

## Skidmore College's Ten Tips for a Successful College Interview

**A** college interview can provide you with new insights and may also add a significant personal dimension to your application. We hope the following tips will help you understand and best use the interview as you research and visit colleges.

### Know what the interview means at each college.

Is it purely informational or intended to help evaluate you as a candidate? At Skidmore your interview will be **evaluative**, and the discussion will allow you to introduce yourself in a way that distinguishes you from other admissions applicants. Your interviewer will engage you in a relaxed conversation and will ask you to discuss your school, courses, activities, and academic and personal goals. You will also be encouraged to ask any questions you have about Skidmore and the application process. The interview summary written by the interviewer after your discussion will describe your individual qualities and your ability to contribute to the Skidmore community. It will become part of your application file when you apply.

By contrast, an **informational** interview will require you to direct the conversation. The interviewer's questions may be as general as, "What can I tell you about this school?" or "What questions do you have about the application process?" Ordinarily, no written evaluation is included in your application file after an informational interview. The purpose of the interview is to raise and answer questions that will help you distinguish among the colleges you are considering and determine which ones are the "best fit."

### Make and keep appointments.

Particularly, if you want to have an admissions interview or chat with a faculty member, it's a good idea to call for an appointment. For popular interview times—school vacation weeks, for example—you might have to make arrangements many weeks in advance. If it turns out that you will be late for an appointment, or if you have to miss it entirely, make sure to call ahead to notify those who might be waiting. Don't assume that if you arrive unannounced that people will be available to meet with you. Plan ahead.

### Know something about the college before you visit.

Do your homework. You are not expected to be an expert on the college, but you should know the basic facts before your interview. Web sites, viewbooks, catalogs, and college guides are all good sources of basic information. The interviewer's questions will help you clarify the qualities you hope to find in a college and will help you understand how different colleges do or do not satisfy those expectations. To that end, you should be prepared to talk about your college search: What are you looking for in a college? What is important to you? What is your vision of the ideal college? How did you decide to visit this specific campus?

### Think about your high school years.

Be introspective. What do you do with your "free" time? How would your parents describe you? What would your favorite teacher say? Your friends? Make a list of co-curricular interests and hobbies that are important to you. How have you spent your summers? Have you ever worked, either on a

volunteer or paid basis? How have you changed during your high school years?

### Know your high school.

The colleges you apply to will assess your performance and record within the context of your high school. Are honors courses offered? Advanced Placement courses? An IB program? How large is your high school? How many students are in your senior class? You should be able to describe your school, your courses, and the level of competition that you face. What course was the toughest? Do you regret any course choices? (Try not to complain about "bad" teachers!) How diverse is your high school's student body? Your community? Don't assume that your interviewer can picture your school. Try to describe it as vividly as possible.

### Watch your language!

Assuming it is an evaluative interview such as Skidmore's, an interviewer will want to get to know you and assess you as a potential student and member of the college community. What you say and how you say it matters, so think before you speak. Listen carefully to the questions, take time to think, and express your ideas clearly. Do your best to avoid slang and crutches such as "you know," "like," and "um."

### Be aware of your body language.

Establish good eye contact with your interviewer. When people look at each other they communicate more effectively. Be aware of how you act when you are nervous. Do you tap your foot? Twist or flip your hair? Look at the floor? Say "you know" a lot? If you can identify your nervous habits ahead of

time you can consciously address them in the interview and make a better impression.

### Be prepared to ask questions.

Ask questions regarding academic requirements or special services offered by the college, but avoid basic questions that should have been answered in your preliminary research. Do not waste time asking questions that are easily answered on the admissions Web site, in the viewbook, or in the catalog. Examples: "How many students attend your school?" or "Do you have a psychology major?" Use your time wisely by asking about things that interest you. You might ask about internships, accessibility of professors, athletic facilities, performance opportunities, student leadership positions, or social life on campus. Ask questions that will help you identify qualitative differences between similar colleges. It's a good idea to bring your list of questions to the interview.

### Dress "comfortably."

Most admission interviewers recommend that you wear clothes that are comfortable for you and make you feel good about yourself. You don't have to "dress up" in a skirt or a button-down shirt and necktie unless that's what you're most comfortable wearing. Be neat, but be yourself.

### Be honest. Don't pretend.

If you really read science fiction, then don't pretend that you like Dickens. Share any serious personal difficulty that has affected your record with your interviewer. Don't try to guess the "right answer" to questions. What you have done is not nearly as important as why you did it and how it helped you grow. If you have a weakness in your record (for example, a poor grade or a semester of poor grades) try to put it into perspective for the interviewer. Be honest. If this is your first interview and

you're nervous, share those feelings with your interviewer. If you're afraid that some aspect of the college might not be right for you, share your concern. Feel good about yourself and convey that feeling to the interviewer. You can be positive about your accomplishments without sounding conceited. Interviewers expect you to say good things about yourself.

### Be sure to follow up after the interview.

Interviewers, like everyone else, appreciate being thanked for their time. Write down the name of your interviewer as well as the date (many will give you a business card) and send a personal thank-you note after returning home. Colleges notice the gesture and it helps to reinforce a positive impression. If you enjoyed your interview and visit, find out about opportunities to return to campus and stay overnight in a dorm, sit in on classes, and attend upcoming special programs.

Remember that every college wants you to leave your visit feeling good about the experience. If you take the time to research colleges, and then do a little thinking about your high school career and where you want to go in the future, you'll find your visits informative and enjoyable, even helpful to you in the admissions selection process.

**Time to put our ten tips into practice?** Think about scheduling an interview at Skidmore. Call us toll-free at 800-867-6007.

**SKIDMORE**  
COLLEGE

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*Good Luck!*



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