

What to Expect at Your Visa Interview

As per the recommendation of NAFSA (Association of International Educators), there are 10 Points to remember when applying for an F-1 or a J-1 visa

1. Ties to your Home Country

Under U.S. law, all applicants for non-immigrant visas, such as student visas, are viewed as intending immigrants until they can convince the consular officer that they are not. You must, therefore, show that your reasons for returning to your home country are stronger than those for remaining in the United States. "Ties" to your home country are things that connect you to your hometown, homeland, or current place of residence: job, family, financial prospects that you own or will inherit, investments, etc. As a prospective undergraduate, the interviewing officer may ask about your specific intentions or promise of future employment, family or other relationships, educational goals, long-range plans and career prospects in your home country. Each person's situation is different, and there is no magic explanation or single document, certificate, or letter that can guarantee you a visa. If you have applied for the U.S. Green Card Lottery, you may be asked if you are hoping to immigrate. A simple answer would be that you applied for the lottery since it was available, but not with a specific intent to immigrate. If you overstayed your authorized stay in the U.S. previously, be prepared to explain what happened clearly and concisely with documentation if available.

2. English

Expect that the interview will be conducted in English and not in your native language. One suggestion is to practice English conversation with a native speaker before the interview, but do NOT prepare speeches!

3. Speak for yourself

Do not bring parents or family members with you to the interview. The consular officer wants to interview you, not your family. You will make a negative impression if you are not prepared to speak on your own behalf.

4. Know the program and how it fits your career plan

You should also be able to explain how studying in the U.S. relates to your future professional career when you return home.

5. Be Brief

Because of the number of applications received, consular officers are under pressure to conduct a quick and efficient interview. They must make a decision, for the most part, on the impressions they form during the first minute of the interview. Therefore, what you say first and the initial impression you create are critical to your success. Keep your answers to the officer's questions short and to the point.

6. Additional documentation

It should be immediately clear to the consular officer what documents you are presenting and what they mean. Lengthy documents cannot be read or evaluated quickly. Remember that you will have 2-3 minutes of interview time, if you are lucky.

7. Not all countries are equal

Applicants from countries suffering economic problems or from countries where many students have remained in the U.S as immigrants will have difficulty getting visas. They are more likely to be asked about job opportunities at home after their study in the U.S.

8. Employment

Your main purpose of coming to the United States should be to study, not to work before or after graduation. While many students do work on-campus during their studies, such employment is secondary to completing their degree. You must clearly explain your plan to return home at the end of your program. If your spouse is also applying for an accompanying F-2 visa, be aware that F-2 dependents cannot, under any circumstances, be employed in the U.S. If asked, be prepared to tell the officer what your spouse intends to do with his or her time while in the U.S. Volunteer work and attending school part-time are permitted activities.

9. Dependants at home

If your spouse and children are remaining behind in your country, be prepared to explain how they will support themselves while you are gone. This can be especially tricky if you are the primary source of income for your family. If the consular officer gets the impression that your family will need you to send money from the United States in order to support themselves, your student visa application will almost certainly be denied. If your family does decide to join you at a later time, it is helpful to have them apply at the same post where you applied for your visa.

10. Maintain a positive attitude

Do not argue with the consular officer. If you are denied a student visa, ask the officer for a list of documents he or she would suggest you bring in order to change the decision, and try to get the reason you were denied in writing.