

Preparation for the selection day and/or the selection interview

Content

1. Preparations before the selection day	3
1.1 Dresscode – What should I wear?	3
1.2 Timing.....	3
1.3 Tips on how to deal with nervousness.....	3
1.3.1 Anchoring in four steps	3
1.3.2 The 3x3 Method – Part 1	4
2. The selection day.....	4
2.1 The presentation and the discussion	4
2.1.1 Choosing a suitable topic	4
2.1.2 Helpful strategies for the presentation	5
2.1.3 Helpful strategies for the discussion.....	5
2.1.4 Tips for the keyword sheet	6
2.2 The personal interview	7
2.2.1 General information	7
2.2.2 Experience reports.....	8
2.2.3 Questions from the foundation	8
2.2.4 Questions you can ask the foundation	10
3. After the selection day (3x3 Method – Part 2).....	10
3.1 The feedback table	10
3.2 The control table	10

Contact

Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg

Student Service Center (SCS) - Scholarship advising

Sedanstraße 6, 79085 Freiburg

study@uni-freiburg.de

Information hotline: +49 (0) 761 203 4246

universität freiburg

Scholarship providers proceed differently after reviewing the written applications. Sometimes they already make a selection after this first step, but usually there are further selection rounds. This may involve one or more selection interviews with one or more interview partners. In some cases, several applicants are invited to a selection day or even a weekend, where they go through various stages.

You will usually receive information on the next steps, the respective procedure and how you can prepare for them as soon as you are informed that you are invited to the next stage of the selection process after the written application. In most cases, information about the general course of the procedure can also be found on the scholarship provider's website.

1. Preparations before the selection day / the selection interview

1.1 Dress code – What should I wear?

You should dress appropriately for the occasion, but above all feel comfortable! Students, for example, would be overdressed in a suit and tie or a costume. When making your choice, also take into account the venue (e.g. youth hostel vs. hotel) and the orientation of the funding organization (e.g. corporate/exclusive foundation [in this case, a suit or costume would be appropriate] vs. trade union-affiliated foundation).

1.2 Timing

Punctuality is the top priority! As a minimum, you should always allow 30 minutes of "search time" and arrive at the right room about 10 minutes before the appointment/register at a secretary's office, if necessary.

1.3 Tips on how to deal with nervousness

Remember that the invitation to the next step in the selection process is already a success because your written documents have already convinced the scholarship provider! In this section, we introduce two techniques for gaining self-confidence and self-assurance. The first technique is called "Anchoring". It puts you in a positive mood and activates memories of previous successes. The second technique, the "3x3 Method", involves identifying and communicating your three most important strengths.

1.3.1 Anchoring in four steps

- *Remember positive feelings* (e.g. a successfully completed exam, good feedback from a professor)
- *Relive a positive situation* (Take time for this! Remember all facets of the situation, e.g. the kind of tension, the sound of the voices, the looks, ...)
- *Set the anchor*: At the moment when the emotion is strongest, snap your fingers, clench your fist or similar. This generates a connection between the emotion and the movement (the type of anchor may vary, it can be a hand movement, but also a song or a photograph. You may need to refresh the anchor repeatedly.)
- *Use the anchor*: Use the movement, song, photograph or similar as required.

1.3.2 The 3x3 Method - Part 1

1. *Strengths table* (to be completed before the selection day)
Can also be applied to weaknesses (question about weaknesses + reflection on them)
2. *Feedback table* (to be completed after the selection day), see last page
3. *Control table* (to be completed after the selection day), see last page

Strengths table

Three important personal strengths (hard and soft skills) that you consider crucial for the application are formulated precisely and entered in a table with examples. It is important to make a realistic self-assessment and to write down your strengths in detail so that you can use them effectively in the interview.

- **Hard skills:** Distinct expertise and methodological competence (can be proven by grades, degrees, certificates, etc.)
- **Soft skills:** Non-measurable skills that relate to your self-image and interaction with others, e.g. social skills (communication skills, ability to work in a team or to take criticism), self-competence (creativity, motivation, enthusiasm), etc.

2. The selection day

Here we would like to point out once again that the selection days at the respective scholarship providers are individually structured and not all of the elements mentioned below take place in the same way! In this section, we provide you with an overview of common aspects and what you should keep in mind.

2.1 The presentation and the discussion

Among others, it is about determining the following skills:

- Getting enthusiastic about a topic
- Logically and fully comprehending a complicated topic
- Presenting facts in an understandable way
- Responding to and taking into account the opinions of others
- Being able to react to unexpected questions or criticism
- Key qualifications such as self-motivation, communication and teamwork skills, logical thinking

2.1.1 Choosing a suitable topic

A topic that arouses enthusiasm should have three characteristics: It should be *interesting*, *understandable* and *ambiguous*.

- Topics that are unknown or only superficially known arouse particular *interest*. It is also possible to approach a familiar topic from a completely new perspective.
- The topic should also be *understandable*, i.e. not require too much background knowledge from the participants and not be too extensive. Since it can be assumed that all applicants for a selection day

have a basic knowledge of current affairs and political debates, a currently relevant topic is a good choice.

- *Ambiguity* means that the topic should be discussable, i.e. allow for at least two different points of view.

Presenters should be well acquainted with the topic so that they can give an authentic presentation. It is also helpful to narrow down the topic at the beginning and to point out what will not be included in the presentation.

2.1.2 Helpful strategies for the presentation

1. Conduct research on the topic & develop a structure (introduction, main part, conclusion)
2. Convert the written argumentation style into an oral presentation style:
 - Abbreviate sentences that are too long.
 - Simplify difficult facts.
 - Prepare good examples & catchy reasons for your key messages.
3. Briefly explain the structure of your presentation.
4. Determine whether questions should be asked during the presentation or afterwards.
5. Possible: You can clearly present theses or possible decisions >> This can provide early indications for the subsequent discussion.
6. To introduce the discussion, it is helpful to summarize the key messages once more at the end of the presentation.
7. It is better not to express your own opinion at the end of the presentation, as this could stand in the way of a discussion (here, too, the scholarship provider may have other requirements).
8. After the presentation, ask if there are any questions about the presentation.

2.1.3 Helpful strategies for the discussion

1. Transition from the presentation to the discussion.
 - To do so, respond to possible questions from the audience
 - or ask a prepared question.
2. If the discussion leads too quickly to a standardized answer:
 - Prepare arguments that may not yet have been addressed in the previous context.
3. Make sure that the discourse is not too one-sided.
 - Bring forward arguments that challenge the prevailing opinion.
 - Find enough pros and cons in advance (approximately the same number).
4. Involve all participants in the discussion:
 - Quickly develop a sense of whether some listeners are intimidated by particularly active participants.
 - Make sure not to intervene too much in the debate yourself, i.e. do not “steal” speaking time from the discussion participants.
 - Control your body language to give all participants the impression that they are seen as important discussion participants.

5. The moderator should contribute to the discussion developing its own momentum and remain in the background (develop a pleasant authority). It is also important to always remain in the role of the moderator (pay attention to time!).
6. Towards the end of the discussion, summarize the arguments once again, formulate a possible consensus and ask the participants whether they also see this consensus as the essence of the presentation and discussion.

2.1.4 Tips for the keyword sheet

A keyword sheet should actually only contain keywords, not complete sentences. You should also not read it. Instead, try to speak without notes.

Example structure for a keyword sheet:

Keyword sheet

- Catchy presentation starter
- Opening
 - Introduction to the topic
 - Ensure that all listeners have the same knowledge level
 - Transition to the arguments of the main part
- Main part
 - Presentation of central pros and cons
 - Formulate a transition between the two parts
- Conclusion & transition to the discussion
 - Summary of the central statement(s) of the presentation
 - Introduce the discussion by asking a question
- Prepared arguments for the discussion

If no aids are allowed during the presentation, the sheet can still be helpful to practise the presentation in advance.

2.2 The personal interview

2.2.1 General information

Unlike in a job interview, you do not speak to a full-time employee here, but the interviews are usually conducted by former scholarship holders on a voluntary basis. The conversation usually focuses on the three areas of performance, initiative and responsibility. The aim is to find out whether applicants are motivated and ready to perform and whether they are proactive and have a sense of responsibility. For example, if someone is committed in some way, be it as a student representative or as a member of Amnesty International, they are showing a sense of responsibility. During the interview, the reviewers try to find out whether someone is actually committed on a regular basis or only attends the members' meetings twice a year. To test the performance, applicants are confronted with a topic that they have not been able to prepare for, e.g. "Tell me about your concept of justice." This is not about knowledge, but about how you react in a situation for which you could not prepare. Special features in your CV can also be important in the assessment. Have you been abroad or done an internship after leaving school? Do you have a special area of interest? Or maybe an exciting hobby? It is advantageous if a dialogue situation between the applicant and the reviewer can develop as freely as possible here.

The following tips are for *orientation*. However, it is important not to pretend to be someone else and to be authentic.

Preparation

- Find out about the scholarship provider (read the mission statement and find out whether they also offer non-material support for scholarship holders and what this includes)
- Follow current political topics
- Have your application documents and other necessary documents ready
- Be prepared for enquiries in the event of irregularities in the course of your life/studies

Greeting:

- Introduce yourself with your full name
- Make sure you maintain sufficient distance without appearing distant
- Only sit down if you are asked to do so

In the conversation:

- Respond to questions and do not avoid them
- Ask if you do not understand something
- Pay attention to your own body language: do not cross your arms or turn away
- Maintain eye contact without staring - this creates a confident impression
- Keep your hands still
- Mind your speaking tempo - not too slow and not too fast
- Stick to the facts

- Be authentic - if you do not know something, say it openly or, for example, if you are nervous, ask for the question to be postponed and come back to it later.

2.2.2 Experience reports

Here you can find an experience report from an applicant who applied for a scholarship of the German Academic Scholarship Foundation (Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes):

‘The two individual interviews, which last around 40 minutes, are conducted with two different committee members. The interviews are based on the CV and the application form. In my interviews, we talked about my career choice (‘why teaching?’), then I had to explain the topic of my thesis in non-technical language (my subject was mathematics), and finally we talked about my expectations of a possible scholarship and a current political topic. The invitation said: “It is neither possible nor necessary to prepare for the one-to-one interviews”. In principle, this is correct. However, you should prepare answers to a few questions that will almost certainly be asked in every interview: Firstly, why YOU in particular should be awarded a scholarship of the German Academic Scholarship Foundation and why you would like to be a scholarship holder of the GERMAN ACADEMIC SCHOLARSHIP FOUNDATION. It is also obvious that you will be asked why you have chosen your field of study, etc. You may also be asked questions such as “Which book did you read most recently? Please outline the content”. Unusual aspects in the CV are also discussed, sometimes favourably, sometimes critically. Especially if you have exotic areas of interest, you should be able to answer questions about them. Most reviewers are persons with a wide range of interests who may have already read something on the topic. It also helps to put yourself in the position of the reviewers. Moreover, it is advisable to be well informed about recent social and political affairs. In general, it can be said that there are no “right” or “wrong” answers. Even if you answer a question incompletely or only after further questioning, this is no reason to despair. Some reviewers deliberately ask probing or provocative questions to test the applicant's reaction. At least during my interviews, the selection committee was very friendly.”

2.2.3 Questions from the foundation

Interviews with foundations can be conducted in different ways because the funding criteria are so varied. However, what all scholarship providers have in common is that they want to know something about you, your life and your motivation.

The way reviewers proceed in selection interviews varies greatly. Some have a number of questions that they ask all candidates in order to evaluate the answers directly according to certain criteria. Others just want to have a nice conversation with the applicants and hope to gain insight into their personality. The most common questions and types of questions asked by scholarship providers are summarized below.

Describe your CV / “Tell us about yourself”

After the initial small talk, many reviewers ask candidates to say something about themselves or to describe their CV. This question is often replaced by the sentence ‘Tell us about yourself’. In this case, we recommend suggesting that you briefly describe your personal background.

It is best to start with your school leaving certificate and when you obtained it. Of course, you do not have time to describe your whole life now. Instead, you should concentrate on the most important milestones. The stations of your CV that you should present depend on the objectives of the scholarship provider to which you are applying. Leave enough time between the stations for your reviewers to ask questions.

Why should YOU receive the scholarship?

Another type of question that is frequently asked is why you in particular should receive a scholarship. You should also be prepared for this question. When answering this question, we recommend mentioning your strengths that are relevant to the foundation, but not making a direct comparison with other applicants. So do not say: “Because I can certainly demonstrate the most civic engagement”. This creates an unsympathetic impression. Mention your strengths in the order of their importance to the foundation. Avoid simply listing the strengths. Instead, explain each strength with a few examples.

Being able to say something about the foundation's focus

Many foundations and scholarship providers have a clear thematic focus, for example a political orientation. So if you have applied to a foundation that is affiliated to a particular political party, the reviewers will possibly ask you about your political attitude. Although they will not ask directly about the party, political topics will usually be discussed.

Being informed about current topics in the newspapers

Many reviewers like to discuss current press topics with their applicants. By talking to you about a current topic, they want to find out whether you are interested in current affairs, how clearly structured you can argue and learn about your personality. You should therefore read the newspaper regularly in preparation for the interview so that you can join in the discussion with the reviewers.

Being able to admit your strengths and weaknesses

In order to be able to determine whether applicants can realistically assess themselves, reviewers also like to ask about the strengths and weaknesses of the candidates. Of course, you want to make a positive impression and should therefore focus on your strengths. Not wanting to mention a weakness is often interpreted as not being able to take criticism. You should also avoid the old trick of mentioning weaknesses that are not actually weaknesses.

You should rather first mention three strengths and explain them with an example and then you can mention a weakness that is not very important for the values and selection criteria of the foundation. You can say that this was primarily a weakness in the past, how you worked on it and what you learnt from this weakness.

Goals for the future

Many foundations also like to ask about your goals for the future. Reviewers use this question to find out whether you are determined and make elaborate and conscious decisions. Do not answer that you do not know yet and that you are not thinking about it at the moment. If you are actually not sure, you can name various alternatives that you are still considering and then tell them about your tendency.

Do you have any questions?

Many selection interviews end with the sentence “Do you have any questions?”. “No” is not a good answer here. The answer shows whether the applicants have prepared well and are interested in the foundation. In the case of foundations that offer both financial and non-material support, it is always worth asking about the non-material support programme (see next point).

2.2.4 Questions you can ask the foundation

Questions you can ask the foundation in a one-to-one interview

- What does the non-material support involve?
- What opportunities do I have to get involved?
- What opportunities do I have to get involved *after* the funding period?
- What motivates the reviewers to be part of the selection committee? (must not seem crude, however >> should have a good reason, e.g. the question of a possible volunteer engagement)

3. After the selection day (3x3 Method - Part 2)

3.1 The feedback table

How did the strengths resonate with the interview partners?

- Did you address or apply the relevant strengths?
- Have another look at the table before the next interview!
- Table as follows: Strength (column 1), Was it relevant for the conversation partners? (column 2), How was the strength communicated? (column 3)
- Table as follows: Strength (1), Further improvement opportunity (2), Successful communication opportunity (2)

3.2 The control table

Used to evaluate your strengths

- Do you want to follow up on the three strengths in future?
- Which strengths have increased the prospect of success?
Indication: In-depth dialogue about it, positive feedback
→ How can you enhance the strengths?
- Which strengths did not convince the interviewers?
Indication: No inclusion in the conversation, change of topic, no feedback
→ Add new strengths