

How to Answer Common Scholarship Interview Questions

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If you read my recent post, “[5 Tips for Successful Scholarship Interviews](#),” you already have a good idea of what to expect during the scholarship selection process, including the common scholarship interview questions you might receive. But, do you know how to answer those questions? Some of them may seem rather simple, but your answers could ultimately make or break your chances of scoring the award. Remember, this is your one and only chance to impress the scholarship review board or committee chairperson, so you’ll need to have a game plan before entering the arena. But don’t worry — I have a few tips to help you ace some of the most frequently used [scholarship](#) interview questions. Here are five that you are likely to receive during most of your interviews.

1. “Tell us about yourself.”

This question is often used as an ice-breaker and should give the scholarship committee a better idea of who you are as an individual. They want to know what sets you apart from the other scholarship candidates, so don’t waste this opportunity by rehashing your résumé or transcript. Focus on something that distinguishes you from the other applicants or something that they cannot find by reading your application. For example, you may be pursuing an [engineering](#) degree, but in your free time you create cartoons just for fun. Perhaps, you have a [Tumblr](#) page filled with crazy food concoctions that were created to illustrate engineering problems, or maybe you are the direct descendant of the person who invented indoor plumbing. The idea is to find something that sets you apart from the other applicants, whether that’s a talent or a strange genealogical fact, and let your enthusiasm shine through.

2. “Give us an example of a time you overcame adversity.”

Please, whatever you do, don’t use your grades for this interview prompt, unless there were some extremely rare circumstances that caused your academic marks to slide. Too many students think that it’s impressive to raise a ‘C’ to a higher grade, when in reality many students have found themselves in the same situation. Instead, consider using an example that really illustrates a time where you were placed in an uncomfortable situation; for example, confronting someone who may have been bullying you or dealing with a difficult teacher. Other potential answers could include: instances of discrimination (gender, race, sexuality, etc.), being wrongly accused of something, or a sudden change in your family’s finances. Even working on a [group project](#) with other students you would not normally associate with would be more interesting than explaining how you raised your GPA.

3. “Where do you see yourself in five years?”

Don't let this one throw you. It's basically the scholarship committee's way of finding out if you have a game plan or you're just winging it. Try to envision where you want to be in five years, and then figure out how to get there. Your plan should include how long you will remain in college (bachelor's, master's, or higher?), internships or other outside activities that will help improve your chances of accomplishing your goals, as well as a financial strategy to cover all your expenses. Don't simply say, “I expect to run my own business and live in New York City.” Take the committee on a journey and fully explain how the steps you are taking now will place you on the right path to reach your desired destination.

4. “How do you plan to use the scholarship money?”

If you were about to give someone \$1,000 (or more), wouldn't you want to know that it was going to be spent on something worthwhile? That's the same reason why the scholarship committee is asking you this question. It's one thing to say you 'need' money for college, but it's quite another to actually show a provider where the proceeds will be put to use. Plan ahead by creating a budget that spells out all your estimated expenses for obtaining your degree, and don't forget to include any anticipated income you may receive from your family or other resources. Assure the committee that you are applying to other [scholarships](#), as well. It will impress the committee if they see you are taking an active role in keeping your student debt to a minimum. Don't forget to bring along extra copies of your budget, too, just in case the committee wants a closer look.

5. “Why do you deserve this scholarship?”

I have to admit that this was my least favorite question during scholarship interviews, but it always came up. And to be quite honest, there really is no perfect answer. There are, however, some things you should definitely not include in your response. Don't brag about your GPA or how many clubs you belong to at school. The majority of finalists will all have similar academic accomplishments, so it's not worth repeating. It's also not a good idea to declare that without the scholarship you'll be unable to attend college. In most cases, that will be untrue. Yes, you may be unable to afford your dream college, but I assure you that there are other less expensive alternatives to earning your degree. Instead, be honest with the committee and acknowledge that there are other worthy candidates that probably deserve the award as much as you do, but remind them that your work ethic and past accomplishments are a good indicator of your future success.

A Few Parting Words

Always conclude the meeting on a positive note. Be sure to shake the hands of everyone who participated in the interview, looking them in the eye and acknowledging them by name. Thank them for their time and

consideration, and be sure to let them know that you would be happy to address any follow-up questions, should they arise. Within 24 hours of your interview, send a hand-written note to the scholarship committee, thanking them once again for considering you as a recipient. These simple touches will go a long way in distinguishing you from other eligible applicants.