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generating the Tell me about yourself question in job interviews can be a pivotal moment in college students. We've gathered insights from twenty professionals, including HR managers and CEOs, to offer their best tips. From avoiding generic descriptors to preparing with mock interviews, the experts provide a roadmap for crafting a compelling personal narrative. Avoid Generic Descriptors: Be a Storyteller with Relevance: Transition from Basics to Aspirations: Structure Your Response Strategically: Formulate a TMAP Elevator Pitch: Focus on Industry Engagement: Convey Fluency Over Content: Tell a Resonant Why Story: Showcase Proactivity and Eagerness: Tailor Your About Me Response: Craft a Concise Elevator Pitch: Emphasize Skills and Aspirations: Deliver a Low-Risk Pitch: Highlight Soft Skills with Examples: Focus on Three Key Aspects: Share Your Major Choice: Blend Personal and Professional: Communicate Passion for the Role: Prepare with Mock Interviews: Avoid Generic Descriptors: As a regular interviewer (and I'm guessing others feel the same), generic words such as passionate, reliable, motivated, conscientious, and so on, just wash over you like white noise during an interview. You might as well save your breath. We know when candidates are telling us what we want to hear, and it can come across at best as a lack of imagination and is predictable at the very least. I want to figure out for myself whether a candidate is passionate, reliable, or conscientious, so by giving me some specific background details or relaying a situation where they've demonstrated the kind of person they are, this really fleshes out that individual. For example, I want to hear: what their passions are what makes them tick what gets them up in the morning what motivates and fascinates them. And the why? This tells me whether they're the sort of person who needs to be on the move off scuba diving, climbing mountains, or engaging in other physical adventures. Perhaps meticulous, focused editorial work would suit them. Or, I'll understand that they're a low-key, laid-back, easygoing person who would be a great asset to a team. The best candidates are those who can tell me about themselves in a way that is relevant to the position they are applying for. I want to know about their family life and the name and breed of their dog, but that can come later. What I really want to know is what attracted them to the position applied for in the first place. I can very quickly tell if they don't really know about the job or the company, or have done no research whatsoever, and have simply uploaded their CV for a bit of job-fishing, so it's imperative that they make it clear to me what they have in their personal repertoire or about their character that would make them a great fit for the company. Anyone can pay lip service; believe me, it's easy to do an unimpressive interview. Yet, it doesn't take a huge amount of effort to stand out from the crowd, so my advice to any college student is to get yourself noticed and big up those unique traits that make you the perfect person for the job. Lisa Tucker, Head of HR and Communications, Inteltekble A Storyteller with Relevance We get a lot of fresh college graduates for interviews at our legal process outsourcing company. Every time we conduct interviews or participate in college placement rounds, we allocate 1-2 minutes for the candidate to introduce themselves and the customary tell me about yourself session. We usually prefer a candidate to be more of a storyteller, as we know that a college student might lack practical knowledge of the actual process on which we work. We also prefer minimal usage of industry jargon and more real-life incidents, where the job responsibilities laid out in the recruitment offer are fulfilled or accomplished by the candidate through a personal incident, or any academic qualification. This gives a better peek into the skills of the candidate and shows how street-smart they are in applying college education to real-world problems. I also prefer when the candidate can tell me about their previous internships or work experience. For example, the contract drafting associate at our company told us that in one of her previous internships, she could speed up the tedious sheet preparation by 60%, resulting in reduced cycle time and improving the TAT for their final customers. The techniques described by her during the interview were relevant to the requirements we had, and she explained it in a quantifiable way while sticking to a storytelling tone. Her authenticity and lack of robotic recitations landed her a job at our company. Aseem Jha, Founder and Head of Customer Delivery, Legal Consulting Pro Show Professional Presence Craft your answer by saying, As you may have read in my LinkedIn profile to show professional presence, and be sure that your profile fits the jobs you are pursuing and answers how you excel at what you do. Then work into your reply to the interviewer(s). I reviewed your profile and would like to ask you a few questions as they relate to your career path, from your experience. Watch them sit up straight because no one does this! And you will stand out for it. Marc W. Halpert, LinkedIn Coach, Trainer, Marketing Consultant, connect2collaborate.com Transition from Basics to Aspirations When asked, Tell me about yourself in a job interview, start by quickly covering the basics like your hometown, university, and major, ideally within a minute. The key tip here is to then seamlessly transition into a deeper dive of your interests and professional aspirations. Let your personality fly! Talk about what drew you to your major, which career path(s) interest you, or the types of learning experiences you're looking for. You can also tie in extracurriculars and share what relevant skills they have helped you develop. For example, you could say, My name is Katie, and I'm graduating from Boston College this spring. I'm originally from Texas and came to Boston to study marketing. I've interned at two software companies over the last three years, where I've gained experience in digital marketing and data analysis. I'm also a member of the marketing club, where I've helped plan and execute several campaigns. I'm looking for a role where I can continue to grow my skills in marketing and data analysis, and I'm excited about the opportunity to work with your company. This approach shows that you're not just a student, but someone who's actively engaged in their field and has a clear vision of their future. Following for my food blog, and I'm interested in using the skills I've learned there in a more professional setting. In my free time, I love exploring Boston's food scene, performing in my college improv group, and reading romance novels! The goal here is to make your introduction memorable enough to stand out and open up various avenues for further discussion during the interview. This approach not only personalizes your opening but also demonstrates a clear link between your academic pursuits, personal interests, and the job you're interviewing for, making you a much more relatable and compelling candidate. Katie White, Content Marketing Manager, Centime Structure Your Response Strategically One key strategy for delivering this response is to structure it strategically and concisely. You can start by summarizing your academic background and initiatives that match the requirements of the position. Emphasize your internships, part-time jobs, if there are any, or other activities that honed your skills. If you want to be more creative, you can inject an object that symbolizes your characteristics. This will leave a powerful impression on the interviewer. Remember how critical it is to tailor your response to the particular job and company you're applying for. This approach shows not only your suitability for the job but also your thorough understanding of the company. Make sure that your response lasts only two to three minutes. This encourages follow-up questions, leading to a lively and insightful discussion about your potential. Bianca Nagac, Marketing Manager, MVP Asia Pacific Formulate a TMAP Elevator Pitch Tell Me About Yourself, or TMAP, as I like to call it, is a frequent opener from interviewers to get candidates talking about themselves. A common way to formulate your response is as follows: Name, Major, and I am a [Level/Level] with expertise in [function or capability]. My strengths include [unique professional quality/Particular accomplishments or distinctions relevant to the position and have worked with [type of organization/industry/sector] and [company/organization]. I am looking for a role where I can continue to grow my skills in [relevant skill/industry/sector] and [company/organization]. I am excited about the opportunity to work with your company. This approach shows that you're not just a student, but someone who's actively engaged in their field and has a clear vision of their future. Keep it under 2 minutes. Jane Ferr, Talent Management Strategist, Jan Ferr Consulting Group, Inc. Tailor Your Response to the Interviewer Tailor your response to the interviewer. If you're interviewing for a role in a company that values innovation and creativity, highlight your experiences in those areas. If you're interviewing for a role that requires strong analytical skills, focus on your academic achievements in those areas. This shows that you're not just a student, but someone who's actively engaged in their field and has a clear vision of their future. Steven Rothberg, Founder and Chief Visionary Officer, College Recruiter Highlight Soft Skills with Examples While you may lack considerable work experience, I recommend focusing on the skills you have gained through academic and extracurricular activities. A few examples of this kind of work include taking the helm at a club, volunteering, or working occasionally. Provide concrete examples to illustrate the importance of soft skills, such as collaboration, communication, and problem-solving. Consider sharing an example of a collaborative endeavor in which you served as team captain and overcame significant obstacles. Cindi Keller, Communications Coordinator, The Criminal Defense Firm Focus on Three Key Aspects Try to focus on three things about yourself that you think they need to know. For example, There are three things I think you would want to know about me as it relates to this job: First, blah. Second, blah. Third, blah. From there, you can end it with I'm happy to dive into any of those, or I can expand on anything you had in mind? Then you can pause. This shows you know your value, you've thought about how you can be valuable to their organization, and it focuses the conversation on something you know you're good at. Spencer Shulim, CEO, Build Better a Share Your Major Choice As a college student interviewing, potential employers are curious to understand motivation. Students should be able to thoughtfully answer the question, Tell me about yourself, by incorporating an answer affiliated with Why did you choose your major? By sharing the reason behind your choice, you demonstrate a sense of self-awareness. Megan Dias, Career Services Coach, Parsity Blend Personal and Professional When college students are asked, Tell me about yourself, in a job interview, my key tip is to craft a response that's a blend of personal insights and professional aspirations, tailored to the job they're applying for. This question is often the interviewer's way of gauging how well a candidate can articulate their story, linking their background, skills, and interests to the position and company. For example, a student applying for a marketing role might start by briefly mentioning their major and a personal trait that drew them to marketing, such as a love for storytelling or creativity. Then, they can highlight a relevant project or internship experience, explaining how it solidified their interest in the field and developed specific skills related to the job. Finally, they should express enthusiasm about how this role aligns with their career aspirations. This structured approach provides a concise yet comprehensive snapshot of the candidate, making their response memorable and engaging. It's about painting a picture of who they are, what they've achieved, and how they see themselves contributing to the potential employer's success. Nicolas Schlopsna, Managing Consultant and CEO, spectu Communicate Passion for the Role Aim to convey the level of passion that you have for your hobbies and the role itself. Really strive to show that you can communicate that level of passion effectively, and how it will relate to the role itself. Wendy Makinson, HR Manager, Joloda Hydrail Prepare with Mock Interviews When you are in an interview, and you get this question, you may feel nervous. To help you feel more confident, I recommend practicing your response to this question with a friend or family member. This will help you feel more comfortable and confident when you are in an interview. You should try to find a way to highlight these aspects of yourself and how they relate to your work and career passions. You will be surprised at how your hobbies and daily tasks influence your goals and aspirations, and vice versa. When you are doing the mock interview, make bullet points so that it will be easier to digest and remember for the interview. Ashwin Ramesh, CEO, Synup Whats Covered: Are you worried about your admissions interview? If so, you're not alone. Many students are like you and want to be as well-prepared as possible, which means anticipating and practicing responding to the questions you will be asked ahead of time. While there's no way of knowing exactly what you'll be asked, there's one question you can always prepare for the classic, Tell me about yourself. Although this question may seem open-ended (and daunting), there are some tips and tricks you can rely on to ensure your response is informative, personal, and natural. In this post, we'll outline why this question is important, the topics you should cover in your answer, and a few example responses to inspire your preparation! Setting the Tone You should see the tell me about yourself prompt as an opportunity to show the interviewer your most important qualities and give them an initial sense of how you might contribute to the schools community. In any interview you have over the course of your college years and beyond, this prompt is meant to give the interviewer an idea of what you would bring to the position at hand in this case, as a member of the colleges matriculating class. Unsurprisingly, you want to talk about yourself and your background, but in a focused way that paints an accurate portrait of yourself as a productive, insightful member of the incoming freshman class. Stand-alone details and dead-end stories are rarely relevant in answers to this kind of question. Instead, you want to be careful not to set the tone for the rest of the interview. Starting strong is especially important since most college interviewers are alumni volunteers who haven't, and want, see your grades, essays, or anything else in your application. Since they won't have any prior familiarity with your profile, part of your responsibility when responding to this question is to lay a solid foundation for the rest of the interview, by having a thoughtful, cohesive, but not overly rehearsed answer at the ready. Topics to Cover There's one right way to respond to this question, because for different students, certain aspects of their lives will be more or less relevant to understanding who they are. That being said, here is an initial list of topics that many students end up discussing in their answers: Where you grew up What you want to study (and why) Unique personality traits Academic interests Extracurricular activities Why you want to attend the college Keep in mind that you probably don't want to talk about every single one of these things, as you don't want your answer to be too long about 2-3 minutes maximum. While this question is important, you have a whole interview to go, so you don't need to jam every single thing you want to say into your first answer. You'll have plenty of other opportunities to discuss things you don't get to in this first response. Plus, your interviewer may feel awkward if you start off by monologuing at them for 10 minutes, or confused if you mention dozens of unrelated things. In general, though, it is a good idea to begin by mentioning the area in which you grew up, or some other foundational aspect of your upbringing, like your parents' professions or your cultural heritage. Don't spend too much time discussing the intricacies of your hometown or home life, but try to connect where you're coming from to your interest in the colleges location, size, or campus culture. You'll also want to tell the interviewer about your prospective major, if you have one, or, if you're undecided, what some of your main areas of interest are. While laying out your academic background, describing two or three of your most important broader personality traits will give your interviewer a clearer sense of who these subjects are important to you. You may also touch on a key extracurricular that further illuminates who you are. End your answer with a quick explanation of why you want to attend this particular college. Since you should have researched the school thoroughly before the interview, you will hopefully already have a good idea of how your personality, as well as academic and extracurricular interests, will fit in there. Your response should concretely connect your personal strengths and experiences to the schools offerings and overall culture. Crucially, you should assume that your interviewer can figure out how your background aligns with the schools culture on their own. While they are obviously familiar with the school, colleges and universities have hundreds if not thousands of different opportunities available, so they may not have heard of the offerings in your particular area(s) of interest. Be clear about why and how your past experiences have set you up to succeed at this institution. Finally, admissions officers want to be confident that you'll accept your offer of admission, if you receive one. So, you should make sure to express how interested you are in attending this particular school, rather than speaking about broad goals for college that you could achieve anywhere. Examples of How to Respond Response #1 I grew up in a small town in Connecticut and have lived there my whole life, so I'd really love to experience city life in college. Since I live relatively close to New York, I've had the opportunity to visit a few times, and it has so much to offer, especially in terms of the literary scene. I love reading and writing, so I'm thinking of majoring in English or journalism. Journalism seems like a good fit because I'm good at noticing details and know how to tell a story. I've been writing for my school newspaper and the president of the Spanish club. I also took English and Spanish at an after-school program in my town. NYU seems like the perfect school for me because it has such strong English and journalism programs, including honors programs in both fields, and amazing study abroad programs through its campuses all over the world. I love to learn Italian, Chinese, or Arabic to become tri- or even polylingual! Analysis This interviewee touches on her interests in a way that shows her qualifications to attend NYU. She references her passion for English, journalism, and foreign languages several times throughout her response, and explains what she has done to explore them both inside and outside school. At the end of her response, she also identifies specific attributes of NYU that appeal to her (honors programs in English and journalism; campuses around the world), which clearly fit with the details she's provided about her own background. Additionally, she reveals some of her key personality traits, such as her attention to detail and her resilience, and provides examples that illustrate these attributes. These examples make her response memorable, whereas if she were to just say I'm a resilient person with good attention to detail, it would come across as cliché or generic. Response #2 As a kid, I frequently visited family in Los Angeles. During those trips, my aunt would take me to see musicals at the Orpheum Theatre, which sparked my love for drama. Since then, I've been in over 30 musicals at my school and through my local theater, although my favorite role still has to be Georg von Tr

Year Trips program as a means of building community, or her desire to get involved in a Dartmouth Outing Club sub-club to learn a new skill like canoeing. Similarly, the modified major is unique to Dartmouth, but the student doesn't explain how she would take advantage of it. Just stating that she has multiple interests isn't sufficient, because that will be true of just about every applicant to Dartmouth she needs to describe the intersection(s) she sees between economics and American history, and how the modified major will help her explore them more productively than, say, just double majoring, which you can do at nearly any school. Finally, while it's okay to mention connections you have to the school or surrounding area, you need to illustrate how they've shaped your own perspective on the institution. For example, this student could talk about how she was originally apprehensive about attending school in such a small town, but attending reunions with her parents showed her that the strength of the Dartmouth community fends off feelings of isolation. Right now, though, that personal element is missing, and thus saying her parents are Dartmouth alumni just comes across as name-droppy and braggy.

5 Tips to Prepare for This Prompt

It's almost guaranteed that this "Tell me about yourself" question will come up during your interview, often as the very first question. To ensure you aren't caught off-guard, here are some tips for how you can prepare:

1. Reflect on the Past Brainstorm at least five important events in your life that have helped shape you into who you are today. Ideally, these events will align with your major and broader goals for the future. Sift through them to decide which story is most relevant to understanding what you have to contribute to a college campus. It's especially wise to choose an event that connects to some of your most important character traits. That way, your interviewer will start to get a sense of who you are not only as a student, but as a whole person.
2. Evaluate Your Interests What are your favorite classes? What clubs or teams are you a part of? Did you start an organization yourself, or do you have a leadership position? What hobbies do you have when you're not at school? Do you have a part-time job you love? Your academic and extracurricular interests are given a great deal of weight by college admissions officers. In your interview, you want to be able to easily reference specific examples of how you've pursued your passions, as well as how you developed them, so that your interviewer gets to see your eyes light up, so to speak, and gets a clearer sense of what sets you apart from other applicants.
3. Pinpoint Your Major If you've decided on a major, highlight why you're interested in this major and why the university is ideal for this area of focus. If you're still undecided, that's perfectly fine, but you should be able to discuss your broader academic interests and why this college is a good place for you to hone in on one particular area. For example, maybe you're interested in medicine, but also love animals, and don't know if you want to be a doctor or a veterinarian. You might talk about how Washington State University has excellent graduate schools in both fields, with plenty of courses and extracurriculars available to undergrads as well, and thus is the perfect place for you to figure out which path is right for you.
4. Research the University One of the best ways you can stand out from other students while answering this question is to connect your background to programs, classes, professors, and other unique offerings at the college, and explain how these resources will launch you into your future. These school-specific details will not only make your answer more thorough, but will also demonstrate that you are well-prepared and genuinely interested in attending the college. Make sure, though, that you aren't just saying something generic that could apply to any institution. Perhaps you've heard that a school has great professors, but that's true of most colleges. So, you'll want to instead zoom in on one or two particular professors whose work aligns well with your own interests, so that your interviewer can clearly see what sets this school apart in your mind.
5. Practice, Practice, Practice After thinking about how you'll answer the question, it's important to run through your response with family and friends. Although you don't want to sound too rehearsed, as you can then come across as stiff, you also don't want to be stumbling over your words. Plus, those close to you may have suggestions for details you might include that you didn't think of yourself.

How Much Do College Interviews Matter?

College interviews matter, but they won't make or break your application. In fact, they account for only around 5% of an admissions decision. That said, they are a great way to showcase your personality and character, your ability to engage in conversations and answer questions, and your overall maturity and professionalism. Your college interview is unique in that it allows you to put a face, personality, and voice to your name, so you still want to take it seriously and prepare thoroughly. You can also use your interview as a way to determine if the university is the right fit for you. After all, you'll likely be matched with an alum who will be able to answer questions about their experience at the school; their insights could be invaluable if you're eventually accepted and need to decide between this institution and your other options! That being said, other factors such as academics and extracurriculars will have a much larger impact on your chances of acceptance. If you'd like to know how your profile stacks up, we recommend using our free chancing engine. This tool will give you personalized odds of acceptance at over 1500 schools in the US, based on how well your profile aligns with that of an average accepted student! When answering the "tell me about yourself" prompt in a college interview, it's essential to strike a balance between sharing your academic interests, personal experiences, and future aspirations. Remember to keep it brief and relevant to the college context. Here's a suggested approach for a well-rounded answer:

1. Start with a brief introduction: Begin by mentioning your name, the college you're attending, and your field of study. You might also want to include your year in college and where you're from.
2. Share your academic interests: Elaborate on your major or focus, and discuss what sparked your interest in that area. For example, you could mention a project, class, or event that inspired your passion for the subject.
3. Talk about your extracurricular activities: Briefly discuss relevant clubs, organizations, or hobbies that reflect your interests and personal values. This demonstrates your involvement in the college community and enables the interviewer to learn more about your personality outside of academics.
4. Highlight any major achievements: If you have any significant accomplishments related to your field of study or extracurricular activities, feel free to mention them. For example, you could talk about receiving an academic award or leading a successful club initiative.
5. Connect to your future goals: Make sure to talk about how your academic interests and extracurriculars relate to your future aspirations. Explain how pursuing these passions at college will help you achieve your long-term goals.
6. Personal touch: Adding a small personal detail can make you more relatable to the interviewer. This might be a fun fact about yourself, a hobby, or a talent unrelated to academics. Remember to practice your response to maintain the flow and avoid rambling. Keep it succinct and engaging by mentioning the most important aspects of your college experience. Finally, be genuine and true to yourself when crafting your answer to leave a lasting impression.

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