



The Scholarship Interview

(Information gathered from various Internet resources)

Congratulations! If you have made it to the interview stage, you are a finalist, entering the last phase of evaluation. The face-to-face interview is an excellent way for the judges to get to know you and, particularly, assess your maturity, composure, performance under pressure, etc. Interviews usually last 15-20 minutes and sometimes involve a panel of people.

Preparation

It is impossible to predict what questions you may be asked in a personal interview but it is possible to prepare yourself by working out answers to some of the more common questions that get asked in interviews. Write down the answers to these questions.

- ✚ What are your greatest strengths?
- ✚ What are your career goals?
- ✚ Where do you see yourself in five years? Ten years?
- ✚ Tell me about a personal achievement that makes you proud.
- ✚ Tell me about a mistake that you made and what you learned from it.
- ✚ Who has influenced your life and why?
- ✚ Why would you be an excellent recipient of ___ scholarship?

These are the basics. Know these answers cold.

Next, think specifically about the scholarship award that you are seeking. Be sure you are very well informed about the organization.

- ✚ What is the mission of the organization offering the award?
- ✚ Who have they given the award to in the past and why?
- ✚ Who are the judges?
- ✚ What is it about your application that made you a finalist?

Use this information to develop responses that you may be able to introduce into the discussion to provide the content that you would like to be sure that the judges hear from you. For example, if you are a finalist in a scholarship competition from an environmental group and you believe that your volunteer work on the local Conservation Commission was key to your selection as a finalist, consider finding

examples from that experience to highlight your strengths or describe lessons you have learned.

Finally, prepare yourself to make a good impression. If you need a haircut, get a haircut. If you are a nail biter, invest in a professional manicure. Select your interview outfit with care. It may or may not be advisable to wear a suit or dress, depending upon the specific situation. However, it is always appropriate to make sure your clothes are clean, they fit correctly and there are no loose buttons or hanging threads. Familiarize yourself with the working of a steam iron and press your clothes.

Logistics

Be sure you know where you are going and how long it will take to get there. Think about traffic flow at different times of the day. It is really hard to concentrate on the questions you are being asked when your heart is still racing from the parking lot dash, there are rivulets of perspiration running down your face and you have to go to the bathroom but didn't have time.

Presentation

You look great. You have arrived with enough time to visit the restroom, run a comb through your hair and brush your clothes off. You're under control. It's probably impossible to relax under these circumstances but it may help to remember that you are here because these people think you are a competent, qualified candidate. You earned the right to have this interview. The judges will use this time to get to know you better and you are working from the advantage that they are already supporters. Help them to help you have a great interview by being as genuinely pleased to be there as you can. Let your enthusiasm for your education show. The personal interview can be a wonderful experience if you can approach it as an opportunity rather than as a trial.

What If...?

What if, despite your logistical preparations, you are late or arrive with a big stain on your shirt. Well, you now have the opportunity to exhibit the grace under pressure and ability to adapt that has gotten you so far already.

Acknowledge the problem ("I had a flat tire on the expressway"), apologize if appropriate ("I'm so sorry to have delayed our scheduled meeting") and then move on. Don't continue to focus on the initial negative; try to get the process moving forward so you can shine. ("I realize that I'm late but I'm very interested in participating in the interview if you are ready to move forward.")

What if you can't think of a good answer to a question that's been posed? Or, you can't even think of a bad answer because your mind has gone blank? Again, grace under pressure is key. Explain that you're having a mental block on that topic just now and ask if it's possible to come back to the question a bit later. Or, suggest that it's a really interesting question that has prompted a lot of different ideas for you and you'd like to take a moment to organize your thoughts. In situations such as this one, Sue sometimes suggests that while she takes a moment to think, others can freshen their drinks (or something) so that she isn't groping for an answer while several sets of eyes are watching her mental athletics.

There are a lot more possible what-ifs. The key is to remain confident and don't let a problem shake your sense of yourself. The judges recognize the pressure you are under and, as in life, you are often judged not by the reality that problems occur, but by the style with which you manage those problems. Approach the interview with a sense of confidence, some humility and enough good humor to get you past any awkward moments.

Summary: Scholarship Interview Do's and Don't's

The Do's:

- Learn pertinent facts about the scholarship.
- Practice interviewing with a friend, family member or guidance counselor to improve your confidence in talking about yourself and answering questions.
- Call prior to interview day to confirm the time and location of the interview.
- Be a few minutes early! Get directions to the interview location before leaving your home. Check in when you arrive.
- Dress appropriately as if applying for a job, which means neither too casual nor too dressy.
- When you meet the interviewer(s), introduce yourself, make eye contact and use a firm handshake, but not too hard.
- Listen to the interview questions carefully; think about what you'll say before replying.
- Be brief and honest with your answers.
- Maintain eye contact with the interviewer(s).
- Demonstrate interest and confidence.
- Have one to two questions ready to ask the interviewer(s).
- Thank the interviewer(s) for his/her time and consideration. If possible, send a thank you note after the interview.
- Remember to SMILE!! Don't be shy.

The Don'ts:

- Don't assume the interviewer(s) are knowledgeable about you and your background – regardless of what you've included in your application.
- Don't be negative or critical about teachers, school, or friends.
- Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know".
- Don't expect the interviewer(s) to make a decision on the day of the interview.

- Don't use political, racial, ethnic, religious or other sensitive statements.
- Don't chew gum, bite nails, smoke, yawn, stretch, or slouch.

Other questions you may be asked:

- Be prepared to discuss your college choice, career goals and any other information you included in your application.
- Information on your background.
- Your academic achievements and why you should receive the scholarship.
- Personal matters such as finances, future plans, and things you are interested in.
- Your personal value structure, which may include the things you think are important in your life.