

# APPLYING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PSYCHOLOGY PART 2: PREPARING FOR INTERVIEWS

Notes from the January 13, 2021 [Webinar](#) provided by Melissa Dreier

Sponsored by the Academy for Eating Disorders (AED) Early Career SIG to promote diversity and inclusion in clinical and counseling psychology and the study of eating disorders.

## Questions? Contact:

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## • What do interviews look like?

- Most programs will offer a series of structured interviews throughout one or two interview days. These will include interviews with the principal investigator, graduate students, and other faculty. Some programs may offer a social dinner.
- Given the virtual format, there will be less “free time” to get to know people and fewer social opportunities. Some programs are trying to accommodate with informal pairing with graduate students.
- All programs are operating differently!

## • How should applicants prepare for interviews? Where’s a good place to start?

- Guides online (e.g., [Dr. Mitch Prinstein](#); [Dr. Jin Goh](#); [Mallory Dobias](#))
- Start writing out responses and practice saying your answers out loud!
- Organize mock interviews with friends, mentors, etc. if possible.
- Read recent research from your PI to get a sense of current projects in the lab.
- Remember: Interviews are also *your* opportunity to find out if *you* want to work with the PI!
- You may be interviewed by other faculty members too (not just PI to whom you’re applying). This helps your PI get a sense of how you come off to their trusted colleagues.

## • Are there any “rules” or expectations that applicants should know about to make sure they come off as interested and professional?

- Never run out of questions for PIs, grad students, etc. (even if you don’t *really* have any questions by the time you’re asked “any questions?”). This helps demonstrate you’re really interested.
- Send a thank you note/email afterwards!
- Don’t have any other technology/websites open (e.g., don’t be on Facebook/Twitter/texting). If you are taking notes, tell the PI so they know you’re not on social media, etc.
- Dress professionally (common options: blazer, cardigan, button-down).
- If you’re truly not interested, don’t take the interview spot.

## • What are questions you should definitely prepare for?

- “Tell me about yourself” – have a brief bio ready, which segues into your current research interests
- “Design your dream study” (i.e., translating your research questions into concrete studies).
- “Why this lab/program?”
- “Why do you want to pursue clinical psychology specifically?”
- “Describe a challenging situation and how you overcame it.”
- “What do you look for in a mentor?”
- “What are your specific research interests?”
- Pro-tip: It’s always okay to take a pause if you need a second to think (e.g., “Great question; let me take a second to think about that.”). If you feel really stumped, feel free to walk them through your thought process as you go (e.g., “Hm, if I were to design an ideal study, I would base it on my interests in XYZ. I would start by thinking about recruitment of that population...”).

- **How can you navigate group interviews?**
  - Make sure not to dominate/talk more than all of the other group members. Although you want to make sure your voice is heard, faculty will be looking at how respectful you are to other applicants. Take turns!
  - See your fellow interviewees as colleagues/friends (not competitors). Lots of people make friends on interviews!
- **What are grad students looking for in interviews?**
  - Genuine interest in lab and opportunities for collaboration
  - They are looking for a research buddy/friend/potential junior mentee.
  - Remember you're also "interviewing" them to be *your* research buddy/friend/potential junior mentor.
- **How can you ask grad students more sensitive questions to assess fit for program?** (e.g., "What is the stipend? Is it livable?" "Is there summer funding?" "What would be the response of the program if a graduate student became pregnant/started a family?")
  - OK to be direct with graduate students about these things; they are very important for picking which lab will be the best fit!
  - Ways to make things more comfortable:
    - Wait until you're in a one-on-one scenario with a graduate student, rather than in a group/panel situation.
    - Ask program coordinator/administrator rather than grad student/PI
  - Remember: Really negative responses to these questions are red flags. You shouldn't feel embarrassed if you do get a negative response. You would not have been happy at that program anyway!
  - If you are a person of color or from a marginalized or underrepresented group, it can be really important to ask questions related to this: e.g., "How will I know that I will be supported or protected as a person of color in the program?"
  - Finally, you can always follow up via email with a student or PI if you forget to ask a question or would feel more comfortable asking in that format.
- **What are good questions to ask?**
  - Pro-tip: Bring a notebook so you can actually write down/remember answers to the questions you ask!
  - For grad students:
    - What do people do for fun in this city?
    - What does work/life balance look like for students? How many hours do you work per week?
    - If you had the weekend off, how would you plan an ideal weekend in your city?
    - What is the lab dynamic like for you?
    - How frequently do you meet with your PI? How quickly do they respond to emails?
    - How do grad students start up studies in the lab?
    - Do you hang out with your lab and/or cohort?
    - Pro-tip: Can be helpful to ask the same question to all grad students you meet with to evaluate range of answers.
  - For PIs:
    - What is your mentorship style like (e.g., weekly meetings, more over email?)
    - How do research collaborations in the lab usually form?
- **How can you strike a balance between being confident but not narcissistic in interviews?**
  - Express your genuine excitement about what you've done.
  - Treat your accomplishments as part of a conversation.
  - Don't stress too much about being narcissistic; your interview *is* your time to highlight your skillsets, and this is valuable information that the lab is wondering about.
- **What would you recommend for taking care of yourself during this process?**
  - Protect time for yourself and your non-academic hobbies to de-stress.
  - Know that rejections are inevitable. They don't say anything about your worth and often come down to really idiosyncratic details.
  - Take online platforms (e.g., Academic Twitter, forums) with a grain of salt.
  - Make sure to engage in very basic self-care (e.g., make sure to get sleep, eat all meals, etc.).
  - Practice your positive reframes throughout.