Graduate School Interviewing: How to Make an ACCEPTable First Impression

Part I. Practice Questions

Turn to your neighbor, and practice answering these questions in 1-3 sentences.

1) Why do you want to be a __________ (professional title)?
2) Why do you want to pursue a __________ degree?
3) What attracts you to _______ program at ______ University?

Q. 1: Why do you want to be a __________ (professional title)?

- **Weak Responses**
  - I find Psychology interesting.
  - I (or someone close to me) had a “personal” experience.
  - I want to help people.
  - I like kids.

- **Strong Responses**
  - I’m interested in a career in teaching, research, clinical work because of [X] professional, mentoring, academic experiences.
  - I have worked in a few areas of psychology. I selected this area because of my specific philosophy and future goals. For example, ...
Q. 2: Why do you want to pursue a ________ degree?

- **Weak Responses**
  - I want to make more money.
  - I want to be a "doctor."
  - You can’t do a lot with a bachelors in psychology.

- **Strong Responses**
  - A Ph.D. or M.A. (etc.) will allow me to work more effectively in a specific setting or with a specific population.
  - This degree will qualify me to do a certain type of work (therapy, college-level teaching, consulting, etc.) that other degrees will not.

Q. 3: What attracts you to ______ program at ______ University?

- **Weak Responses**
  - It's in a nice city.
  - It's affordable.
  - It's my "dream" university.
  - I have family here.

- **Strong Responses**
  - My past experiences have prepared me for the clinical/research opportunities available here.
  - The faculty here are productive and contribute to their field in a special way; I would like to learn to be a driving force in this field, in a similar manner.
  - This program/university has a unique area or specialty that I desire that others do not offer.
  - My research interests directly align with those of [X] professor.

**Part II. Planning Before the Interview**

**Remember:** They invited you to interview, which means you are a serious contender for admission. Treat this like it is important and exciting! BECAUSE IT IS.

**Autonomous Attitude**

- **Successful self-presentation is key.**
  - Handle as many of your travel plans independently as possible.
  - Demonstrate confidence, organization, promptness, and thoughtfulness.
- **Consider adopting the "Triple I" attitude:**
  - Interested
  - Informed
  - Inquisitive
Prepare to Market Yourself...

- Why are you better than your competition?
  - Experience
  - Specialty
  - Future plans

- Know yourself
  - Organize your CV
  - Prepare to describe experiences succinctly and effectively.

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Prepare to Market Yourself...

- Ensure your all-around professionalism
  - THINK before you post something on the internet.
  - Google yourself to see what comes up.

- Facebook
  - Alter privacy settings, but be aware that ANYTHING you or friends post might be found. It’s a small world!
  - Create a professional “about me” section.

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Be Informed

- Do your homework on the program and interviewer!
  - What kind of research/clinical work is being done?
  - What would you be doing while you’re there?
  - Why is this program a good fit for you?
  - Think about your personal statement but don’t reiterate it.

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Prepare for the right type of interview

- In-Person Interview
  - Scope out the scheduling and location.

- Skype
  - Which room? Is it clean?
  - Your dog isn’t going to run in or start barking, is he?

- Phone Interview
  - Consider your phone options… you don’t want to get cut off.
Practice Makes Perfect!

- Get some practice answering typical interview questions.
  - Answer questions in a way that demonstrates how you solve problems.
- Do a mock interview!
  - Career Resource Center
  - You can also enlist the help of mentors, grad students, friends, or family members.

Part III. During the Interview

DURING the interview...(cont.)
DO

- Try to be relaxed and genuine.
- Present yourself positively.
- Interviewers aren’t just interested in what you know but WHO you are!
- Be appropriately enthusiastic.
- Don’t panic if you get a difficult question.

DON’T

- Avoid being overly casual (or overly pedantic).
- Think about:
  - Posture
  - Tone
  - Language use/time you spend talking

DURING the interview...(cont.)

- Asking your own questions is essential!
  - Make sure that they are informed.
  - Make sure that they are appropriate.
  - Don’t ask questions that can be answered in the school’s literature.
- Every interaction is an interview.
  - Even casual interactions with students or social events.
DURING the interview...(cont.)

- Some programs (particularly clinical/counseling) may have group interviews.
  - Collaboration, panel, turn taking.
- Your relationship with other interviewees is important! Be pleasant and cooperative.
  - Interpersonal skills are the name of the game.

Part IV. AFTER the interview

- Write a simple note of thanks!
- Not a time to campaign, to raise substantive points, or to ask further questions – just a polite note demonstrating graciousness and diplomacy.
- Keep notes about anything important you learned and keep a record of the things you liked/didn’t like about the interview.
  - This helps later on when you need to make a decision about where you want to attend!

Additional Resources

- [http://www.psych.ufl.edu/files/graduate/interviewing.pdf](http://www.psych.ufl.edu/files/graduate/interviewing.pdf)
- [http://gradschool.about.com/od/interviews/a/intquest.htm](http://gradschool.about.com/od/interviews/a/intquest.htm)
- [http://www.crc.ufl.edu/students/studentMockInterviews.html](http://www.crc.ufl.edu/students/studentMockInterviews.html)

Questions?