

I have an interview for a graduate program... now what do I do?

Congratulations! Typically, institutions interview only 3-6 individuals for each slot, so your odds are looking good!

Programs handle these interviews in a variety of ways. Some use Zoom or phone calls, others invite students out to their campus for a few days. Most programs begin scheduling these interviews in January. Although some programs can help pay the cost of your plane ticket, and can give you housing with a graduate student, most of the time, you will be paying these costs yourself. Because flights are often delayed in winter, it is a good idea to pack your suit in your carry-on, so that if you lose your luggage, you will still have it.

If you have several offers for interviews, you may find that some of your interview dates conflict. You should be sensitive to the difficulties the program faces—they must compete with other schools for students, and they have only a short period of time in which to make a decision. If you find that you have a scheduling conflict, you can ask whether there are alternative dates, see if a Zoom interview is possible, or ask for an informal interview. Be sure to communicate to the school whether this request reflects your level of interest in the school—they will be eager to offer your spot to another student if you are not interested in their program.

Many students believe that they will be quizzed on statistics or facts during the interview—this is not the case! Often, faculty will ask questions about soft skills (such as teamwork, leadership, or conflict resolution) or they will ask questions about why you are interested in their program and what your career and research goals are. This is also an opportunity for you to get a feel for whether their program is right for you.

To prepare for the interview, we recommend the following:

- Carefully read the program's handbook or website, and have notes about:
 - Required and optional coursework
 - Graduation requirements (e.g., practicums, internships, qualifying exams, licensing exams, thesis requirements)
 - Faculty research areas (if there is a specific person you want to work with, you can read some of their publications to understand what working with them will be like).
 - Practicum opportunities
 - Funding opportunities (scholarships, teaching, or research assistant positions)
- Based on that information, craft some of your own questions so you can learn more about the program. This will show that you've done your homework, and it will help you ensure their program is the right fit for you.

- Spend some time thinking about some of your life experiences and what you've gained from them. These will help you prepare for soft skill questions. Here are some ideas to get you started:
 - Why do you want this degree? What jobs interest you?
 - What research skills do you currently have? What skills do you want to develop in the next few years?
 - What research topics are you most excited about?
 - How do you handle decision-making?
 - What kind of team member are you?
 - How do you show initiative?
 - When you are struggling in school, what resources do you turn to for help?
 - When you have a question, how do you find an answer?
 - How do you respond to tough feedback?

- Remember any way you behave during a visit (in-person or virtually) is under scrutiny! Some programs will have informal get-togethers so you can interact with students, but they will be on the lookout for unprofessional behavior, excessive drinking, and other red flags. Faculty and students all want nice colleagues, so bad behavior towards students or administrative staff will almost certainly get back to the faculty.