program?
- Tell me about your involvement on campus or in your community as an undergraduate student. What was your role and contribution?
- What career goals do you have for after graduate school?
- What do you hope to do after completing your graduate degree?
- Why are you interested in this program? What would you bring to this program?
- Why do you believe the admissions committee should select you?
- What will you do if you do not get into graduate school? What is your second career choice?
- What factors or individuals have influenced your decision to attend graduate school?
- How did you choose your undergraduate school and your major?
- Explain the discrepancy between your grades and your admissions test scores.
- Describe your greatest strengths and skills. Give me detailed examples of each one.
- Describe what you are doing to improve two of your weaknesses. Be specific.
- Are you applying to other professional schools?
- What criteria are you using to evaluate potential graduate schools?
- Why do you want to go to this school? What do you know about this school?
- What other schools have you applied to? What’s your first choice and why?
- If you observed a fellow student cheating, what would you do? Why does academic integrity matter?
- What regrets do you have about your college education and experience up until now?
- What do you consider to be some of the most pressing issues in this career field today?
- What resources do you read and use to keep current in your field?
- Do you have any questions you would like to ask? (always have questions to ask in interviews)
- Is there anything else you want to tell me and the admissions committee?
- Why should we admit you? What makes you a strong candidate for this graduate program?
- What accomplishments and achievements are you most proud of during college?
BEHAVIORAL-BASED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Behavioral-based interviews involve questions asking you for examples of past situations demonstrating you have the skills, competencies and work behaviors a graduate school in candidates. Interviewers want examples of past situations with positive or negative results where you can describe the situation, what you did, challenges you faced, and the outcome.

This popular interview questioning style focuses on evaluating past behaviors to predict future behaviors and your potential for success. Identify specific situations where you demonstrated the required competencies, skills and qualifications required for admissions. Give examples of your past situations using the **STAR Approach** to tell your story by describing the:

- **Situation**: challenges, problems, concerns, issues, conflicts
- **Tasks**: your responsibilities and role in the situation
- **Actions**: focusing on your behavior and the skills you used
- **Results**: outcomes, accomplishments, what you contributed, how you were effective

- Describe an accomplishment. What did you do to make that happen? Be specific.
- Tell me about a time you performed well in a stressful situation. What did you do?
- Tell me about a time when you were (or you were not) satisfied with your performance.
- Tell me about a time you believe you made a difference. What did you do?
- Describe a problem you had in a work setting. How did you go about solving it?
- Describe when you worked as a member of a team. What was your contribution?
- Describe your biggest challenge in preparing for graduate school. How did you overcome it?
- Describe a time when you volunteered. Describe your role. What did you contribute?
- Tell me about a situation when you were part of a team and a team member was not performing their role as expected. What did you do? What were the results?
- Describe a time you successfully managed multiple tasks. How did you prioritize?
- Describe a recent problem you attempted to solve using a systematic and logical process.
- Tell me how you handled a conflict with a co-worker. What did you learn from that?
- Tell me about a weakness you used to have. What did you do to improve that skill?
- Describe a time when you did (or did not) perform well in a stressful situation.
- Tell me about a time when you made suggestions for improving a process or procedure.
- Tell me what you did in your most recent volunteer experience to be effective. What challenges did you have to overcome? What did you contribute? What did you learn?
- Tell me about a time when you took the initiative and went beyond what was expected of you in order to complete a work project or class assignment.
- Tell me about a time when you utilized good listening skills and empathy.
- Describe a time when you effectively interacted with people from diverse backgrounds. What were the challenges you encountered and how did you handle them?
- Give me an example of a time you had to make an ethical decision.
PROFESSIONAL APPEARANCE COUNTS! DRESS UP!

It is always better to be conservative and overdressed than underdressed in admissions interviews. You will always be safe in a professional suit. Classic cut matching suits and shined shoes are recommended for men and women.

✓ Dress conservatively in dark colors such as navy blue and dark gray.
✓ Choose natural suit fabrics that don’t wrinkle – preferably wool gabardine.
✓ Wear minimal jewelry. Have neat hair and clean fingernails.
✓ Prepare in advance – avoid last minute shopping in case you need time for alterations.
✓ Try on your suit before the interview to be sure it fits and makes you look professional.
✓ Avoid sandals, spiked heels, tank tops, bare legs, white socks...
✓ Be well groomed, use deodorant but not cologne or perfume. Avoid garlic. Carry breath mints.
✓ Bring resumes, transcripts, lists of references, applications and any other documents related to your interview in a dark leather portfolio with paper for notes and a nice pen.
✓ If interviewing in the winter on the east coast, you may need an overcoat.
✓ If you are traveling to interviews, pack light. Carry your suit in a small carry on sized suitcase or garment bag – don’t check your bags and risk losing a suitcase when flying to your interviews.

WOMEN

• Wear a navy blue or dark gray matching suit in a color and fit that complements your body type.
• Skirted suits are considered the most formal, but pantsuits are accepted for most professions.
• Skirts should be about knee length (not too short – no thigh showing when you’re sitting).
• Wear long sleeved, ironed blouse in white or neutral color.
• Sleeveless and low necklines are not professional - no armpits or cleavage please!
• Wear low heeled, closed-toe and closed-heel leather pumps and hose with skirted suits.
• Wear flat or low-heeled, closed-toe leather shoes with a pantsuit.
• Black or navy blue polished shoes - complementary to suit color.
• Do not wear open toe or open heel shoes, sandals, spiked heels, or bare legs with a suit.
• Wear hose neutral in color or matching the color of your suit, free of runs or snags.
• Only use light make-up. Make sure fingernails are clean - avoid flashy nail polish colors.
• Have well groomed hair pulled away from your face so you won’t touch it when you talk.

MEN

• Wear dark matching suits in navy blue or dark gray solid color or thin pinstripes.
• Single-breasted jackets are more common than double-breasted.
• Find a great fit that complements your body type.
• Long-sleeved, ironed white cotton shirts, with cuff extending ¾” below the jacket sleeve.
• Wear a plain white t-shirt under your button down dress shirt - especially if you tend to sweat.
• Conservative silk ties should complement suit and be as wide as your lapels (2¾” to 3½”).
• Bottom tip of your tie should land in the middle of your belt when you are standing.
• Black shined leather shoes with black leather belt.
• Dark socks long enough that skin does not show when sitting with legs crossed.
• Well-groomed hair. Make sure your nails are clean and manicured.
• Be clean shaven or have your beard and mustache neatly trimmed.