

# Common Graduate Admissions Interview Questions



## 1. TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF

This tests your ability to summarize and communicate your thoughts clearly. Talk about your academic background, work experience, any major accomplishments, and your motivations for pursuing the graduate program. Remember, this is a SUMMARY; Keep it brief.

## 2. WHY ARE YOU INTERESTED IN THIS PROGRAM?

Admissions committees want to understand why you applied to their program. If your reason is compelling, it convinces them that you would be more likely to choose their program over others if you got multiple offers. For this you need to highlight specific features of the program; Avoid answers which are too generic.

| GOOD ANSWERS   | BAD ANSWERS  |
|--|--|
| You want to take a certain subject in the program's course list  | You chose the university because of its global rankings                        |
| You found a laboratory with projects you wish to participate in  | You chose the university because it gives out lots of scholarships             |
| There's a professor you want to work with (take note of the professor's most recent publications and projects) | You chose this university because some famous people studied there in the past |

## 3. WHAT ARE YOUR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES?

Admissions committees ask this question to determine your self-awareness and attitude. Choose qualities which you can apply within the context of the program you're applying to.

For **STRENGTHS**, mention qualities which you can support with evidence. Avoid comparing yourself to others.

For **WEAKNESSES**, be honest and give a genuine flaw. Make sure to explain the steps you are taking to address these weaknesses.

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| Examples of Good Answers  | Examples of Bad Answers  |
|---|--|
| (Strength)<br>"I think I'm good at breaking down complicated topics into easy-to-understand chunks. Whenever we would have an exam in undergrad, I'd volunteer to host review sessions with my classmates to help them remember the concepts more clearly."                 | (Strength)<br>"I feel that I am academically gifted in my field. I am currently the top student in my class and I expect to graduate magna cum laude with my current GPA." |
| (Weakness)<br>"Time management is something I'm still working on. I've tried some strategies in the past which I felt didn't fit my current lifestyle. Currently I'm trying out the Pomodoro technique when I study, but I'll have to wait and see if it will work for me." | (Weakness)<br>"People say that I am too hardworking. Also I am afraid to let other people down, which is why I work so hard."  |

## 4. WHAT ARE YOUR CAREER GOALS?

To admissions staff, potential students are more likely to finish the program if they have a clear goal in mind. Describe at least one potential career path that you're interested in pursuing. To get an idea of the possibilities, check out where the alumni of the program end up after graduating (LinkedIn is a good tool for this; some program websites also have alumni pages).

Connect the aims you want to accomplish with the degree you want to pursue and some features of the program you're applying to (such as those in #2). If possible, show that your goals will benefit not only you but some other organizations (e.g. your country, your field, your government).

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## 5. TELL ME ABOUT A TIME WHEN YOU...

You may get asked about to give examples on how you handled certain situations in your career. A good strategy would be to use the Context-Action-Result (CAR) framework in answering these situational questions.

**CONTEXT:** Give a brief description of the problem you found yourself in.

**ACTION:** Outline which action/s you did to solve the problem.

**RESULT:** What benefits did you get as a result of the action/s you mentioned?

### SAMPLE QUESTION:

**Tell me about a time when you took initiative in your work.**

C: I was using (instrument) for my experiments. When I looked at the literature, the experimental values that I got were far from the literature values. My other labmates said that they were getting the same results as I did, and that it was normal.

A: I asked one of the lab staff to check if I had been doing my experiment correctly. I showed her all the equipment and chemicals I used and what steps I did.

R: We found that one of the reagents I used had been contaminated with a foreign substance. After replacing this with a new batch, I was able to get within the range of the literature values. Had I not pointed out the problem, more experiment time and research funds would have been wasted.

## 6. WHAT ARE YOUR TOPICS OF INTEREST?

This question tests your familiarity within your field. Choose a specific topic (e.g. use “electrochemistry” or “organic chemistry” instead of “chemistry”) and mention subtopics which are possible to pursue under the program you’re applying to. It is also good to mention any relevant experience you’ve had with the topic and the reason why you chose it.

Before your interview, be sure to familiarize yourself with the theory behind the techniques, analyses, and instruments commonly used in your field. These may come as follow-up questions.

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## BONUS: DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS FOR US?

When you apply to a university for graduate studies, you are volunteering to spend years of your life within that institution. The interviewer gives you this opportunity to answer any doubts you have about their program. Moreover, asking questions indicates that you're seriously considering the program and that you're already planning for your future.

### SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR YOUR INTERVIEWER

- How does the university help graduates (especially international students) in finding future career opportunities?
- What funding options are available, if I get accepted? Will these be enough to cover my living costs and/or tuition?
- Will I have access to training and/or certifications during my stay, and will the costs be covered by my institute?
- How long does it usually take for students to finish this program?
- Are there any associations or events for international students?

## Further Reading:

- [Guidance for your Graduate School Interview](#)
- [Science Magazine](#)
- [Top 10 Graduate School Interview Questions](#)
- [10 Graduate School Interview Questions \(With Answers\)](#)
- [Behavioral Interview Questions and Answers](#)