Resources for Applicants: "Interviews 101"
University of Arizona

Do your research
Research the scholarship-granting organization and its history, the scholarship itself, the values and philosophy behind the scholarship, the mission of the organization that developed the scholarship, etc. etc. before you go in for an interview. This includes every page of the scholarship website, the sponsoring organization's website, and what others might have had to say. (Try a web search and use powerful tools like NewsBank, which you can find of the UA Library webpage: http://www.library.arizona.edu/search/articles/dbByTitle.php?titlechar=ALL)

- Your ability to communicate your interests, your experience, and your goals with respect to the values/philosophy/mission of the scholarship is essential.
- While it is true that asking questions during an interview is encouraged (particularly toward the end), avoid at all costs asking something that you could have learned if you had taken the time to do this preparatory research!

Remember the 50-50 airtime rule
During the interview, mix speaking with listening.

Adhere to the "20 seconds to 2 minutes response" rule
Prepare to spend less than 2 minutes in response to a question.

Demonstrate that you are the resource person
Determine that during the interview you will stay focused on what you can provide rather than on what the scholarship will provide you.

Show you are part of the solution
Demonstrate all that apply about you—punctual, dependable, good attitude, drive, energy, enthusiasm, self-disciplined, well-organized, highly motivated, manage time well, handles people well, use language effectively, team work, flexible, adapt well to change, love to learn and learn quickly, creative, goal-oriented, problem solver, have integrity, loyal, etc.

How you present yourself is an indicator of how you will be if you get the scholarship
Thus, the more professional you are in your appearance and demeanor and preparation, the more likely you might actually be the ambassador for or representative of the scholarship that the organization is trying to find.

Mentally catalog "their concerns"
Interviewers can be nervous, too. As worried as you are about being selected for the scholarship, they are worried about selecting the right person. So, try to mentally catalog ahead of time, not your fears, but theirs. These include things like:

- Will the candidate be able to do what they propose?
- Will the candidate be committed to the philosophy of the scholarship?
- Will the candidate be able to adapt to the circumstances associated with the scholarship?
- Will the candidate demonstrate self reliance? And work well with others?
- Will the candidate reflect well on the scholarship in how they perform?

Consider that memorizing interview questions/answers rarely helps, but practice helps enormously
Think about it—many classic questions are things you know. Practice by doing mock interviews, not by memorizing. (See Mock Interview Questions below.)

Remember that there are four or five basic interview questions
These may be asked directly or indirectly:
- Why are you here? (Why are you knocking on this door rather than another?)
- What can you do for us? (Are you part of the solution? Will you reflect well on us?)
- What kind of person are you? (Right personality for this kind of scholarship, and values in common with the goals of this scholarship?)
- What distinguishes you from others who, on paper, may be similar to you? (What is unique about you—skills, experience, attitudes, etc.)
- Can we afford you? (Many think this question is limited to money, like in a job interview. However, scholarship interviewers—like job interviewers—also assess any potential downsides associated with you being awarded the scholarship. Essentially, they want to know if you reflect the values and philosophy of the scholarship.)

Don't be fooled by questions about your past
They ask about your past to understand your qualifications, interests, etc. But the primary focus is to use what they learn about your past to predict the future...an imagined future with you representing the scholarship and its values.

Make a strong first impression: it counts a lot
This may not be the world as it should be, but it is how the world is. Interviews that are lost are often lost in the first two minutes. Your appearance and personal habits count. It may sound crazy, but research shows that your odds go up if you have obviously freshly bathed, shaved, freshened up; if you dress professionally and your clothes are freshly laundered, pressed, polished; you have no noticeable odor of bad breath, smoke, food, coffee or other drinks; are discreet with any extras (cologne/perfume, jewelry, etc.) No chewing gum, smoking, using mobile phones (or other noisy or showy personal equipment).

How do you know what to wear? Ask the scholarship office folks! Dress appropriately (professional rather than elegant or flashy) and comfortably, but never too casually. How you dress reflects both how you feel about yourself and your level of respect for the process.

Avoid nervous mannerisms
Your odds go up if you can limit nervous mannerisms (hands away from hair and face), have good eye contact, a firm handshake, good posture. Don't know what to do with your hands? Try keeping them in your lap or on the table. Gestures are fine—but make sure that they do not distract from your words! Don't fidget.
So who isn't nervous?
Remember:
- It is normal to be nervous; interviewers will expect you to be nervous.
- Often they are nervous, too!
- A manageable level of stress can actually improve interview performance.
- Interviews center off the subject you know best: yourself.
- If you've done your homework, you have an advantage: You know more about the interviewer/organization/scholarship than they know about you.
- You have nothing to lose. You didn't have the scholarship before the interview. If you don't have it after, you're no worse off than before.

Tap your confident side
Your odds go up if you speak to the beard (not too soft or loud), answer with confidence (to pause and think is one thing, to hesitate is another). Avoid self-critical or apologetic comments during the interview. Try to limit one-word answers—and equally important, avoid rambling. Try not to interrupt the interviewers. When asked a yes/no question, follow up with a brief, interesting detail that the interviewer might remember. If you don't understand a question, it's perfectly acceptable to ask the interviewer to rephrase or repeat the question. Make eye contact throughout the interview; avoid looking at the floor or ceiling while listening and speaking.

Show consideration to others
Your odds also go up if you show respect to all who you meet (as all will be asked for their impressions of you!). Be sure to introduce yourself and try to catch their names—and use them (with title). Allow them to suggest when and where to sit down. Don't yawn, look at your watch, or appear bored. Never criticize others (previous employers, schools, programs, etc.) and do not tell sob stories (turn a life-altering experience into a positive reflection on you). Even if suggested by an interviewer, do not order a strong drink or have a smoke.

Be on time: never late, never too early
Arrive between 5 to 10 minutes early (so, if necessary, figure out how to get to the place in advance to ensure you will not be too early or too late). Note: if by chance you arrive earlier than 10 minutes prior to the interview, drive or walk somewhere else.

Show you are prepared
It is a good idea to bring a small brief case or clean folder with a notepad, pen, a copy of your full application (which you should reread a day or two before), several copies of your resume, a sample of your work when applicable (writing, music on a CD, etc.).

Avoid slang and jargon
During scholarship interviews, slang is wack! Jargon is to scholarship interviews as bugs are to software code: undesirable. Acronyms (other than NASA) are simply BF (Bad Form). Use common terminology-technical language is only ok if you know the interviewers expect it—if you don't know for sure ask in advance (after a mock interview prior to the real thing). If you are caught during the interview having used or needing to use a technical term, define it.
Take notes
Can you take notes in an interview? Almost always the answer is yes—but it is polite to ask first. What notes should you take? Some questions have multiple parts (note some cues to help ensure you answer each). Note things that you might want to ask at the end of the interview.

Uphold appropriate values
Turn offs: Any arrogance, excessive aggressiveness or ambition; Any signs of tardiness, laziness, or lack of motivation; Any sign of constant complaining or blaming others; Any sign of dishonesty or irresponsibility; Any sign of not following instructions; Any sign of lack of enthusiasm for the organization or its goals. What impresses you or does not impress you about the scholarship mission and the associated values are signs of your values.

Volunteer information
When offering information during an interview, remember that it is the interviewer's job to decide what's pertinent and what's not. It is your job to "flesh out" your application with details that will convince the interviewer of your strengths. Prepare (that is practice—do not memorize) answers to questions you think might highlight qualities or accomplishments. Phrase what you say about yourself positively. If you are asked why you performed poorly in the sciences, emphasize you talent in creative writing, for example, instead of enumerating excuses.

Asking the interviewers questions
This is absolutely acceptable—have some questions thought out (and noted) beforehand. But NEVER ask a question which you could have answered by reading the application and the organization's website. NEVER ask a question simply to show off knowledge. When do you ask your questions? Usually toward the end and it is a good idea to first ask, "I have a few questions as well, if that would be appropriate." Refrain from asking questions like: "When will I learn whether or not I have been selected?"—questions like this can be answered prior to the interview by reading materials about the scholarship (i.e. website) and talking with your campus advisor.

Provide good closure
Be prepared with a good way to close the interview. At the end of the interview, you may be asked whether you have questions or something to add. You can ask a question, add information that you prepared before the interview, or follow up on a topic covered during the interview itself. Good closure shows that you have been engaged in the exchange. When the interview is over, thank the interviewer for giving you the opportunity to meet and make a timely exit (i.e. avoid running out, but also refrain from lingering).
Correct bad (but very common) speech habits: Avoid "uptalk" (a.k.a. HRT)
HRT stands for high-rise terminals, the technical term for "uptalk." It is a way that young people speak (and heavily reinforced in the media) so that every sentence ends with an interrogative tone so that it sounds like a question even when it is a statement. This can be problematic in an interview, as illustrated in this uptalk example: "Good morning. My name is J. Doe?" Well, is that your name or isn't it?

Why do we use uptalk? For some, it can signify identity and group affiliation. The problem is that your interviewers will not be part of such an affiliation and thus uptalk will come across as uncertainty. Others use a rising inflection to soften the real intent of the message or to avoid taking a stand. However, in a scholarship interview, this may come off as a lack of confidence.

Uptalk is very common and many of us do not realize we have the habit. To figure out if you have this habit, start by listening for uptalk in the speech of others (television is a common source). Next, explain what uptalk is to someone and ask them to listen for any rising intonations at the end of your sentences and count them during a conversation. If you have this habit, it is time to practice not using that rising intonation. Sign up friends to monitor your speech and remind you to bring your voice down at the end of sentences. If they are persistent, you can kick the habit in a matter of weeks. If you do, you will automatically sound more authoritative and confident, and that will carry into your interview. (Adapted from Diane DiResta)

Correct bad (but very common) speech habits: eliminate verbal pauses
Verbal pauses (also known as filler words) are when you say um, ah, uh, you know, etc. while searching for the next words to say. Verbal pauses also include bridge words such as and, but, like and so. If you say one of these words and land on it before you actually know what you're going to say next, it is a bridge word. Another form of verbal pause is the repeated word. You keep repeating your last word until you figure out what to say next, like and and and. Verbal pauses are distracting in communication. Some use filler words to demonstrate we are thinking hard; others use them to be perceived as "just like everyone else," and still others use them to maintain control of the conversation. Whatever the reason, they can make you sound less intelligent, less clear, or even unwilling to listen. Your communication will be more effective once you eliminate them. To raise your awareness, listen for verbal pauses in the speech of others (television is again a common source) and then try and listen for them in your own speech. Friends can be of great help in eliminating verbal pauses. First ask one to tally which verbal pauses you use and the number of times you use them during a conversation. Then assign each of your friends a specific verbal pause and have them remind you each time you use them. (The reminder can be a discreet tap of the arm or a cough if you want to be even more discreet.) If you and your friends are diligent, you can eliminate this habit in a matter of weeks. (Adapted from Steve Pavlina, http://www.stevepavlina.com/blog/2005/07/eliminating-verbal-pauses/)
Distinguish between knowledge and opinion
Good scholarship interview questions will bring to mind things that you *know* and the things that you *believe*. Both are important, and both have their place in an interview question response. The key here is to remember that knowledge and opinion are different things--keep this clear in your mind when you are speaking. Interviewees that have trouble keeping this straight can come off as having limited knowledge or being opinionated. If you find, this is true for many of us, that your strong views get blended into what you know about a topic or an event, you may need to practice keeping opinion and knowledge separate. One good way to start is to develop the habit of answering practice interview questions by *starting* your response laying out the factual context *before* relating your personal views. (It is much harder to do the opposite, particularly when you are nervous!) In this way you can be more certain to provide a basis for you opinions, which will come off as more informed (and more professional).

Practice, practice, practice
Nothing is more important than experience when it comes to interviews. And that is hard to get before the "real" interview. Options: Mock interviews. Practice your interview skills with a friend (and later with a small group of friends). Review your interview skills aloud with someone and brainstorm hypothetical situations that the interview may encompass. Ask your friends to flag when you say "um," "ah," "like" and "you know" to make sure you are not overusing such filler phrases. Later try a mock interview with people who have some experience with interviews.

Mock Interview Questions:
- Tell me about yourself.
  - Note: This question seems innocuous. Realize that most interviewers use this question not only to gather information, but also to assess your poise, style of delivery and communication ability. Avoid launching into a mini-speech about your childhood, schooling, hobbies, early career and personal likes and dislikes. Instead, cite recent personal and professional experiences that relate to the scholarship mission that support your application and convey your aspirations and remember the two minute rule!
- Why did you choose this:
  - Scholarship
  - Degree,
  - Career?
- What are your major strengths?
- What accomplishment gave you the greatest satisfaction?
- What are your goals in life?
- Give us an example of where you demonstrated leadership.
- Tell us the most important thing you learned in college.
- Describe the qualities of a successful (something related to the scholarship)
- Describe a conflict situation and how you handled it.

"Sample Questions for Practice Interviews" from University of Minnesota Twin Cities
- Why do you want to go to [Oxford] to study [psychology]?
- How did you first become interested in [particle physics]?
  - What do you consider to be a particularly pressing issue or challenge for scholars in your field right now?
In your application essay, you mentioned that you are interested in doing research on [gender relations in early modern Japan]. If I wanted to learn something about this subject, what is one book or article you'd recommend?

In your application, you use the term [public history] more than once. How would you define [public history] in one sentence?

- What do you do for fun?
  - Name a book you've read recently that was NOT for a course. What did/didn't you like about it?
  - What is one social problem that especially concerns you? How do you believe this problem could be solved? What do you see as the biggest obstacle to be overcome in order to solve this problem?
  - You've been involved in a number of {co-curricular, community service, political} activities while in college. Tell us about an activity that you've found especially rewarding, and why.

- What are your plans for next year if you don't receive this scholarship?
- Is there anything else you'd like the committee to know about you?

"Mock Interview Guidelines" University of Massachusetts Amherst

- You have a strong desire to give back to the world, where does this come from? (Your family, religion, etc.?)
- What is your philosophy of service that keeps you dedicated?
- How would you be a good American ambassador as a [Marshall] Scholar?
- Is there anyone in the [UK] you are specifically looking forward to working with?
- What did you learn from your time at [Oxford]?
- What do you envision yourself doing in 10 years?
- What will you do with your [Oxford] degree in the long-run?
- How will a [Rhodes] Scholarship help you in your career goals?
- What current events concern you? Why?