



# PMHS College Interviewing Skills

“They want to know about you!”



# What is the College Admissions Interview?

- A 1-on-1 conversation with either:
  - A member of the college admissions staff
  - An alumnus of the college/university
- It can either be conducted on-campus or locally, usually by an alumnus.
- It will likely be 45 minutes to 1 hour, and will be a relaxed, conversational meeting.
- It's another "touch-point" in the college admissions process.
- If you really want to attend a certain college or university, you should try to interview with them. This is what sets you apart. Your chance to speak about yourself, your passion, your dreams. This is about you telling your story.

# Why Interview?

## It shows “Demonstrated Interest”

- **Qualities beyond the Application or that happened afterwards:** Sometimes, admissions officers are looking for qualities that can't be reflected in an application. What is your passion, your dream, what do you want out of life?
- **Fit with the college/university:** The interview also allows them to check whether the student is a good “fit” for the institution – and vice versa. This is your chance to show why you are well suited for that particular school or why you will thrive in that environment. And you have the opportunity to question the interviewer about their time and experiences at the college/university.
- **Get to know you on a more personal basis:**  
“A great interview should be comfortable, proceeding like a good conversation,” says Dave Hamilton, a college counselor. In fact, your interview may even be fun. According to Dodge Johnson of College Planning in Malvern, PA, “Admissions folks want to like you, and you to like them and their school.”

Interviewing with a college is a signal of an applicant's interest in actually attending, said Karen Richardson, associate director of admissions at [Tufts University](#), on Friday.

# How to Prepare

- Practice, Practice, Practice.
- Handshake, eye contact, voice inflection and knowledge of the school  
Dress the part .

## Phone off and away!

- A mock interview with a family friend (an adult) or relative is important for both feedback and to make you more comfortable. Know what you want to get across and focus on ahead of time.



# Get Comfortable Talking about Yourself

- **You are the primary topic of this conversation** – have fun with that.
  - Tell the “story” about who you are, as if you were introduced to a new friend who wanted to get to know you better.
- **Provide more than a “yes” or “no” answer** to questions. Elaborate!
  - Keep your answers as conversational as possible.
- **Give specifics that back up your answers** so you’ll be able to support your points.
- **Be yourself – authenticity matters** – Though you should practice answering some basic questions, answer honestly, naturally and spontaneously in the interview.
- **Don’t memorize your answers**, or you’ll end up sounding like you’re reading from a script.
- **Be positive:** Highlight the good things from your academic past and put a positive “spin” your background. Remember that problems can be viewed as challenges.

# Some Interview Pointers

- **Research the college or university** – you need to know something about it, so that you can answer the question: Why do you want to go to \_\_\_\_\_?
- **Be prepared to identify and talk about key topics** – experiences that are significant in your life. Think in advance about some of your favorite experiences, activities or plans and practice talking about them.
- **Review your application essays** – so they're fresh in your mind.
- **Prepare some questions to ask** – Show your interest in the school by asking specific questions, such as:
  - How would you describe the student body? . . . What are the most popular majors (and why)? . . . What are the school's strengths?
- **Try not to ask questions that are in the school's informational materials** –
  - You wouldn't want to ask if the college has fraternities & sororities, since their literature tells you that. But you could ask whether it's important to belong.
- **Be prepared to answer questions about yourself**

# Typical Interview Questions

1. **Tell me about yourself.** This question seems easier than it is. Academics, extracurriculars, athletics. Speak to your passions.
2. **Tell me about a couple of your accomplishments that you are most proud of and why? What makes you unique?**
3. **Academics-What courses are you taking? AP or IB? Are they challenging? What subjects interest you?**
4. **Who in your life has most influenced you?**
  - There are other variations of this question: **Who's your hero? What historical or fictional character would you most like to be like (or like to meet and speak with)? If I ran into your favorite teacher tomorrow what three things might he/she say about you?** Substitute “siblings” or “best friends” for “favorite teacher.”
5. **Why are you interested in our university? How did you hear about us? What are your criteria for your school search?**
6. **What will you contribute to our campus community?** You'll want to be specific when answering this question. An answer like "I'm hard-working" is rather bland and generic. Think about what it is that makes you uniquely you. What exactly will you bring to diversify the college's community?
7. **Tell me about a challenge that you overcame.** This question is designed to see what kind of problem solver you are. When confronted with a challenge, how do you handle the situation? College will be full of challenges, so the college wants to make sure they enroll students who can handle them. Read more tips on this question...
8. **What do you do for fun in your free time?** "Hangin' out and chillin'" is a weak answer for this question. College life obviously isn't all work, so the admissions folks want students who will do interesting and productive things even when they aren't studying. Do you write? hike? play tennis? Use a question such as this one to show that you are well-rounded with a variety of interests.
9. **Recommend a good book to me.** The interviewer is trying to accomplish a few things with this question. First, the question asks whether or not you've actually read much. Second, it asks you to apply some critical skills as you articulate *why a book is worth reading*.
10. **If you could do one thing in high school differently, what would it be?** A question like this can turn sour if you make the mistake of dwelling on things you regret. Put a positive spin on it. Variations: **What would you change about your school? What is your school known for in your hometown?**

**\*\*\*There are no “right” answers just like there are no “right” activities—they are your answers, unique to who you are.**

# The Day of the Interview

- **Know how to get there** and give yourself an extra 15 minutes in case of traffic.
- **Dress the part** – first impressions are important. Wear a minimum of accessories, make-up, jewelry and perfume/cologne.
- **Introduce yourself** when you first meet your interviewer with a **firm handshake** and warm, “Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_.”
- **A thank you e-mail** afterwards is a nice touch and leaves a good final impression.
- **This is one of many interviews you will have in your life . . .** Good practice and you will feel more comfortable each time.



It was a mistake for Ed to wear a T-shirt to his college interview, and an even bigger one to wear this T-shirt.

**Relax – You’re Ready!**