

NEWNHAM COLLEGE

CAMBRIDGE INTERVIEWS

- Interviews are an important part of the Cambridge application procedure; almost every applicant is invited to come for at least two interviews. But performance at interview is just one of many factors (personal statement, school reference, exam predictions and results) that we consider, so **DO try to keep it in perspective.**
- How can you prepare for an interview? **DO NOT** memorise set speeches and rehearse endlessly. Why? Interviews are a two-way process and you cannot know what the other half will be until your interview starts. Candidates who memorise speeches are often more nervous (will they remember what to say?) and seem stilted (they don't listen to the questions). The contrast between rehearsed lines and their natural speech patterns may make them feel uncomfortable - and will probably be obvious to an interviewer.
- **DO** think carefully in advance – and write notes if it helps – about all the **factors that have led you to believe you want to spend three or four years studying your chosen subject:** teachers and other people who have influenced you, books you have read, places you have visited, television programmes or plays you have seen, extra-curricular interests, experiences and activities you have loved (or hated!). This is valuable preparation for your life (far more important than a couple of interviews).
- **DO take time to read about what format the interviews will take.** After you apply, we will send you information about your interviews: whether you need to submit written work; if you will be asked to do a test or read a passage before the interview; how many interviews you will have (usually two, but sometimes three, or occasionally only one) and how long they will be (from 20 minutes to, in a few cases, an hour); whether they will be subject or general interviews, how many interviewers will be present (usually one or two), and who your interviewers will be.
- **DO** make sure we know enough about you, your interests and achievements to ask constructive and relevant questions. **Fill in your UCAS application and SAQ accurately and give us lots of relevant information in your personal statement.** **DO NOT** tell us that you want to study at a prestigious university, but **DO** tell us what makes the course particularly suitable for you. **DO NOT** simply list your accomplishments (e.g., Bronze Duke of Edinburgh Award, Grade X clarinet); **DO** tell us what they have done for you (e.g., experiences you would not otherwise have had, self-discipline to practice, self-confidence to perform). Tell us what (ideally relating to your subject) you have read and/or done outside school so our questions can be more focussed and constructive.

- DO keep copies of and re-read your personal statement (and any written work that you were asked to send in) before the interview, as you will almost certainly be asked questions about what you have written.
- DO make sure you leave **plenty of time to get to the college** on the day of your interviews (take advantage of our free overnight accommodation if you need to). We are aware that travelling can be unpredictable so, if you suddenly find yourself stuck in traffic or waiting for a delayed train, DO NOT worry. Please do phone us, if possible, to let us know that you will be late and we will do our best to re-schedule your interviews.
- DO see the subject interview for what it is: a model teaching session in which we find out how you would deal with a Cambridge supervision. In most cases, **we are not testing what you already know, but your potential to learn**. You may well be given deliberately unfamiliar material to discuss and if you say ‘I can’t answer that, we haven’t learnt about it in school’ it will not impress your interviewers! Giving the ‘wrong’ answer to a question is much less important than showing that you are willing to discover where you went wrong, can grasp the issues involved and are able to move the discussion forward.
- **Empathise with your interviewers**. DO NOT think you are being interviewed by experts who are waiting to pounce on your mistakes. DO think your interviewers want you to succeed and are doing their best to give you opportunities to demonstrate your potential. They will know a lot about certain aspects of your subject, but they may not know everything you know! Listen to their questions and try to answer them, but also try to help them out. If the interview seems to be moving in the wrong direction, take control and get it back on track.
- DO NOT get discouraged by what you take to be ‘bad signs’. If interviewers look at their watches it is more likely to be because they need to stick to a timetable than because they are bored. All colleges run training sessions and offer written guidelines for their interviewers, but the people who interview you at Cambridge are not professional interviewers, they are your future teachers.
- DO remember that even if one interview goes badly, you still have a second chance (and an interview that seems to be going badly can improve dramatically). **DO NOT give up**. Instead, DO think aloud so that we can help you. If you tell us, for instance, that you find the question difficult because you are not sure about something, then we can explain the issue or give you more information. We are less interested in what you know than how you learn.
- DO remember that Cambridge interviews are our chance to find out more about you than we can learn from your application form, but they are also your chance to find out more about us than you can learn from our prospectus.