



CAREER CONNECTION

Department of Career Services & Testing

Grad School Interview Questions, What They are Looking for; and Example Answer

Tell Me about Yourself

When an interviewer says, "Tell me about yourself," the interviewer wants information that is pertinent to the job you're interviewing for. You could start by explaining where you're from, where you grew up, and any interesting personal circumstances. Then talk about your undergraduate university, what you majored and minored in, and why you made those choices. Finally, close by talking about your extracurricular achievements – both in school and outside. Everything you say should build toward the idea that your life has naturally led you to apply to graduate school. Your answer should be a concise, demonstrating your ability to synthesize and structure your thoughts without rambling.

Why do you want to go here, instead of other schools?

This is your chance to show how much you know about this school, and how well you fit. A detailed and thoughtful response demonstrates you cared enough to research the department of your choice in advance. If you're super stoked on the school, by all means, express it, but stop short of sucking up. And if you're not that stoked on the school, but it's your only option for financial or convenience reasons, you better think of a reason to get excited about it – fast.

Why Should We Accept You?"

Why not? Describe in modest and balanced terms why you are eminently qualified for the program. Talk about your personal, academic, and extracurricular accomplishments and how they make you a strong candidate for the program. Discuss your long range plans and how you will make full use of the university's resources to accomplish your goals -- not just their facilities, but also access to faculty in areas of particular interest to you. While this may sound selfish, you're really telling the school that they won't be wasting an admissions spot with you.

Why Are You interested in This Field?"

If you haven't figured this out in your personal statement, you should go back to the drawing board. Basically, restate what you've written in your personal statement, but go deeper and broader. By deeper, we mean explaining in more detail those factors and motivations that you



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mentioned in your personal statement. By broader, we mean all the stuff you couldn't fit in the statement. A good answer might show both depth and breadth and convey your excitement for the field.

What are your research interests?

Now you get to wax eloquent about your passion. Don't hold back: the interviewer needs to see your excitement and enthusiasm. Be specific, and address how your research interests fit with the school's curriculum. Don't forget to include past schoolwork, work experience, publications, and other accomplishments.

How will you contribute to our program?

This is the time to toot your own horn by responding with a combination of personal and professional qualities. Again, be specific, and cite examples of these qualities you purport to possess. Remember: in this case, modesty will get you nowhere, but try to stop short of arrogance.

What are your short-term and long-term career goals?

Your answer to this question provides the interviewer with a sense of your initiative, interests, and ambition. A thorough and relevant response demonstrates you've spent some time reflecting on the professional direction you'd like to take and how you see yourself getting there.

What do you see as the major trends in your field of study?

Here's where the interviewer gets to assess how well you've kept up with current developments in your field. It's a time for you to note any recent journal articles you've read, conferences you've attended, and the topics relevant blogs or websites in your field are covering. Adding your opinion on the recent trends demonstrates you've spent time considering the pros and the cons.

Tell me about how you achieved a significant accomplishment.

This is not the time to be modest. State your accomplishments with confidence. But here's the trick: you've got to fall short of outright cockiness. In order not to come across as arrogant, notice your tone of voice – does it reek of "I'm so great?" It can also be helpful to point out the difficulties you faced in achieving your goal, or a detail in which you explain, in hindsight, what you could have done even better.



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List some of your strengths and weaknesses.

Listing strengths should be easy. Again, this is not the time to be modest. Be clear and specific about your strengths, but the “listing weaknesses” part can be tricky. You want to be honest, but you’ve got to be careful not to look like a potentially problematic student. One way around this is to discuss how you’ve been proactively working to change your flaws. Examples illustrating both strengths and weaknesses are crucial.

Tell me about your hobbies and interests.

Admissions departments want to know you’ll be able to achieve work-life balance. Here’s your opportunity to show your interviewer you’re more than a one-dimensional student. Your answer to this question has the potential to be very memorable.

Where else have you applied?

This is similar to “why do you want to go here?” The interviewer wants to know how committed you are to attending their school. If you have applied elsewhere, let your interviewer know what particularly interests you about this school. If you haven’t applied elsewhere, explain why you are solely committed to their program.

What questions do you have for me?

The only wrong answer to this question is “no”. If you’re committed to being a student at this school, there’s got to be *something* you’re curious about and want to explore further. Ask about a particular faculty member or research opportunity, what careers recent alums have pursued, recent dissertation topics, etc. What better way to show your interest than demonstrating curiosity? You may want to construct some questions as part of your interview prep so you are ready to respond to this question with inquires that are insightful and demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the program, the university, and your field of interest.