

The professional school admissions interview is a very important component of the application process. Selected applicants who have met the initial standards for a school are interviewed so that the schools can learn more about the applicant as a person. The admission committee wants to learn about you as an individual and to identify a combination of factors such as communication ability, maturity, independence, interpersonal skills, motivation for the program and the profession and promise of academic success in the professional school program. The interview gives you an opportunity to talk about your skills, interests and motivation, and allows you to learn more about the school to which you're applying.

THE INTERVIEW: WHAT TO EXPECT

Interviews can vary considerably. The whole interview process may take a half-hour or half of a day. Within that period you may have one, two, three or more individual interviews with one or more different persons or groups, often including faculty, students and admissions officers. The interviewer will often have seen your application before the interview, but occasionally you may have a "blind" interview where the interviewer has not seen your application. A blind interview is not colored by your academic or test records, letters, essays, etc. so you can carefully select the facts you wish to present to make a strong and complete impression. Occasionally, small groups of applicants are interviewed together.

Each interview is different and reflects the personality and values of the interviewer. You can prepare for the interview by reviewing commonly asked questions (see below) and practicing your answers. There are no right or wrong answers. Keep in mind what you want to communicate, how you want to present yourself, and think of specific experiences you've had to substantiate your answers. Probably the most common interview question is "Why do you want to be a _____?" You may get this question repeatedly, with many variations. So you need to know yourself well enough to answer with feeling and variety more than once in an interview. Parroting a single well-worn line is a mistake, so don't memorize answers when you're practicing. Emphasize what YOU have to offer (skills, experience, interest, motivation, etc.), not what the profession has to offer you. **Try to enjoy the interview; approach it as a conversation and a learning experience, not a test!**

HOW TO PREPARE

The Career Services Center offers many resources to help you prepare for your interviews:

1. ***Interview Interactive Workshops***
Offered Fall and Winter quarters, these group sessions cover what to expect from the interviewing process, how to prepare for a successful interview, and let you practice interviewing with feedback from advisors. Check the Career Services Center's quarterly calendar or website, <http://career.ucsd.edu>, for dates and times.
2. ***Online Interview Preparation Resources***
Visit <http://career.ucsd.edu/sa/PInterview.shtml> for links to information and preparation techniques including an "Interview Preparation Checklist." Also, dental, medical, optometry, pharmacy, podiatry and veterinary applicants can visit www.studentdoctor.net for more interview experience feedback.
3. ***Interview Stream – Online, On-Camera Practice***
You'll want to practice as much as you can for your interview to get comfortable talking about yourself and your accomplishments. You can practice answering interview questions on-camera with the free, online Interview Stream program; see <http://career.ucsd.edu/sa/interviewing.shtml> for more details. In addition to the typical questions listed below, we also have a lengthy list of commonly asked questions which you can use to practice your interview skills available on line at <http://career.ucsd.edu/sa/PDFs/CommonlyAskedInterviewQuestions.pdf>.
4. ***Professional Resources***
You need to know your field and be prepared to discuss current events, issues, and recent developments in that field during your interviews. Read professional association websites and journals, pay attention to relevant news in your field and talk to professionals to prepare for this. Links to professional associations and other helpful websites can be found under "Education & Career Information" on the field-specific web pages on our website at <http://career.ucsd.edu/sa/GettingStartPgsop.shtml>.

TYPICAL QUESTIONS:

Anticipate questions you might be asked and think about how you want to answer them. Remember to be specific and detailed with examples of your experiences to back up your answers.

- How would you describe yourself?
- What do you view as your strengths? Your weaknesses?
- Why do you want to be a _____?
- How do you see yourself contributing to this field?
- What steps have you taken to acquaint yourself with what a _____ does?
- Which aspects of your life's experiences make you a good candidate for this profession?
- Where do you see yourself in 10 or 20 years?

- In what kind of setting would you like to practice or work?
- What will you do if you're not accepted?
- What factors have influenced your decision to become a _____?
- What are the traits of a good professional in this field?
- How would you describe your undergraduate experience? How have you benefited from these years?
- What do you do during summers?
- Tell me about your non-academic interests - hobbies, sports, leisure time or community activities?
- Tell me something about your experience with people. What was your level of involvement?
- Describe your research project.
- What are the advantages of being a professional in this field?
- How do you handle ethical dilemmas?
- What are the most pressing problems facing this field right now?
- How do you deal with stress?
- Can you explain the discrepancy between your GPA and your admission test scores?
- Do you have any questions about this school, its programs, or anything in particular?

Be prepared to talk about anything you have written in your personal statement and your application, and about your future career plans, as well as your academic, extracurricular and research experiences. You'll also need to research the school and program you're applying to. M.D./Ph.D. candidates should be prepared to talk about research interests and background.

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

- **Be On Time!** Even arrive a few minutes early for the interview if you can to collect yourself and to take some deep breaths. It is natural to be nervous, but try to relax. If you must be late or can not go to the interview for some reason, be sure to call and let the school know as early as possible. **DO NOT BE A NO-SHOW!**
- **Dress for Success!** Dress neatly for your interview. It is better to be conservatively dressed than to be trendy or provocative. A dress, suit or skirt and blouse outfit is appropriate for women. Men should wear a suit, or slacks and sports jacket, or slacks, shirt, tie and sweater. Dress in a way that is comfortable for you and don't forget to consider the climate at that time of year!
- **Be Polite!** Use your best manners; greet and shake hands with the interviewer, repeating the interviewer's name ("Hello, Dr. Smith"). Answer all questions honestly and in a friendly fashion. Good eye contact is very important. Make sure that you listen carefully and answer the question you were asked. If you do not understand a question, it's okay to ask for clarification. If an interviewer challenges something you say, be flexible enough to see the interviewer's point of view, but don't change your opinion to please the interviewer. Avoid sounding rehearsed or too stiff. Be serious, but be yourself and let your enthusiasm and confidence show!

THE INTERVIEW AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN ABOUT A SCHOOL

The interview gives you the opportunity to discover the subtle differences among schools. Some schools may offer local interviews to save you from paying to travel, however, if possible, make the trip to visit and familiarize yourself with the school. Ask questions of your interviewers about the school or program's strengths, research emphases, approach to education, and the quality of student life. Seek out opportunities to meet and/or stay with students. If a tour of the school and facilities is not offered, ask for one. Look around and observe the campus and student life; can you see yourself there?

Be prepared with specific questions. Some possibilities are: What do you view as the strengths of your school/program? If you could change any feature about your school, what would it be? How would you characterize the interaction between professors and students? Would you describe the atmosphere among students as cooperative or competitive? What kind of academic, personal, financial and career counseling is available to students? Is there a mentor/advisor system? What school committees (e.g., admissions, curriculum) have student representation? To what degree are students involved in community service? Would you describe the research options your program offers?

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Promptly send handwritten thank-you notes to each of your interviewers and to any students with whom you stayed. (Make sure to find out the correct spelling of their names and use the admission's office address.) Include some specific detail about you or from your conversation to remind them of the interview and be sure to let them know of your continued interest in their program. If you have other interviews ahead, reflect on what went well during your interview and what you can improve upon before your next interview.

REMEMBER: *Be prepared, be positive, be yourself! The Career Services Center is here to help you learn as much as you can about the interview process. Take advantage of our services, and then relax and enjoy your interview experiences!* Career Services Center, University of California, San Diego, <http://career.ucsd.edu> Revised: 01/07