

Does the mere thought of participating in an interview send you into a cold sweat? Don't worry, you are not alone. Many students get nervous when it comes to those face-to-face interactions, especially when there is significant college money on the line. I was fortunate enough to win most of my scholarships without suffering through a lengthy interview process, but a few of the more prestigious and substantial awards required my presence in front of not one, but several committee members. You would think that sitting in front of a panel of strangers would be more intimidating than speaking one-on-one, but I actually felt more at ease with the larger groups. Think about it. The odds are in your favor that at least one of the people interviewing you will like you. But regardless of how many people are in the room, there are a few things you can do to improve your chances of having a successful scholarship interview.

## 1. BE PREPARED

Would you go to an employment interview without doing some background research on the company? Of course not, and the same should be true for your scholarship interviews. Make sure to review the scholarship provider's mission statement, community involvement, and recent news. You'll want to review your application packet again and bring along extra copies of your resume, as well. Be sure to write down a few questions for the interviewer or panel, too. Finally, take time to practice answering some of the typical questions you may be asked during your interview. Here are a few that are commonly used:

- Tell us about yourself.
- What is your biggest weakness?
- Give an example of a time you overcame adversity.
- Where do you see yourself in five or ten years?
- What three words would you use to describe yourself?
- Why do you think you deserve this scholarship?

The last one is the most difficult to answer without sounding like a pompous you-know-what, but don't let it throw you. You should, however, avoid rattling off a laundry list of accomplishments and awards. Instead, use something personal to give the interviewer or panel insight into who you really are and why you would be the best choice for the award. With a little bit of practice, you'll be able to handle just about any question thrown at you.

## 2. DRESS TO IMPRESS

Although you may be most comfortable in your sweatpants or shorts, this is not the appropriate time to dress down. You need to demonstrate to the scholarship committee that you are a serious student and that you are honored to be nominated for the award. Be sure to dress to impress, which means business attire, such as slacks and a buttoned-down collared shirt, or a knee-length skirt or dress. Hair should be neat and out of your face, and don't forget to wear shoes that are in good condition. An interview is not the time to bring out your smelly gym shoes or breach sandals. Don't forget to bring along some mints, too. Nothing kills an interview quicker than bad breath!

## 3. BE ON TIME

Before you attend your scholarship interview, be sure to add the scholarship provider's address to your GPS or look up the directions online. This will give you an estimate of how long it will take to arrive at your destination. Give yourself plenty of extra time to deal with unexpected situations, such as traffic or parking issues, to ensure you do not arrive late. You should also jot down the name of your interviewer and ask him/her by name when you arrive. Nothing screams "unprepared" like showing up for a meeting and not remembering who you are supposed to meet. If you are running behind, please call ahead and let them know you will be late. This will give the scholarship provider the option of pushing back your interview or rescheduling it, if necessary. It's never good to show up late, but it's even worse to do so without giving the provider fair warning.

## 4. THINK BEFORE YOU SPEAK

It's important to listen during your interview and not anticipate questions, as this could lead to some unfavorable results. Once a question has been asked, respond in a clear and concise manner. Stay on topic and do not ramble. Be sure to make eye contact and enunciate! Above all else, answer all questions honestly. Interviewers can tell when you are embellishing or making up answers to impress them.

## 5. BE YOURSELF

It can be intimidating trying to impress complete strangers, but here's something you should know – you've already impressed them. If they didn't see something remarkable or unique about you, you wouldn't have been selected for an interview. Walk into your meeting with confidence, smile, and be yourself. You've worked hard to get here, so enjoy the moment. It's not always easy to judge whether or not your interview has gone well. On more than one occasion, I have left an interview certain that the scholarship committee was not interested in me, only to find out later that I was selected for the award. Most interviewers will keep stoic face and not give away their true feelings. Don't let this influence your responses or behavior during the meeting. Always conduct yourself as though you are the best candidate and deserving of the award.

## 6. BE CONSCIOUS OF YOUR BEHAVIOR

Interviews of any kind can be nerve wracking, but it is important to appear calm and self-possessed while speaking with the review board. Try not to fidget or appear nervous. Sitting still, making eye contact and maintaining good posture gives you

the appearance of a calm, collected and professional student. Be confident in your answers, avoid sounding indecisive and speak clearly and to the point when answering the questions that are put to you.

## 7. KNOW YOURSELF

Beyond being aware of your posture and your appearance, be conscious of what you say. Be clear and concise in your answers to the interviewer, and avoid wavering from the point. A rambling interviewee may seem charming, but he or she does not impress the review board. Stay focused and keep your answers pertinent and on topic.

If you find yourself without a satisfactory answer to a question, don't try to bluff your way through. Ask for clarification, or simply be honest and say you do not know. Interviewers prefer an honest interviewee who is aware of their own knowledge over someone who attempts to bluff or deceive. Above all be cordial, attentive and answer the questions clearly and concisely.

## 8. ASK A FEW QUESTIONS

Don't be afraid to ask questions during the interview process. Inquire about the company sponsoring the scholarship, or ask about particulars regarding the scholarship itself. Being able to engage the interviewer with questions of your own shows that you are prepared and comfortable, and highlights your interest in the award and in your ultimate college career.