

# **How to Interview for a Scholarship, Fellowship or Award Opportunity**

After you have submitted the written application for a scholarship, fellowship or award, you may be invited for an in-person, phone or electronic interview. This interview is a critical part of the application process, as it will likely determine whether or not you are ultimately selected to receive the award/opportunity. This guide will assist you in preparing for and conducting a strong interview.

## **Preparing for the Interview**

You may be provided with ample time to prepare for an interview, or you may have as little as 24 hours advance notice. You should try to do as many of the following during this timeframe:

- Gather information on the nature of the interview including duration, format (group or one-on-one), and possible questions. Some interviews may take place over two days and include a reception or a dinner in addition to an individual interview. If this is the case, be sure to brush up on your etiquette skills and how to conduct yourself during this type of event.
- Know your audience: determine who the interviewer(s) will be. The interviewer(s) may or may not be in your field of study, so it is important to know ahead of time if you will need to cater your responses to a more general or technical audience.
- Schedule a practice (mock) interview with a faculty or staff member to ease your nerves and help you articulate your qualifications in person. It is also a good idea to practice your handshake with your mock interviewer.
- Re-familiarize yourself with the funding organization's mission and the requirements of the scholarship, fellowship or award.
- Know why you are interested in the opportunity and why you are a good fit.
- Reread your application and be prepared to provide more detail regarding your experiences, skills, accomplishments and goals.
- Think about your weaknesses and how they can be improved.
- Review any interview advice provided on the funding organization's website.

## **Before the Interview**

- Make sure you are well rested and have something to eat prior to the interview.
- Dress in business casual or business professional attire according to the nature of the funding organization. If you are unsure of appropriate dress code, wear more formal attire.
- Arrive at the internship location at least 15 minutes early (allow ample travel time).
- Bring a copy of your application, a pen and a pad of paper. Turn off your phone.

## **During the Interview**

Some interview committees may deliberately try to make you uncomfortable, while others are just interested in learning more about you. Regardless, be confident and let your personality come through. Below are some additional recommendations for how to conduct yourself during the interview:

- Have good posture and don't put your arms on the table. Try not to fidget with hair, clothing, hands, etc.

- Make eye contact with the interviewer(s).
- Speak at a reasonable pace (not too fast or slow) and at an appropriate volume.
- Show your enthusiasm and be positive.
- Allow the interviewer(s) to guide the conversation.
- Answer questions thoroughly, but succinctly. It is okay to have brief silences in between your responses instead of filling the gaps with filler words (um, like, as).
- Indicate if you would like clarification on a question or ask the interviewer(s) to repeat the question.
- Take notes as appropriate. Write down the interviewer'(s)' name(s) and get their contact information.
- Ask questions of the interviewer(s) at the end of the interview if provided the opportunity.
- Thank the interviewer(s) for their time at the end of the interview.

### ***Sample Questions/Prompts***

Every interview is different depending on the type of opportunity, your field, the interview panel and many other factors. There is no way to anticipate every question that you may be asked during an interview and you shouldn't try to. If you are unsure of the answer to a question, the best approach is to be honest. You can speak about something you do know about the topic or simply say you're not sure. Interview panels can be turned off by interviewees who have rehearsed all of their responses.

There are some commonalities across interview questions for scholarships, fellowships and awards. You will likely be asked for more details and background about your proposal and/or your experiences. You may also be asked about current events or recent developments in your field. Below are other common questions and topics you may be asked to address in the interview:

- "Tell me about yourself." Interviewers are interested in learning more about who you are: how you chose your major/field, your future goals, etc.
- Why are you interested in this scholarship, fellowship or award?
- How will you make a difference in your field?
- What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- What is your most important leadership experience?
- What are you passionate about and why?
- What current issues are most important to you and why?
- Behavioral questions such as "Tell me about a time when you led a team to accomplish a goal" or "Explain a situation in which you solved a problem". Behavioral questions are a way for the interviewer(s) to use your past behavior to predict your future behavior in a similar situation. In answering behavior-based questions, make sure to clearly state the situation, the task you were faced with, the actions you took and the result.
- Non-academic questions regarding your extracurricular interests such as "What do you like to do in your spare time" or "What is your favorite book and why?".

## After the Interview

Within 24-48 hours after an in-person or electronic interview, send an e-mail or written thank you letter to your interviewer(s). The letter should be brief and should reiterate your qualifications for and interest in the opportunity without being overly confident.

## Electronic and Phone Interviews

Electronic video interviews (i.e. Skype) are often used if an interviewee is unable to travel to the interview site due to their geographical location. All of the suggestions provided in this guide apply to electronic interviews. In addition, be sure to test the program you will be using for the interview in advance. Notify the interviewer of your username ahead of time and ask for their information so you know what to expect. Make sure that you are in a quiet location with ample lighting and you are ready by your computer at least 10 minutes early. If possible, sit at a desk or table rather than a couch or bed. You should be dressed as if you were attending an in-person interview. Be sure to make a plan with the interviewer at the outset of how you will reconnect if there is a disruption in service (especially if you are connecting from abroad).

A phone conversation is another format that is sometimes used for interviews. Again, all of the above recommendations apply to phone interviews. Make sure to smile while you are speaking so your enthusiasm comes through (avoid being monotone). Even though your interviewer(s) can't see you, you should still dress professionally so you have a professional mindset. It is important to be concise while interviewing over the phone, as you are not able to see the interviewer'(s)' body language and other cues indicating whether they are satisfied with an answer. They will let you know if they want you to elaborate on your response.

## Additional Assistance

Feel free to contact the Office of External Scholarships, Fellowships and Awards (contact information provided below) for assistance in preparing for a competitive award interview. We can help you set up a mock interview and connect you with other campus professionals who can be of assistance through the interview process.

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