

# INTERVIEWING FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL AND PROFESSIONAL PROGRAMS

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*"The real art of conversation is not only to say the right thing in the right place, but to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment."* Dorothy Nevill

Congratulations! You have written an outstanding personal statement, gathered strong letters of recommendation, achieved a good GPA, and scored well on your admission test. Now all that stands between you and entrance into the graduate school or professional program of your choice is the interview. While not all programs include interviewing as part of their admission process, some rely heavily on the interview to aid their selection process.

## Three Fundamental Questions

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To prepare, ask yourself three fundamental questions prior to the interview: Why me? Why here? Why now? By answering these questions you will demonstrate a clear sense of self-awareness, a firm grasp on the profession for which the program is preparing you, and a readiness to enter the program at this time.

### Why me?

What sets you apart from other qualified candidates? Review your personal statement or narrative portion of your application. Many times these documents generate more personalized questions. Be ready to support what your personal statement says and anticipate follow-up questions.

Prior to the interview compile a list of qualities summarizing your outstanding traits. Decide how you want to be remembered after the interview and then show these memorable qualities in well-illustrated, memorable messages. To determine these themes take an honest look at your abilities, values, passions, motives, attitudes, and goals.

Many admissions professionals use behavior-based interview questions built on the assumption that past behavior is the best indicator of future behavior. Behavior-based questions solicit answers about real life experience. Prepare by collecting several stories that illustrate your themes. Compelling narratives can define and distinguish applicants.

### Why here?

What is it about this particular program that sets it apart from others? Build on your initial research to determine the underlying theory and actual practice of the program. What's distinctive about their mission? Is there an internship or fieldwork component?

What is their reputation in the community? As you conduct your research, keep a list of questions that arise and bring these to the interview.

Review publications produced by your target school such as brochures, department web sites, school catalogs, schedules, student newspapers, and recruiting videos. How do they describe their institution? Where do graduates of the program work? Locate external sources to learn what third party observers have to say about the program noting important trends. Visit affiliated professional associations or society web sites. Check out local and national trade publications and journals. What technological or political developments could impact the program, profession, or industry?

Talk to students and alumni of the program. Ask friends, family and professors if they have any associates who attended your target school. Request the names of program graduates in your area from the admission staff. By developing a broad knowledge base you will be prepared to discuss a wide range of issues and concerns in an informed thoughtful manner.

### **Why now?**

What examples can you site that underscore your readiness to enter the program at this time? Be ready to provide examples of your competency to complete coursework, your compatibility with their learning community and your character. Include evidence demonstrating your academic readiness by reviewing your undergraduate class syllabi and/or class descriptions and projects. Draw specific examples to show you are prepared to commit to a challenging program.

Many admission committees are concerned with issues of character. Your success or failure as a student and professional reflects upon their institution. Their concerns go beyond simple program completion. Will you bring distinction or disrepute on the school as a graduate? To assuage their concerns, describe accomplishments and responsibilities in work, volunteer, and leadership settings that provide evidence of positive character traits such as honesty, trustworthiness and dedication.

Practice possible responses, but don't memorize pat answers. There are dangers of pre-recorded responses. First, you can't memorize all possible answers. Second, it's easy to press "play" and answer a question that was not asked. Third, memorized answers can sound rehearsed, slick or phony. Finally, pre-recorded answers can be easily forgotten. Sharing your themes and stories within a natural conversation rather than delivering a rehearsed monologue is the better strategy.

Use a variety of techniques to improve your interviewing skills: write out themes and stories, practice by using a mirror, videotape, tape recorder or mock interview with a friend or family member. Most career center's offer mock interviews and are prepared to coach and encourage students in the process.

Effective interviewing requires a set of skills: listening intently, forming thoughtful responses, and relating to others. Like any skill, the more you practice the more proficient and comfortable you become. The goal is to do the mental homework prior to the interview so that you can demonstrate with confidence, enthusiasm and passion, "I am ready for this program!"

## POSSIBLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

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### Why me?

1. What are your strengths/weaknesses?
2. Tell me about yourself?
3. Why did you choose your major?
4. Describe a time you worked with a difficult person. \*
5. What do you do in your spare time?
6. What three adjectives best describe you?

### Why here?

1. What other schools are you applying to?
2. Describe and give an example of your learning style. \*
3. Why do you want to go here?
4. Are you interested in any specialties?
5. What issues do you see as impacting this profession?
6. Give an example of the role you play as part of a team. \*

### Why now? Category

1. What coursework has prepared you for this program?
2. When did you decide to become a doctor/lawyer/etc.?
3. Do you feel well prepared to enter medical school/law school/etc.?
4. What do you see yourself doing in five/ten/twenty years from now?
5. What do you see as the weakest part of your application?
6. What will you do if you don't get into this program?

\* Indicates behavior-based questions.