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## *Undergraduate Interviews*

[Home](#)

**Law School  
Admission  
(JD)**

**Personal  
Statements**

[Writing Tips &  
Strategies](#)  
[Editing Service](#)  
[Custom Writing  
Service](#)  
[Purchase Essay  
Packages](#)

**Reference  
Letters**

[Getting Great  
Letters](#)  
[Custom Writing](#)

Unlike Ivy League programs in business and medicine, for which admissions interviews are mandatory, undergraduate committees differ in their use of the interview in the selection process:

1. Some require a personal interview and have representatives available to meet with candidates in cities throughout the United States.
2. Others do not require interviews and leave it to the applicant's discretion.
3. A final group of schools offer interviews selectively: only to certain applicants and only at the school's request.

If possible, always try to interview at the schools you wish to attend. Use the opportunity to personalize the application process and convince the committee that you have a unique contribution to make to the class.

Schools that require interviews have three goals:

- a) to assess the overall "marketability" of each candidate

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Guide](#)

## **Law School Admissions Guide**

[Admission Tips  
Interview Skills  
Waitlist Strategies  
& Services](#)

## **Business School Admission (MBA)**

### **Essays**

[Writing Tips &  
Strategies  
Editing Service  
Custom Writing  
Service  
Purchase Essay  
Packages](#)

### **Reference Letters**

[Getting Great  
Letters  
Custom Writing](#)

- b) to aggressively recruit the truly outstanding candidates away from competitive schools
- c) to market and promote their own programs

Those who are invited for a personal visit can be assured that they are "in the running" for admission, having demonstrated the academic prowess that is required for college. The interview allows the school to determine whether your interpersonal skills are as stellar as your academic ones.

How can an interview help? The applicant pool for Ivy League schools is filled with thousands of candidates who all look great on paper. They have perfect grades and SAT scores, along with impressive achievements in extracurricular activities. We know that most of them can handle the rigor of a top program and build a successful career after graduation.

But we are seeking only the BEST candidates: those dynamic individuals who possess that rare balance of academic prowess and interpersonal strengths to become an effective leader. We value many traits beyond what is on your application, including integrity, maturity, creativity and passion. An interview is your opportunity to distinguish yourself from the pack and demonstrate your full potential.

Applicants are often stunned to learn that the interview can be weighted as high as 20% in the formula used to rank applicants. Some feel this is unfair because an hour-long interview doesn't adequately reflect their potential for scholastic success. How can a short meeting be weighed the same as four years of academic achievement? Quite simply, the interview isn't ABOUT academic ability; it's about whether you have the non-academic strengths to make a unique contribution to the class.

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[Reference Letter](#)

[Guide](#)

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[Admission Tips](#)

[Interview Skills](#)

[Mock Interview](#)

[Service](#)

[Waitlist Strategies](#)

[& Services](#)

[GMAT](#)

[Preparation](#)

## **Medical School Admission (MD)**

### **Personal Statements**

[Writing Tips &](#)

[Strategies](#)

[Editing Service](#)

[Custom Writing](#)

[Service](#)

[Purchase Essay](#)

[Packages](#)

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The interview is an opportunity for the school to question you about your application, your autobiographical sketch or any issues on your transcripts or SAT scores. But it is primarily a tool for the schools to identify exceptional candidates whose talents are not reflected by their GPA or test scores. Your interviewer wants to learn what you are like as a person and how well you respond and communicate. They want to understand your values, how you think and how well you handle yourself under pressure. The school is committed to admitting students who are able to handle the stress and rigors of Ivy League school on an academic, personal, physical and psychological basis.

We are also committed to diversity. In every class, the school desires a healthy balance between students whose strengths are strictly academic and those who bring other unique talents to the table. We seek talented dancers, pianists, artists and athletes, along with future doctors, lawyers and news anchors. We seek students of different races, religions and ethnicities, who are willing to share their unique perspective with their classmates. The Ivy League's reputation is partially based on this richness and diversity. We want mature students who will eagerly contribute to their class. Your interview is your opportunity to convince them that you are up to the challenge.

### **A Profile of Successful Applicants**

Our interview questions are designed to identify your strengths and weaknesses for all of these criteria. We particularly probe the following five areas:

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[Admission Tips](#)  
[Interview Skills](#)  
[Mock Interview Service](#)  
[Waitlist Strategies & Services](#)

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[Editing Service](#)  
[Custom Writing Service](#)  
[Purchase Essay Packages](#)  
[Scholarship Essays](#)

**a) Academic Excellence.** We seek students who have accepted the challenge of AP classes and the most demanding programs available to them. We want to make sure they are aware of the exhaustive commitment that is required to succeed at an Ivy League school.

**b) Demonstrated Excellence in Activities outside the Classroom.** Be prepared to discuss the talents you've developed outside school, including athletics, debate, musical or artistic endeavors. We are also highly impressed by applicants who have worked during their high school years and during the summer. All of these experiences demonstrate motivation and achievement.

**c) Personality.** Our best students must have the ability to communicate clearly, handle complex issues, manage stress and successfully interact with people from all walks of life. Be prepared to demonstrate that you are a happy, healthy, well-adjusted person with a strong commitment to leadership.

**d) Motivation.** For too many years, applicants flooded Ivy League schools because they wanted to make the "big bucks". Others were pushed into applying by well-meaning parents who were also successful alumni. Neither motivation is adequate during difficult times if your heart is not truly committed to the school. Ivy League schools carefully screen out applicants who are unable to clearly articulate why they want to attend our school and what contribution they hope to make during their tenure. Be prepared to discuss your specific interest in our school and to demonstrate your suitability for our culture.

**e) Balance.** We seek applicants who are well-rounded and well-adjusted. There's nothing more disheartening

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[Purchase Letter  
Packages](#)

**Undergraduate  
Admissions  
Guide**

[Admission Tips](#)  
[Interview Skills](#)  
[Waitlist Strategies  
& Services](#)

**[SAT Preparation](#)****Resume Center**

[General Tips](#)  
[Organization](#)  
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than an applicant who looks great on paper who can only talk about their grades. There's much more to life and the Ivy League than memorizing and regurgitating facts. Successful applicants are animated, full of life, with enthusiasm for their family, friends and the world around them. This is reflected through knowledge of current events, sustained interest in hobbies and outside interests and a strong interactive role in their communities.

**Interview Preparation**

Some schools offer applicants the chance to interview with admissions reps at regional locations throughout the US. The interviewer is usually an admissions committee member who travels throughout the country or an alumni of the school who lives nearby. The benefit of a remote interview is that the candidate does not have to invest the time and money in a visit to the school. Unfortunately, we feel the drawbacks of regional interviews outweigh this financial advantage. Whenever possible, plan to visit the school for the full tour and series of on-site interviews.

A school visit is your best opportunity to see the facility, interact with faculty and students and impress multiple members of an admissions committee. You will see first-hand whether this is the right place for you and whether you will fit in. Being on campus also allows for a natural conversational flow about the program, equipment, class size, resources, etc., that is hard to establish off-site.

Once you have been invited for the interview, here are the important steps to take in preparation:

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a) Confirm your interview via telephone and make sure you have proper directions

b) Confirm exactly who you will be speaking with and their professional titles. This will allow you to research their background and specialty area, which they will likely enjoy talking about. Be prepared for questions about the interviewer's specific area of interest.

Try to identify free blocks of time in your interview schedule to see the library, the computer area and classrooms. The interview is a two-way street, and you should invest every available minute checking out the school to determine if it is the right place for you. Plan to tour the town after the interview to get a feel for housing, recreation and living costs. If you are accepted, you want to know right away whether this is a good school for you.

c) A week or so before the interview, send a copy of your resume to each person you are scheduled to meet. Bring along another copy with you to give to each person on the day of the interview. This can be a godsend if your file gets lost or if you are unexpectedly sent to interview with someone you didn't expect.

d) Arrive at the interview on time and properly dressed. For this occasion, conservative is best. The ONLY acceptable attire is a formal suit for both men and women, well-fitted and in a conservative color. Make sure your clothes are clean, neat and pressed and that your grooming is exceptional. For women, this means well-styled hair, no excessive perfume, makeup or jewelry. For men, wear a conservative tie, dress shoes and no jewelry other than a watch and wedding ring.

This may seem obvious, but we have seen many otherwise qualified candidates blow their chance for admission by wearing ridiculous clothing to the interview. We've seen short skirts, purple hair and sandals in the middle of winter. My last applicant had two visible tattoos and several body piercings in places I didn't know could be hygienically pierced. From the moment he walked in the door, regardless of what he had to say, I couldn't get past his own immaturity and poor judgment.

d) Review as much information as possible on your formal application. Your interviewers will review your file before speaking with you and jot down notes for possible interview questions. Re-familiarize yourself with your grades, essays and research topics so they will be fresh in your mind before the interview. At the very least, be prepared to discuss your three most significant:

- i) accomplishments and what they mean to you
- ii) personal attributes of which you are most proud
- iii) abilities that will make you a campus leader

Whenever possible, incorporate these strengths into your answers. Also be prepared to discuss your weaknesses. Most applicants naively think that they don't have any shortcomings and are blindsided by these questions. Although it's difficult to talk about possible deficiencies, your job at the interview is to recognize questionable points in your background and to discuss them confidently and directly.

e) Learn as much as possible about the particular college and its program. The more information you have, the better you can anticipate typical questions and ask intelligent ones yourself. Be ready for the inevitable questions about why you want to attend that

particular college. Don't say something lame like it's location or low tuition; you'll sound limited and shallow. Focus instead on the school's excellent faculty and their reputation for finance. Know what areas of research they are famous for and the companies that employ their graduates. Read every bit of material you can find about the particular school and be prepared to customize your answers to reflect its strengths.

### **What You'll Be Asked**

You should be prepared for these potential areas of questioning:

- \* your childhood, personality, family, school, hobbies, sports and outside interests
- \* your professional experience and motivation to enroll in college
- \* your career goals and interests

Be prepared for a wide range of questions, from casual inquiries about your family to probing questions about ethical/legal issues. Also be prepared for general questions about current events and items of interest in popular culture. Nothing is more disheartening than interviewing an "academic genius" who doesn't know who the Vice-President is.

### **Tips to Asking & Answering Questions Effectively**

1) Keep your answers short, but informative. Be prepared to offer a 4 to 6 line answer to every question. This is enough to share a few thoughts and to stimulate further discussion if the interviewer desires. Try to avoid simple yes and no answers or



responding in monosyllables. Show interest in the questions and sincere thought in your responses.

2) Avoid sounding self-centered. Cite your achievements, but demonstrate an appropriate level of humility. When discussing professional accomplishments, acknowledge the help and support of your teammates, mentors, teachers and role models.

3) Don't reveal insecurities. Accentuate the positive and don't dwell on the weaknesses in your background or application. Don't give any indication that you aren't willing and able to meet the rigors of college. Your job on the interview is to convince them you are the right candidate: they won't believe it if you don't sound sure of yourself.

4) Watch your tone. You may be asked a few stressor questions that are designed to test your ability to handle conflict. Don't get defensive. Your tone can be revealed in both the words you choose and your voice. Practice responding to difficult questions with a friend before the big day. It will help.

5) Listen carefully to the interviewer, no matter how nervous you are. Too many candidates ask questions at the end of their interviews on topics that we've already covered. Although you'll be stressed during the interview, this isn't acceptable. It simply confirms that you weren't listening, which is the kiss of death for a college applicant.

### **Questions You Should Ask the Interviewer**

Successful candidates always ask questions at their interviews. In fact, the questions you ask reveal more

about your suitability for college than anything else. Here's what your questions tell us:

- a) How seriously you are thinking about the pragmatics of college and how well you understand the school's expectations
- b) What is important to you: your own expectations
- c) Your ability to connect general information to the school's particular reality
- d) How much research you did about the particular school
- e) Your common sense and intellectual curiosity
- f) Your energy level and communication skills
- g) How well prepared you are (and will be in the future) for a business meeting
- h) Your maturity level

### **General Rules for Asking Questions**

- a) Only ask about topics you genuinely care about. You want to appear sincere and interested, not desperate for something to say.
- b) Research the topic thoroughly before mentioning it so that you can engage in a subsequent discussion. Prepare for your interview just as you would for an exam.
- c) Make sure the answer isn't obvious or has already been answered.
- d) Ask the appropriate person. Faculty members can offer a better perspective on certain issues than business students and vice versa. Asking the department head about the social life on campus will be fruitless and embarrassing.

e) Watch your tone of voice and your body language. Many nervous applicants are unintentionally rude when they ask questions, which automatically puts off the interviewer. Be gracious and diplomatic in how you phrase your questions and reply to responses.

Our [undergraduate admissions guide](#) includes over 300 questions that are commonly asked at college interviews, along with an explanation of why each question is asked and how savvy candidates answer them. We also include over 50 targeted questions for YOU to ask the interviewer that show your maturity, motivation and judgment. Your college interview is your one-chance-in-a-lifetime to attain your professional dreams. Before you go, take advantage of our comprehensive guide to ensure your success.

### **Conclusions: Our Best Tips for Interview Success**

- 1) Prepare for the interview extensively: review your application, learn about the school, and prepare answers for the typical questions
- 2) Practice answering questions aloud before the interview until you can handle all types of questions confidently
- 3) Walk into the interview with an air of confidence and professionalism. Offer a firm handshake and a professional demeanor
- 4) Listen carefully to the interviewer's questions and answer accordingly. Don't babble incessantly about a

related topic or answer the question you wish he had asked

5) Be yourself. If your answers are ambiguous or inconsistent, the interviewer will likely consider you a poor candidate. Don't send out any unnecessary warning signs.

Your success will ultimately depend on your ability to sell yourself to the interviewer. (S)he is seeking the following traits:

Maturity	Communication Skills	Honesty	Motivation
High Energy Level	Confidence	Pride	Initiative
Listening Skills	Sense of Humor	Analytical Skills	Leadership Potential

If you have them, flaunt them! They will open the door to a wonderfully challenging, yet satisfying college career.

[Back to top](#)