

## Graduate Admissions Interview Tips

Face-to-face, Skype and Phone Based Interviews. Own the Moment With Our Easy to Follow Graduate Admissions Interview Tips.

How you look is just as important as what you say. Don't blow your chance at securing that admissions offer by letting the interview go wrong. Your SOP and essays opened up the door and now your social skills need to help you secure your seat at the best school possible.



The interviewer wants to find out who you are, how you think, and what your plans are if they admit you. How you 'come across' will leave an impression on the interviewer too that will either support what they already think about your application or make them feel that you are not the person that you seemed to be on paper.

Many great candidates get weeded out during the interview stage so do not take anything for granted. Good preparation for anything is always at the heart of success. Graduate admissions interviews are no different. Take some time to think about your interview and get prepared. Use these admissions interview tips to help out on the day and get admitted to a great school, not just to a good one.

## College Admissions Interview Tips



### Handling Face-to-Face Interviews

#### 1. First Impressions are Lasting Impressions

- **Know Where the Interview is Located:** Interviews can be on or off campus. If you are not familiar with the venue, look it up on-line and check out maps, bus or subways route, and parking areas depending on your mode of transport. Make sure you know how long it will take to get there and do not be late.
- **Dress for Success:** Look clean and be appropriately dressed. Business casual is the minimum, a shirt and tie is never a bad idea as is a dress for women. Do not take it for granted that student casual is acceptable, particularly if meeting professional people. If you have piercings, it may be an idea to limit them or at least avoid making them seem shocking or distracting.

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- **Arrive Early:** Interviewers are busy people and alumni interviewers are taking their own time to meet you. Being late is generally inexcusable and a sign of bad manners. In case of a serious incident or problem that prevents you from being on time or even meeting at all, call the interviewer and let them know that you will be late or cannot meet them due to unforeseen serious circumstances. Hope
- **Good Handshake:** Handshakes matter because they passively convey something about you to the interviewer. Make sure your hands are clean and not sweaty. Grasp the interviewer's hand firmly but not too hard and not too soft. While making eye contact with them, shake their hand warmly, smile and introduce yourself by name. Know when to let go of the interviewer's hand. Save the high fives and fist bumps for your friend's when you get accepted.
- **Business Cards:** It's not a bad idea to get some simple business cards printed up for interviews and for meeting with admissions if needed. This is a quick and easy way to say 'this is who I am' and will help to show that you are polished, prepared and can think like a professional.
- **Small Talk:** When you first meet it is customary to engage in a few minutes of small talk to make a more personal connection with the interviewer. Stick to safe topics such as the weather, do you live close by, how was their flight if they are from out of town and other neutral topics. Avoid offering your opinions on controversial topics like politics, religion and anything else that might cause someone to feel upset or offended.
- **Demonstrate Interest:** It is important to show that you are eager to be admitted to the school even if the school you are interviewing for is not your dream or target school. Do not take anything for granted; look interested, be interesting and get admitted.
- **No Parents:** This seems like a no brainer but parents should not sit in on the interview with you. For any reason.

### 2. During the Interview

- **Sit Up Straight:** Look ready and attentive, not slouched and too casual. Look alert and engaged and leave the right impression.
- **Be Polite:** Please, thank you, may I, excuse me ... it's pretty standard. Bad language is completely out of the question. Show the interviewer that you are a polite and well brought up person and that your mother taught you well.
- **Good Eye Contact:** Apart from discussing what a great candidate you are for admission, you need to make a solid connection with the interviewer. Engaging the interviewer with good eye contact demonstrates that you are confident and

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- conveys a feeling of honesty. When you speak, look up and speak to the interviewer convincingly. Avoid staring at the floor or up to the ceiling.
- **Clear Voice:** No one wants to listen to your skills and experiences for 40-60 minutes in a monotone voice. They also do not want yes/no answers or shy grunts in response to their questions. Speak up, be natural and use voice inflexion to make your point and engage the listener in an interesting manner.
  - **Don't Memorize:** Memorizing your answers before hand is not a good strategy. If the interviewer asks a slightly different question than you expect, your answer may sound strange and not totally match the question. Forgetting some of what you memorized could leave you looking confused. Eyes tend to look upward when we try to recall or remember something, so it will be obvious to the interviewer that you memorized your answers. Show that you are a dynamic thinker who can express their ideas because that is what schools are looking for.
  - **Be Organized:** If you are bringing files, portfolios or picture albums make sure that they are placed into suitable albums or plastic document sleeves so that you look organized and are not left rooting through papers during the interview.
  - **Key Words:** Key words for use during the interview; Explore, Curious, Curiosity, Look into, Learn about, Prepare for. Try to start your answers with these kinds of action or descriptive words to frame what it is you are going to say. It is also best to use positive responses and look confident rather than start from a negative response and then try to portray yourself as a positive person. Think, 'Yes I can' versus 'Yes I Cant'.

### 3. After the Interview

- **Make Notes:** Make some notes about what was discussed. It might also be helpful to make some notes about how you think you could have improved in case you have other interviews. File away any business cards with contact information that the interviewer and/or admission staff offered in case you need to contact them later.
- **Send a Thank You Note:** It is both polite and acceptable to send a short thank you email to the interviewer within 24 hours of the interview. It is not reasonable to ask about your results or their impressions of you. Do not keep emailing the interviewer to follow up or you will look pushy and desperate.
- **Wait Patiently:** The results can take time but hopefully the wait will not be long. If you think you should have heard something but have not, perhaps follow up with your contact in admissions to see if there is any reason for a delay.

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## Handling Skype Interviews

Skype has become a popular tool with colleges that wish to conduct interviews with students that they cannot easily meet face-to-face. Your appearance and personal presence is very important on Skype because you will not have the advantages of direct human interaction that you would have if you were to meet in person.

Use these tips below to make sure that you are completely ready to ace your Skype interview:

- **Download Skype:** Get it for free at [www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com) and install it on your computer well before the interview. Use the test feature in Skype to make sure you have the program and your hardware working properly. Practice and test it out with other Skype users such as your friends or family before the interview.
- **Your Skype Username:** Choose a Skype name that is either your name as it appears on the college application or a name that does not leave a negative impression about you on the interviewer. If you have an existing Skype account with a user name that you think might generate a bad impression, please set up a new account and use it for the interview. Avoid weird or obscene names!
- **Your Skype Profile:** Once you have downloaded Skype it is easy to change the information in your Skype profile. This information is what the interviewer will see when they add you to Skype and then log in for the interview. As the interviewer may have hundreds of contacts in their Skype address book you should try to make it as easy as possible for them to find you.
- **Profile Name:** Make sure that the name that shows in your Skype profile is the same name that you have used on the application you submitted. Put your city in brackets beside your name to help the interviewer know where you are, ie. John Smith [Dallas, TX]. It is also a good idea to have your contact telephone number in that profile in case your Internet connection drops or is weak and begins to interfere with the interview.
- **Changing Your Profile:** Profiles are easy to change so don't be afraid to do a minutes work for the interview to make the right impression. To edit your profile, launch Skype and go to File | Edit Profile and then make changes. The profile can be changed back to whatever you like once the interview has been successfully completed and you get admitted.

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- **Your Skype Picture:** First impressions are lasting impressions! The interviewer will see your profile picture when they call you or if the camera fails to work properly and you need to shut it off. Make sure the picture you show is one of you, is tasteful and creates a great impression on the interviewer.
  - Pictures of you at a party or a club or doing something illegal are definitely not recommended. Passport or ID photos are also not suggested as it may show that you have no personality or imagination. Avoid using 'selfies' and pictures taken in mirrors.
  - Choose something of you alone with a natural pose that shows your face clearly. Smile and look happy (everyone likes to talk with happy people). Avoid wearing a hat or posing with a group of friends, as the interviewer may not be able to easily identify which of the group is you.
  - Pictures of you doing a sport or favorite hobby are generally OK to use if they show you face clearly. The best pictures are the ones that show who you are and leave a positive impression on the interviewer. If you don't have something handy, get your friend to take a picture for you with your smart phone and then upload it to your Skype profile.
- **Location. Location. Location:** Choose a suitable place for the interview where you will not be interrupted. The location should be quiet and without other people in the room with you (like your mom, dad, dog, cat, BFF... just you alone).
- **Answer the Call:** Use Skype just like you would a telephone. Answer the Skype call with, "Hello, this is (your name) speaking" so that the interviewer knows right away that they have reached the right person. Make sure that you hit the turn on video button so that the interviewer can see you.
- **Use a Good Quality Webcam:** Make sure your webcam helps you to look your best. Most computers come with a built-in camera that is suitable for a Skype interview but if you have one of those cameras that make you look dark yellow and living on Pluto, you definitely need to buy something new. Buying a good brand name webcam is a small investment in your future and for sure will help you to leave the best possible impression on the interviewer.
- **Background & Lighting:** The background behind you should be neutral and free of anything that might distract the interviewer (don't forget that they can see everything). If you will do the interview in your bedroom or dorm room, remove your old toy doll collection and the Hello Kitty and Bieber posters from the walls.

If there is a bookshelf behind you make sure it is neat and organized and remove anything that might distract the interviewer. Lighting should be shining on you and not be coming from behind you otherwise you will appear dark and shadowy and they won't be able to see how bright you really are.

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- **What to Wear:** In order to leave the best impression, be well groomed and dress for success! Just like for a face-to-face interview, ladies should be made up and hair should be done properly. Men should shave and wear an ironed shirt and a tie that is knotted properly and tightened at the neck. It is equally important not to overdress, as that might seem inappropriate.
- **Gestures & Hands:** Excessive gesturing and hand movements are distracting. Nervousness can cause us to scratch our faces repeatedly or rub our foreheads among many other involuntary gestures that convey nervousness. The best way to control your hands and show confidence is to interlock your fingers and place your hands in front of you on the desk or table. Take a look at a newscaster on TV; they usually have their hands on the desk to avoid distracting the viewer.
- **Eye Contact and Voice:** Look right into the camera as if you are looking into the eyes of the interviewer. Speak slowly and clearly and ask if the interviewer can hear you when the interview starts. Try not to speak with your head down or looking up to the ceiling.

Eye contact conveys trust and a sense of confidence, both are qualities that you want to show to the interviewer. Make sure that you have already tested the microphone that you will use and that the sound is good quality and easy to hear. Headsets with microphones are also acceptable, but it is of course better if you do not have anything on your head.

- **Have a Phone Handy:** Have a home phone or cell phone available just in case the Skype connection becomes unstable or fails. Have it on silent, as you don't want to have it ring or hear a text-received sound during the interview. You can politely ask the interviewer to call you to complete the interview if Skype becomes unusable. The number should be offered complete with country code and be visible in your profile. For example: +1 999-555-9999
- **Have Notes Ready:** Lets face it, the interview is very important and it's easy to get nervous. It can be useful to have a one sheet of paper with bullet points (not paragraphs) of key points to refer to in case you begin to forget what it is you wish to highlight about yourself.

Lay that sheet of paper in front of you on the table, and if you feel the need to use it, ask the interviewer politely, "Do you mind if I refer to a few small notes I have made? I am very nervous and I wish to make sure I give you the most accurate information about me." A reasonable person should agree because the interview is not a test after all.

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## How to Handle Phone Interviews

Phone interviews are still common so you need to know how to handle them. The main preparation for the phone interview is the same as for all other interviews; clearly identify the features of the school or program that are important to you and discuss them during the interview. You must explain your study plan to the interviewer and discuss how you will use those features to prepare yourself for your career or higher-level academic goals.

A phone interview offers a few advantages in that you can only be heard and not seen. For those who are very nervous and may not do so well in person this may come as an advantage. For those with a soft or weak voice the phone may be a disadvantage. There will also be somewhat less preparation in terms of what you wear or how the interview site appears as there will be no camera to capture your faults for the interviewer.

Use these tips below to make sure that you are completely ready to ace your phone interview:

- **Location and Signal:** Make sure that you are located in a place with a good signal 5-10 minutes before the time you expect the phone call. Choose a quiet place for the interview where you will not be interrupted. There should not be other people in the room with you (like your mom, dad, dog, cat, BFF... just you alone). A stable signal is important, as you do not want anything to distract from the impact you want to leave on the interviewer.
- **Charged Battery:** Make sure your phone battery is charged (both for mobile phones and wireless house phones) or even better plug your phone in so that the battery does not drain during the interview.
- **Answer the Call:** Answer the call with, "Hello, this is (your name) speaking" so that the interviewer knows right away that they have reached the right person. Remember, this is a formal interview even though it is on the phone.
- **Clear Voice:** No one wants to listen to your skills and experiences for 40-60 minutes in a monotone voice. They also do not want yes/no answers or shy grunts in response to their questions. Speak up, be natural and use voice inflexion to make your point and engage the listener in an interesting manner.
- **Be Polite:** Please, thank you, may I, excuse me ... it's pretty standard. Bad language is completely out of the question. Leave the right impression on the interviewer by showing that you are a polite and well brought up person and that your mother taught you well.

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- **Demonstrate Interest:** It is important to sound eager to be admitted to the school even if the school you are interviewing for is not your dream or target school. Do not take anything for granted; sound interested, sound interesting and get admitted.

### Addmitto is College Admissions Made Easy™



Your grades and test scores are already fixed so the only part of the application that you have any control over is your SOP and other essays. Get some help with topics and telling your story with a full service coaching package or use our hourly editing services to get your essays just right.

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#### About Addmitto

ADDMITTO was founded to help undergraduate applicants structure their experience and goals in a way that highlights their strengths, deals with their weak points and sets them apart from other applicants through their college admission essays and interviews.

Take an admission coaching session with us on Skype to discuss your admission strategy, choose admission essay topics or to get some help smoothing over the rough spots in your application. Stand out from other applicants by getting your essays edited and restructured to leave a more solid impact on the reader. An interview preparation session will help you to master the art of the interview and practice for the main event, helping you gain even more of an edge over your competition.

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