

Graduate School Interviewing Tips:

Not all graduate programs interview, but be prepared for the possibility, especially if you're applying for a slot in a particularly competitive program or field. First, if you're asked to interview, congratulate yourself! Only applicants who have made it to the short list of finalists are asked to interview, as interviews are time consuming and costly.

The purpose of the interview is to permit members of the department to get a "look" at you. To meet you, the person. Sometimes applicants who seem like a perfect match on paper aren't so in real life. What do they want to know? Whether you have what it takes to succeed in graduate school and the profession, like maturity, interpersonal skills, interest, and motivation. How well do you express yourself, manage stress, and think on your feet?

You'll have a chance to see the facilities and lab spaces as well as ask questions. This is your interview too! You have the chance to learn about the school, program, faculty, and students to determine if it's the right match for you. During the interview, you should be evaluating the program just as they are evaluating you.

What to Expect

Interview formats vary considerably. Some programs will request applicants to meet for half of an hour to an hour with a faculty member and other interviews will be full weekend events with students, faculty, and other applicants. Graduate school interviews are conducted by invitation but the expenses are nearly always paid for by applicants. In some unusual cases a program may assist a promising student with travel expenses, but it's not common. If you're invited to an interview, try your best to attend - even if you have to pay the travel expenses. Not attending, even if it's for a good reason, signals that you're not seriously interested in the program.

During your interview you'll talk with several faculty members as well as students. You might engage in small group discussions with students, faculty, and other applicants. Participate in discussions, demonstrate your listening skills, but do not monopolize the conversation. During your interviews, the interviewers may have read your application file, but don't expect them to remember anything about you. Because the interviewer is unlikely to remember much about each applicant, be forthcoming about your experiences, strengths, and professional goals. Be mindful of the salient facts you wish to present.

How to Prepare

Learn about the program and faculty. Understand the training emphasis and faculty research interests.

Review your own interests, goals, and qualifications. Note what things make you a good match for the program. Be able to explain how your goals and qualifications match what the program has to offer.

Take the perspective of faculty members. What can you contribute to their graduate program and research? Why should they accept you? What skills do you bring that will help a professor advance in his or her research?

Anticipate questions and rehearse potential answers

Prepare intelligent questions to ask.

During the Interview

Remember your goals during your interview: to convey your interest, motivation, and professionalism, and to gather the information you need to determine if this is the graduate program for you.

In meetings with graduate students, try to ask questions to learn what they really think about their advisors and the program. Most students will be forthcoming - especially in one-on-one conversations.

Don't underestimate the potential influence of current graduate students. Present your best side because current graduate students may be in a position to help or hurt your application.

Some interviews include social events like parties. Don't drink too much (even if others do). Remember that even though it seems like a party, it's an interview. Assume that you're being evaluated at all times.

Common Graduate School Interview Questions:

- *Tell me about yourself.
- *What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- *If you're not accepted into graduate school, what are your plans?
- *Why did you choose this career?
- *What do you know about our program?
- *Why did you choose to apply to our program?
- *What other schools are you considering?
- *In what ways have your previous experience prepared you for graduate study in our program?
- *What do you believe your greatest challenge will be if you are accepted into this program?
- *In college, what courses did you enjoy the most? The least? Why?
- *Describe any research project you've worked on. What was the purpose of the project and what was your role in the project?
- *How would your professors describe you?
- *How will you be able to make a contribution to this field?
- *What are your hobbies?
- *Explain a situation in which you had a conflict and how you resolved it. What would you do differently? Why?
- *Describe your greatest accomplishment.
- *Tell me about your experience in this field. What was challenging? What was your contribution?
- *What are your career goals? How will this program help you achieve your goals?
- *How do you intend to finance your education?
- *What skills do you bring to the program? How will you help your mentor in his or her research?
- *Are you motivated? Explain and provide examples.
- *Why should we take you and not someone else?
- *What do you plan to specialize in?
- *What do you do in your spare time?

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