**Top 10 College Interview Questions**

**Favorite Books, Biggest Mistakes & Why Harvard?**

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Harvard Admissions Office

*Photo by Glen Cooper, Getty Images*

**10 Typical College Interview Questions**

1. **Tell me about yourself:** Your child may fret about what the interviewer is really looking for, but when asked early on, this is a warm-up question, an easy lob that starts the conversation rolling. The real question is "Who are you? And what do you want us to know about you?" There is no wrong answer. Hometown, family, passions - anything is fine. If this is your child's top choice school - if accepted, he will absolutely come - then this is a good time to say so.
2. **Why this school? Why is this a good fit for you?** This is a critical question and the answer should be specific to the university, not to its desirable weather or proximity to a city or coastline. Why did your child choose this school? Extra points if your science buff's answer about the university's world class labs is accompanied by the words: "and the opportunity to work with Prof. X on his X research."
3. **What would you bring to this school?** Another major question and one that should be carefully thought out beforehand. It's obvious what the star quarterback or stellar bassoonist bring to a campus, but everyone has something to offer. What does your child think he contributed to the vibrancy of his high school campus? What makes him special?
4. **What are your strengths/weaknesses? Academic challenges/passions** Your child should use anything even remotely like the classic strengths/weaknesses question as an opportunity to talk about his academic or extra-curricular passions. And if there is a weakness in his transcripts, now's the time to explain a poor grade or dropped class, particularly if illness or family trauma were involved. Absolutely avoid blaming other people or claiming "my teacher didn't like me." Caveat: If this is an off-campus, alumni interviewer, he may not have your child's transcripts or test scores. It's important to send any explanation of poor grades or dropped courses to the admissions officer reading your child's file.
5. **Favorite book/movie/music?** Don't over-think the question or try to figure out what the interviewer wants to hear. If your child's favorite book is "Harry Potter" or "Twilight," then that's the answer he or she should give. Avoid the temptation to impress admissions officers with esoteric, intellectual choices that aren't really favorites - the interviewer is going to want to chat about it, which will be difficult, not to mention unimpressive, if your child hasn't actually read it.
6. **Favorite class/extra-curricular activity?** Another opportunity for applicants to talk about who they are, and why this particular college is a good fit.
7. **What other schools have you applied to?** This one's tricky, because the admissions officer is gauging competition for this particular candidate, and no school likes to think of itself as a "safety." One way to handle that is by speaking of those choices vaguely - "I'm looking at small universities on the west coast" - before turning the conversation back to the special attractions of this university.
8. **What's the biggest challenge you've ever faced?** Whether it's an academic, emotional or physical challenge, the best answers offer a happy outcome, a fear overcome or a major life lesson.
9. **Who has most influenced you?** A teacher or family member is a safe bet, as are political luminaries, such as Gandhi or Nelson Mandela, but be prepared for follow-up questions.
10. **Do you have any questions for me?** Prepare several. If this is an alumni interview, be sure to ask about the interviewer's college experience - and make it something more interesting than "Er, did you like it?" or "Where did you live?" If it's Emory University, for example, [a question about Dooley the skeleton](http://youngadults.about.com/od/University_Guide/qt/Everything-About-Emory.htm) should spark a lively discussion about campus culture and tradition, and yield valuable insight into the feel of the place. It also tells the interviewer that this applicant really does know something about the school.

**Unusual Campus Interview Questions**

Your child can't prepare for every question, but here's a sampling of the more unusual questions asked during college interviews:

* "Describe your ideal class."
* "If you were a kitchen utensil, which one would you be?"
* "Are your grades the result of intelligence or hard work?"
* If someone gave you a million dollars, what would you do with it?
* "If you were on the cover of Time Magazine 10 years from now, why would you be there?"
* "What would you change about your school?"
* "If you could have dinner with any one - living, dead, historical or fictional - who would you choose and why?"
* "If you had high school to do over, what would you do differently?"