

PROBABLE GRADUATE ADMISSIONS INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

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This article was published by Advising Quarterly, AMIDEAST,
<http://www.advisingquarterly.org>

Being prepared for questions that may appear during the admissions interview can be very important and reassuring during this stressful stage of the admission process. The information given here is based upon the writer's personal experiences with the interview process and from a poll of interview takers visiting the office. The suggestions below the questions are not necessarily to be followed precisely—honesty in responses is the most important consideration.

Interview Format

Usually interviews are scheduled to take twenty to thirty minutes, but they may extend to forty minutes or even an hour. In the beginning, the interviewer, who is typically the professor of your chosen department, will welcome you and check your name. It is not necessary to introduce yourself at length, especially as you can expect many questions asking you to describe yourself during the interview.

Normally, the professor questions first, letting you ask questions at the end of the conversation. It would be a good idea to prepare in advance one or two questions that indeed interest you about the program or institution. However, any questions should be well-grounded in information from the materials issued by the university. The department will expect applicants to have scrutinized such materials closely. As one Internet site on admission interviews puts it—“Don't ask things that are on the first page of the catalog.” If your questions seem weak to you, it's better not to ask them.

The Most Likely Questions

What are you doing now?

Describe your occupation and the ways in which it is relevant to your chosen field of study. If your current employment is not particularly relevant to your academic plans, do not linger in discussing it but go swiftly on to and emphasize your extracurricular activities, which *must* relate to your planned study if your current occupation does not.

If what you say can draw the interest of the interviewer, most of the rest of the interview may be based upon what you have already said. That can eliminate the formality of the interview structure, allowing you to discuss more naturally what you have done.

What is the greatest challenge in your field of study (in your country)?

What do you believe to be root problems in your chosen field? Or, what do you believe to be the weakest point in current approaches to problems? Review such elements in advance, grounding your opinion with facts. It is good if you have a potential solution of your own to discuss. Maybe such problems relate to what you see as your own personal challenge in your field (which you may also be questioned about specifically)—also define your personal challenges for yourself and be sure to discuss them at the interview.

What disciplines in our curriculum are the most appealing to you?

You have to know details on the institution's curriculum before the interview (and you had *better* have them before writing your personal statement). It is understood that you will be familiar with the curriculum from the materials that you have been provided with by the university.

Choose three (the number usually asked) areas most attractive to you among the courses. Preferably, choose areas from the core or major areas of concentration (not those from the introductory term or those weakly related to the field's stem). Be prepared to explain your choices.

More Questions

Are you ready for multinational (or overseas or cross-cultural) study?

In answering, discuss any multinational experiences that you have had. It is odd, but, in fact, the multinational environment is impossible to escape. Many ethnic groups contribute to each of our societies. Some of these groups preserve their genuine culture or at least its remnants. If you do not have international experience, you may connect the everyday life experience of interaction with the representatives of such groups with your preparation for living in a multinational environment. Also, you can discuss your tolerance towards other nationalities whether based on an abstract understanding or on actual experience socializing with other ethnic groups. You should not have to consider tolerance towards you or be worried this as an issue for the interview since fostering tolerant academic environment is a general policy of U.S. universities.

Recollect any experience of living in an environment distinct from your usual one. You may have traveled abroad or even visited regions of your own country with distinct culture or languages. Explain such experiences in a positive way, illustrating your adjustment to such environments. Perhaps you may love traveling and learning about other cultures or languages. Discuss this point in answering this question.

What do you expect to gain from these studies?

This question should have been answered in your personal statement essay. Recall the information from your essay, summarize it, and add what you think is necessary. Review what the program offers you. Analyze why you have decided to apply to this program.

What skills do you expect to apply to these studies?

Again, you may have covered this question in your essay. If you have, update your response and rework it for oral presentation. If you have not, consider the skills you have. Your résumé, recommendations (if you know the information in them), and your own knowledge of your academic and personal strengths may assist you. Decide which of your abilities are particularly applicable for this particular program and emphasize them.

What specific interest do you have within your field of study? (Or, What is the probable topic of the research you hope to conduct at the university?)

Another personal essay item—you must be aware of a particular issue within your field that stimulates you and is worthy of revealing in a subsequent thesis (assuming the program requires a thesis). The topic you choose during the interview doesn't have to be your final decision. It may be changed or elaborated on later. Making a statement simply shows your involvement and interest in the field.

What research have you carried out previously?

List any research you have previously conducted, whether at your university or for an article or other project. Emphasize research relevant to the field of application. If you have done a good deal of research relevant to the field, focus on the projects most relevant to the particular program.

Why have you changed your specialty (if you have)?

Consider in advance whether your switch was based on larger societal issues or on some personal experience that awakened your interest in a new topic. Or perhaps you changed your area of study because of recent professional experiences—now you are striving to gain academic knowledge to match what you learned in the “real world.” Any of these reasons is fine, but be ready to explain and justify why you are making the change, and to show a realistic grasp of what your new specialty involves.

Why have you decided to continue your education?

To answer, consider what reasons brought you to undertake this educational endeavor. They will vary according to your particular situation: further education may develop your professionalism, bring new opportunities, help implement specific plans, lead to a scholarly career, and so forth.

Why have you decided to apply to this university (to this particular program)?

Again, this question should have been answered in your statement essay. To reply, consider the program’s significant emphases and unusual strengths. Materials issued by the university usually emphasize such areas. Pick relevant strengths and/or special research opportunities and resources out and discuss these in your own words.

Can you discuss [a specific issue within your field]?

Be ready to answer questions about specifics concerning your field. For example, you may be asked to name some organizations in your field in your home country. Or you may be offered the chance to express your feelings about a world event world that affects issues in your field. Or you may be asked to discuss a few major problems in your field in your country. You must be well-informed about the state of your chosen specialty to show the seriousness of your application.

Most Difficult—Be Bold

In fact it is not the questions but rather finding opportunities to represent yourself fully that is the greatest challenge. Usually the interviewer will invite you to be bold in recommending yourself for the program by outlining your positive qualities and aptitudes in a persuasive manner. Recall the information you gave in your essay and/or in your résumé. Explain what you are able to contribute to the program (which may mean sharing information from your practical experience, your active participation in social activities, or other facets of your life). You may want to review such achievements as your TOEFL score (if it is high), but keep such recounting of facts brief (the basics should be known already by your interviewer). If you have a response you know will be unexpected, or an unusual situation to discuss, it is difficult to know what impact it might make, negative or positive. Both outcomes are possible—you can only consider your presentation carefully and hope that the interviewer may appreciate your honesty, frankness, and independence of thinking.

Other Possible Questions

Here are a few last questions that interviewers have been known to pose. Consider in advance what answer you will give if asked. Choose a response that is both honest and reflects well on you.

- What have you published related to your field?

- Where do you see yourself in the next five (or ten) years?
- What would you say about your country to a person who has no idea of it?
- Can you give examples of past problems in your life and how you have resolved them?
- What books have you read (or are you reading currently)?
- What do you do with your spare time?