

College Interview Questions

12 Questions You Should Be Ready to Answer in Your College Interview

Most college interview questions are meant to help you and the interviewer find out if the college is a good match for you. Rarely will you get a question that puts you on the spot or tries to make you feel stupid. Remember, the college is trying to make a good impression too. Use the interview to show off your personality in ways that aren't possible on the application.

Below are some typical questions and some suggestions for answering them.

1. Tell me about yourself.

This question seems easier than it is. How do you reduce your whole life to a few sentences? And it's hard to avoid commonplace answers like "I'm friendly" or "I'm a good student." Of course you want to demonstrate that you're friendly and studious, but try also to say something memorable here that really makes you different from other college applicants. Can you hold your breath longer than anyone in your school? Do you have a huge collection of Pez dispensers? Do you have unusual cravings for sushi? Read more tips for this question...

2. Why are you interested in our college?

Be specific when answering this, and show that you've done your research. Also, avoid answers like "I want to make a lot of money" or "Graduates of your college get good job placement." You want to highlight your intellectual interests, not your materialistic desires. What specifically about the college distinguishes it from other schools you're considering? Read more tips on this question...

3. What can I tell you about our college?

You can almost guarantee that your interviewer will provide an opportunity for you to ask questions. Make sure you have some, and make sure your questions are thoughtful and specific to the particular college. Avoid questions like "when is the application deadline?" or "how many majors do you have?" This information is both uninteresting and readily available on the school's webpage. Come up with some probing and focused questions: "What would graduates of your college say was the most valuable thing about their four years here?" "I read that you offer a major in interdisciplinary studies. Could you tell me more about that?" Read more tips on this question...

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? This can be an awkward question if you haven't thought about it, so spend a few minutes considering how you would answer. Identify a few real, historical, and fictional characters you admire, and be prepared to articulate WHY you admire them. Read more tips on this question...

5. Why do you want to major in _____ ?

Realize that you don't need to have decided upon a major when you apply to college, and your interviewer will not be disappointed if you say you have many interests and you need to take more classes before choosing a major. However, if you have identified a potential major, be prepared to explain why. Avoid saying that you want to major in something because you'll make a lot of money -- your passion for a subject will make you a good college student, not your greed. Read more tips on this question...

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? Read more tips on this question...

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. What do you see yourself doing 10 years from now?

You don't need to pretend that you have your life figured out if you get a question like this. Very few students entering college could accurately predict their future professions. However, your interviewer does want to see that you think ahead. If you can see yourself doing three different things, say so -- honesty and open-mindedness will play in your favor.

10. Does your high school record accurately reflect your effort and ability?

In the interview or on your application, you often have an opportunity to explain a bad grade or a bad semester. Be careful with this issue -- you don't want to come across as a whiner or as someone who blames others for a low grade. However, if you really did have extenuating circumstances, let the college know.

11. 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. And finally, your interviewer might get a good book recommendation!

12. 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. Try to put a positive spin on it. Perhaps you've always wondered if you would have enjoyed acting or music. Maybe you would have liked to give the student newspaper a try. Maybe, in retrospect, studying Chinese might have been more in line with your career goals than Spanish. A good answer shows that you didn't have the time in high school to explore everything that is of interest to you.

When you've mastered the 12 questions above, check out these 20 more college interview questions.

1. What did you do this summer?

This is an easy question that an interviewer might use to get the conversation rolling. The biggest danger here is if you haven't done anything productive in the summer. "I played a lot of video games" isn't a good answer. Even if you didn't have a job or take classes, try to think of something you have done that was a learning experience.

2. What do you do best?

There are lots of ways to ask this question, but the bottom line is that the interviewer wants you to identify what you see as your greatest talent. There's nothing wrong with identifying something that isn't central to your college application. Even if you were first violin in the all-state orchestra or the starting quarterback, you can identify your best talent as making a mean cherry pie or carving animal figurines out of soap. The interview can be an opportunity to show a side of yourself that isn't obvious on the written application.

3. What do you hope to do after graduation?

Lots of high school students have no idea what they want to do in the future, and that's okay. Still, you should formulate an answer to this question. If you're not sure what your career goals are, say so, but provide a few possibilities.

4. Why do you want to go to college?

This question is so broad and seemingly obvious that it can catch you by surprise. Why college? Steer clear of materialistic responses ("I want to get a good job and make a lot of money"). Instead, focus on what it is that you plan to study. Chances are your particular career goals aren't possible without a college education.

5. How do you define success?

Here again you want to avoid sounding too materialistic. Hopefully success means making a contribution to the world, not just your wallet.

6. Who do you most admire?

This question really isn't so much about *who* you admire but *why* you admire someone. The interviewer wants to see what character traits you most value in other people.

7. What is your biggest weakness?

This is a common question, and it's always a tough one to answer. It can be dangerous to be too honest ("I put off all my papers until an hour before they are due"), but evasive answers that actually present a strength often won't satisfy the interviewer ("My greatest weakness is that I have too many interests and I work too hard"). Try to be honest here without damning yourself. The interviewer is trying to see how self-aware you are.

8. Tell me about your family.

When you interview for college, an easy question like this can help get the conversation rolling. Try to be specific in your description of your family. Identify some of their funny quirks or obsessions. In general, however, keep the representation positive -- you want to present yourself as a generous person, not someone who is hyper-critical.

9. What makes you special?

Or the interviewer might ask, "What makes you unique?" It's a more difficult question than it might at first appear. Playing a sport or getting good grades is something that many students do, so such accomplishments aren't necessarily "special" or "unique." Try to get beyond your accomplishments and think about what really makes you you.

10. What can our college offer you that another college can't?

This question is a little different than one asking why you want to go to a specific college. Do your research and look for the truly unique features of the college for which you are interviewing. Does it have unusual academic offerings? Does it have a distinctive first-year program? Are there co-curricular or internship opportunities that can't be found at other schools?

11. In college, what do you plan to do outside of the classroom?

This is a fairly simple question, but you need to know what extracurricular opportunities exist at the college. You'll look foolish saying you want to host a college radio show if the school doesn't have a radio station. The bottom line here is that the interviewer is trying to see what you will contribute to the campus community.

12. What three adjectives best describe you?

Avoid bland and predictable words like "intelligent," "creative" and "studious." The interviewer is more likely to remember a student who is "clumsy," "obsessive" and "metaphysical." Be honest with your word choices, but try to find words that thousands of other applicants won't choose.

13. What do you think about the latest news headline?

With this question the interviewer is seeing if you are aware of major events going on in the world, and if you have thought about those events. What your exact position is on an issue isn't as important as the fact that you know the issues and have thought about them.

14. Who is your hero?

A lot of interviews include some variation of this question. Your hero doesn't have to be someone obvious like a parent, a president or a sports star. Before the interview, spend a few minutes thinking about who you most admire and why you admire that person.

15. What historical figure do you most admire?

Here, as with the "hero" question above, you don't need to go with an obvious choice like Abraham Lincoln or Gandhi. If you go with a more obscure figure, you just might be able to teach your interviewer something.

16. What high school experience was most important to you?

With this question the interviewer is looking to find out what experiences you most value and how well you can reflect back on high school. Be sure you are able to articulate *why* the experience was important.

17. Who most helped you get to where you are today?

This question is a little different than the one about a "hero" or the "person you most admire." The interviewer is looking to see how well you can think outside of yourself and acknowledge those to whom you owe a debt of gratitude.

18. Tell me about your community service.

Many strong college applicants have done some form of community service. Many, however, simply do it so that they can list it on their college applications. If the interviewer asks you about your community service, it's to see why you served and what the service means to you. Think about how your service benefited your community, and also what you learned from your community service and how it helped you grow as a person.

19. If you had a thousand dollars to give away, what would you do with it?

This question is a roundabout way to see what your passions are. Whatever you identify as a charity says a lot about what you most value.

20. What subject in high school did you find the most challenging?

Even if you're a straight "A" student, chances are some subjects were more difficult than others. The interviewer is interested in learning about your challenges and how you tackled those challenges.