

GUIDE · INTERVIEWS

Forty interview questions

Admissions, scholarship and alumni interviews: what each question is testing, and how to handle the five that are hardest for Afghan applicants.

د مرکز چمتووالی · آمادگی برای مصاحبه

Ariana Nexus Academy runs mock interviews for its students in Pashto, Dari and English.

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Complimentary for Ariana Nexus Academy students

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The interview: forty questions and what each one is testing

Admissions, scholarship, alumni and Academy selection interviews. What is actually being assessed, forty questions with the reasoning behind them, and how to handle the five that Afghan applicants find hardest.

Four kinds of interview

TYPE	WHO CONDUCTS IT	WHAT IS SCORED
Admissions interview	An admissions officer or a faculty member	Whether you are who your file says you are, and whether you would contribute to a seminar.
Alumni interview	A graduate near you or online	Ordinarily informational and lightly evaluative. Treat it as evaluative anyway.
Scholarship panel	Two to five people, scoring against published criteria	Leadership, plan, return, and whether their money is well spent on you.
Academy selection	An Ariana Nexus Academy mentor	Clarity of goal, readiness this cycle, and whether we can genuinely help you. Thirty minutes, in Pashto, Dari or English.

The shape of a good answer

Ninety seconds. Situation, what you did, what happened, what you would do differently. Most candidates spend eighty of the ninety seconds on the situation; the marks are in the last two parts.

THREE HABITS THAT CHANGE AN INTERVIEW

Answer the question that was asked, then stop. Silence after a complete answer is the interviewer's job to fill, not yours.

Bring three stories you can adapt to any question, each with a number in it. You will use them four times between them.

When you do not know, say so and say what you would do to find out. It scores higher than a confident invention, every time.

About you — eight questions

QUESTION	WHAT IS BEING TESTED, AND HOW TO ANSWER
Tell me about yourself.	Not your biography. Ninety seconds: where you are now, the one thing you are working on, and why it leads to this program. Rehearse this one aloud ten times; it sets the tone for everything after.
Why this subject?	They are testing whether the interest predates the application. Name the moment you first chased it, and the most recent thing you read or built in it.
Walk me through your CV.	Chronology with turning points, not a reading of the page. Three minutes maximum.
What is your greatest strength?	Choose one you can evidence in the next sentence. "I finish things" plus a thing you finished beats any adjective.
What is your greatest weakness?	A real one, with what you do about it. Not "I work too hard" — interviewers hear that daily and score it as evasion.
What do you do that has nothing to do with your studies?	A genuine answer, however small. This question exists to find out whether you are a person.
Who has influenced you most?	Someone specific and ideally not famous. What they taught you, in one concrete instance.
What would your teacher say about you?	Say something true that is not entirely flattering, then the thing they would praise. Balance reads as honesty.

Motivation and field — eight questions

QUESTION	WHAT IS BEING TESTED, AND HOW TO ANSWER
Why this university?	Two named courses or professors, one programme or facility, and one thing you would join. If your answer works for another university, it is not an answer.

QUESTION

WHAT IS BEING TESTED, AND HOW TO ANSWER

Why this country?	A reason connected to the subject, not to the passport. Research strength, a named group, a particular industry.
What will you study in your first year?	Show you have read the curriculum. Name two modules and say which you expect to find hardest.
What is a recent development in your field?	One thing, explained in ninety seconds to a non-specialist. Read something in the two weeks before the interview.
What do you want to do after the degree?	Specific and plausible. A scholarship panel is buying this answer more than any other.
Why not study this at home?	Answer factually about capacity, equipment, supervision or curriculum. Do not disparage Afghan institutions; several interviewers have worked with them.
What will you contribute to our campus?	Something you already do. Teaching, organizing, translating, building. Not "diversity" as an abstraction.
What other universities have you applied to?	Answer honestly and briefly. Everyone applies to several; pretending otherwise reads as naive.

Challenge and character — eight questions

QUESTION

WHAT IS BEING TESTED, AND HOW TO ANSWER

Tell me about a time you failed.	A real failure with consequences, and the specific change you made afterwards. Candidates who cannot name a failure are scored as unreflective.
Tell me about a time you led something.	Leadership is scored by what other people did because of you. Give the number of people and the outcome.
Describe a disagreement and how you handled it.	They want to see whether you can hold a position without damaging a relationship — and whether you ever change your mind.
How do you handle pressure?	A system, not a sentiment. What you actually do: a timetable, a sequence, a person you call.
Tell me about a time you taught someone something.	A gift of a question for most Afghan applicants. Use the study group, the younger sibling, the colleague.
What is the hardest thing you have had to learn alone?	Say what the process looked like — the order you tried, what failed, how long it took.
Describe a time you were wrong.	Short, specific, no self-flagellation. End on what you now do differently.
What do you do when a project is going badly?	Concrete steps in order. Interviewers are listening for someone who acts early rather than hopes.

Scholarship and plan — six questions

QUESTION	WHAT IS BEING TESTED, AND HOW TO ANSWER
Why do you need this scholarship?	Factual, brief, without a plea. One sentence on circumstances, then straight to what the money makes possible.
What will you do for your country afterwards?	Specific, achievable, honest about the constraints. Do not promise to fix Afghanistan. Name one sector and one contribution.
How do you define leadership?	Define it in one line, then evidence it. Avoid the dictionary.
What is the biggest problem in your field in Afghanistan?	Name it precisely, give one number if you have it, and say what a person with your training could do about it.
If you do not receive this scholarship, what will you do?	Never say you will give up. Say what your alternative route is — this answer scores resilience and planning.
Who else is funding you?	Honest disclosure. Panels check, and dishonesty here ends applications.

Knowledge and closing — five questions

QUESTION	WHAT IS BEING TESTED, AND HOW TO ANSWER
What questions do you have for us?	Always have three, and never ask what the website answers. Good ones: what do students in this program find hardest in the first semester; what does a successful graduate of this program do two years out; how are supervisors assigned.
Is there anything we have not asked that you want us to know?	Have one prepared line. This is where you place the strongest thing that did not come up.
How did you hear about us?	Straightforward. If it was a mentor or an alumnus, say so and name them.
When could you start?	Know your dates, including any language-course requirement.
Do you have any concerns about studying abroad?	Answer like an adult: name one real concern and the plan you already have for it.

The five hardest questions for Afghan applicants

QUESTION	WHAT IS BEING TESTED, AND HOW TO ANSWER
How will you get a visa, given current restrictions?	Answer factually and without anxiety: admission and entry are separate decisions; deferral and online enrollment exist; policies change. Show you have thought about it, then return to the academic conversation.

QUESTION

WHAT IS BEING TESTED, AND HOW TO ANSWER

Will you return to Afghanistan?	Answer honestly. If the honest answer is "I cannot say where I will be, but this is the work I intend to do and these are the people it serves", say that. A rehearsed patriotic answer is audible.
You have a gap in your education. Explain it.	One clause of context, then the substance of what you did in that time. Never apologise and never linger.
As a woman, will your family let you study abroad?	An improper question that is still sometimes asked. You are entitled to answer briefly and factually — "my family supports this application" — and move on. You may also decline it politely: "I would rather talk about the research."
What is your view on the political situation?	You are not required to hold a public position to earn a place. "I am here to talk about my studies" is a complete and professional answer. If you choose to answer, stay factual and brief.

Practical preparation

ITEM

DO THIS

Connection	Test it at the exact hour of the interview, twice. Have a phone with mobile data ready as a backup and tell them at the start that you will call back if the line drops.
Time zone	Write out the time in Kabul and their time, and confirm it in writing. Afghanistan is at a half-hour offset and this is where errors happen.
Light and camera	Light in front of you, not behind. Camera at eye level. A plain wall behind you.
Clothes	What you would wear to meet a headmaster. Solid colours; no patterns on camera.
Room	Alone, door closed, phone silent, and everyone in the house told the hour before.
Notes	One page, in front of you, with three story headlines and your three questions. Do not read from it.
Names	Know how to pronounce your interviewers' names. Ask at the start if you are unsure — it is courteous, not weak.
If the line drops	Reconnect immediately, apologise once, and continue. It happens constantly and no serious panel scores it against you.

Rehearsal

- 1 Record yourself answering "tell me about yourself" and watch it back. This is uncomfortable and it is the single most effective thing on this page.
- 2 Practise five questions a day for a week, aloud, standing up, in the language the interview will be in.

- 3 Do one full mock interview with someone who will not be kind to you. Ariana Nexus Academy runs these for its students.
- 4 Prepare three stories with numbers in them. Write only the headline of each on your one page.
- 5 The day before: read your own application once, then stop. Over-preparation produces recital, and recital is audible.

Afterwards

Send a short thank-you email within twenty-four hours, to whoever arranged the interview.

Subject: Thank you — [your name] — interview [date]

Dear [Name],

Thank you for your time today. I particularly appreciated [one specific thing from the conversation — a named course, a point they made, a question that made you think].

[If something was left unanswered, one sentence answering it now.] I remain very interested in [program] and I am glad to provide anything further you need.

With thanks, [Full name]

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