

Interviewing Skills for Graduate School

HOW TO PREPARE

Know Yourself

- Values, interests, skills, strengths, weaknesses, accomplishments, transferable skills
- Related experience and success stories
- Why do you want an advanced degree in this field? What are your short term and long term career goals?

Know the Institution

- Research the institution, program, coursework
- Familiarize yourself with the faculty and publications
- Specifically articulate why an institution is a good fit for you

Know the Field

- Research current issues, trends, challenges
- Think about what you want to accomplish in the field

Dress and Logistics

- Dress conservative, sensible, practical, professional (suit)
- Bring directions and arrive early
- Bring extra copies of your application materials and questions to ask the interviewer in a portfolio
- Give a firm handshake, make eye contact, and smile
- Be polite, honest, and enthusiastic
- Speak slowly, clearly, concretely
- Relax and breathe

Tips on Preparation

- Being nervous for an interview is normal. Interviewing is a learned skill and the more practice and preparation you do, the easier it comes
- The interview is a conversation, an opportunity to exchange information
- The interview is usually conducted by faculty members and/or current students
- You are evaluating the school to determine if it is a good fit
- You cannot prepare for *every* possible question—be sincere and honest
- After the interview, reflect on what you have done well and what you want to improve on

PREPARATION RESOURCES

Career Center for Science and Engineering <http://www.ccse.umn.edu>

- Practice with Interview Stream: <http://www.ccse.umn.edu/interviewing.html>
- Visit the Resource Library
- Schedule a practice interview with a counselor

Practice Interview Questions: Graduate School

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why are you interested in this school/program?
- What prompted you to enter this field? Why?
- What strengths would you bring to this program/career field? What would you consider a weakness?
- What exposure have you had to this profession?
- Discuss your experiences as it relates to this field.
- What are current issues/trends/challenges in this profession?
- What are your short term and long term career goals?
- What are your research interests and how do they mesh with the program? Which faculty are doing work of interest to you and why?
- Describe your greatest accomplishment. What are you most proud of?
- How do you perform under stress?
- How do you alleviate stress?
- If you could change anything about yourself, what would it be?
- Tell me about a time you encountered an obstacle you could not overcome. How did you react to it?
- Tell me about a time where you played a leadership role on a team project.
- Tell me about a time when you worked with a difficult person/patient/customer, etc.
- Tell me about a time where you took initiative beyond what was expected.
- Tell me about a time where you were faced with multiple conflicting priorities. How do you organize your work?
- Tell me about a time when you worked effectively as part of a team.
- Give me an example of something you've done that demonstrates your creativity.
- Tell me about a time where you had to present complex information to a customer/peer. How did you ensure they understood what you were trying to communicate?
- Describe a dilemma/problem you've faced and how you resolved it.
- If you are not accepted into this program at this point, what are your plans?
- What do you think will be the hardest aspect of graduate school? How will you cope?
- What was the last/best book you've read? What did you take from it?

The STAR Technique (Situation/Task...Action...Result)

In an interview, you are asked to share details of your experiences on the premise that past behavior predicts future behavior. Past examples may come from work experience, internships, academic experiences, extra-curricular activities or volunteer work. The STAR Technique allows you to talk specifically about your skills and is essential for behavioral based interviewing.

Situation/Task: description of specific situation, project or task related to the skill sought

Action: description of specific steps you took; initiate shown in completing the tasks

Result: outcome resulting from the action taken