

The
10
Secrets of the
7-Minute
College Interview

THE NINA HAVEN
SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM



Nina Haven
CHARITABLE FOUNDATION

Dear Students,

If you're reading this booklet, you're already on a winning path.

When students apply for scholarships, they enter into a competition with other students for increasingly scarce dollars. Interviewers have on average just seven minutes to form an opinion of an individual student. These individuals are under pressure---time pressure, because they have a very limited timespan in which to get to know the students who apply for scholarships; and financial pressure, because there are usually more deserving students than there are available scholarship dollars.

If you choose to prepare for the scholarship interview, you greatly increase your chances of making the most of your seven minutes and therefore of being ultimately successful.

The "secrets" within this booklet aren't really secrets. They're just smart preparation for one of the most important meetings in your life.

The Nina Haven Scholarship Fund has been granting scholarships since 1961. We've rejoiced at meeting the best students, and we've felt badly for the unprepared who allowed opportunities to elude them.

Be smart. Be prepared. Be a winner.

Sincerely,

Judith Weber
President
The Nina Haven Scholarship Fund

12 Touchstones

We must do the things we think we cannot do.

Eleanor Roosevelt

Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence.

Calvin Coolidge

It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.

Chinese Proverb

If a window of opportunity appears, don't pull down the shade.

Jonathan Winters

Fall down 7 times; stand up 8.

Japanese Proverb

The secret of success: do what you should do when you should do it, whether you feel like it or not.

Thomas Huxley

Chance favors the prepared mind.

Louis Pasteur

Our life is what our thoughts make of it.

Marcus Aurelius

Life is not waiting for the storms to pass; it's about learning to dance in the rain.

Anonymous

To accomplish great things, we must not only act but also dream, not only plan but also believe.

Anatole France

Small opportunities are often the beginning of great enterprises.

Demosthenes

It is how we choose what we do and how we approach it that will determine whether the sum of our days adds up to a formless blur or to something resembling a work of art.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi



Long before the interview appointment...

Establish a winning identity.

View your e-mail address as a scholarship interviewer would. How much would you award to someone whose screen name is “aintgonnadoit@comcast.net”? Or triplexrated@aol.com?

For the formal communications with a college admissions office or a scholarship committee, create an e-mail account that uses your proper name and shows a professional attitude.

Now listen to the message on your cell phone. Does it sound like the response of a scholarship winner? If not, change it before you give it to a professional audience.

Pull it together.

You have to look like a winner to be a winner. Choose clothes for the interview that are comfortable so that you don't fidget with what you're wearing. Look clean, neat and professional. Forget the glittery jewelry, the revealing outfits, the grunge. Look like someone in whom adults would trust their money.

Does this mean you're trying to be someone other than who you are? No. You're trying to promote that part of your personality that would make the most of scholarship dollars.

Prepare your body as well as your mind.

Eat something substantial before the interview so that you're at your best. That means keeping the sugar and caffeine to a minimum. Don't go in hungry; you don't want your words to be drowned out by the rumble in your stomach.



Secret Number

1

It's no secret that you absolutely, positively **MUST**: be on time, look well-groomed, extend your hand in greeting as you introduce yourself, greet the panel appropriately depending on time of day, sit up straight, and look at them.

Remember: you asked to be here.

Secret Number

2

Disney got it right: you have to look the part and act the part if you want to be a star. If you want to be a scholarship winner, you have to act like a winner. Keep your head up and your hands down. If you tend to fidget, practice sitting still. Don't wear any clothes or accessories that will buzz, clang, clatter or come loose during the interview. Note: this includes cell phones. In fact, this absolutely includes cell phones.

Secret Number

A large, three-dimensional, golden number 3 with a slight shadow, centered on the page.

It's not cool at this particular moment to be "cool." Use your best conversational English, avoid slang, and act as though you're glad to be here.

Secret Number

A large, three-dimensional, golden number 4 with a slight shadow, centered on the page.

They're on your side. The men and women who serve on scholarship committees believe in education and like young people. They want you to succeed. They're rooting for you to come through. Plus, it's not their money. Their whole purpose is to give away the money that's been entrusted to them for scholarships. They have to do their best to give it to students who will make the most of the financial assistance. Help them out by being the best you can be.

Secret Number



This isn't a school test where you have to cram the night before. You already know all the answers. You, your life, your experience, your hopes for the future---those are the answers. And you're the only one who knows them. So if you're asked a question and you don't understand what you're being asked, it's OK to say, "Could you please repeat the question?" or "Could you please be more specific?" The only wrong answer is no answer. After all, if you don't know, who does?

Secret Number



You can know the questions they'll ask even before you go into the interview room. How? By spending a little time thinking about being in their place. If you were going to give money to someone for college tuition, what would you want to know? Maybe something about their favorite subjects in school? Some of their accomplishments and extracurricular activities? Whether they had a job outside of school? Where they want to go to college? Why there? What they intend to study? Why? What are their goals for the future?

What's the most logical thing for you to do, then? Right! Prepare your answers in advance. That's not cheating; that's just smart.

Secret Number



Honesty counts. This seems so obvious, but it's really profound. You have to be honest first of all about your achievements and accomplishments. This is no time to be modest about what you've done. If you've worked at a job and still gotten good grades, let them know. If you have musical talent, let them know. If you helped care for the young children in your neighborhood, let them know. You must have something going for you or you wouldn't have gotten into the interview. Tell them the good stuff.

You have to be honest about the not-so-good stuff too. Problems in school with discipline or attendance at some point? Tell them honestly what happened. A period when your grades slipped drastically? Explain why. Difficulties at home? It's OK to talk about them if they affect your ability to go to college and to pay your tuition. The interview panel isn't Dr. Phil. They don't want to psychoanalyze you. They just want to understand how important it is to you that you receive a scholarship and why you deserve one.

While you're being honest, also be brief. A couple of sentences will do. You want to get the interviewers' understanding, not their sympathy. Avoid blame or sarcasm. Just speak the facts.

Secret Number



Finances can't be a secret in a scholarship interview. You have to know what your family can afford to pay toward your college education, how much you need for the school you want to attend, and what ideas you have for filling in the gap between what you've got and what you need. If you've been working part-time to supplement the family income or to save toward college, let them know. It reflects your determination and shows you care.

Secret Number

9

Character counts. When interviewers are deciding whether you would be a good bet for the money, they care about more than your school record and your financial picture. They want to feel reasonably certain that you're the kind of person who will make the most of what you're given and that in the future they'll be proud that they helped you make your dreams come true.

It's hard to determine someone's character in seven minutes. But it's not impossible. If you're prepared, if you respond in a forthright manner, if you act as though this interview truly matters to you (because it does!), if you speak and behave respectfully, then you give the interviewers confidence in you as a person as well as a future college student.

Secret Number

10

Everyone wants to be appreciated. Before you leave the interview session, thank the men and women who took their own personal time to meet with you. Within twenty-four hours, write to them—yes, real writing, with nice paper and ink. Write a formal thank-you note not only because they deserve your thanks but also to show them one more time that you're a person worthy of a scholarship. You're a winner.



Likely Questions

- What subjects do you like best in school?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- How would you describe your personality?
- What activities were you involved with outside of classes?
- What are you passionate about?
- Where do you want to go to college?
- What are you planning to major in?
- Do you have any experience in this field?
- Have you done any volunteer work?
- What are your goals?
- Why do you need a scholarship?
- What do you know about this particular scholarship?
- Do you have any other source of funds for college?
- How will you manage your college expenses if you don't receive some or all of this scholarship?
- Why would we be proud in the future that we awarded you this scholarship?

Describing Yourself with Action Verbs

It isn't easy to describe oneself without feeling a bit uncomfortable or seeming to ramble.

Prepare for the interview by choosing some strong action verbs that you can use to describe what you've done and what you want to do in the future.

For example,

I coordinated a group of students to plan the end-of-the-year celebration for the senior class.

I managed the operations of the coffee shop where I worked when the manager was not available.

I created a PowerPoint presentation to help interest other students in a fundraising activity.

A Sampling of Action Verbs

Achieved	Contributed
Adapted	Convinced
Analyzed	Coordinated
Built	Created
Changed	Demonstrated
Conducted	Designed
Constructed	Developed



- Enabled
- Facilitated
- Formed
- Generated
- Guided
- Implemented
- Improved
- Increased
- Initiated
- Instituted
- Led
- Managed
- Mentored
- Nurtured
- Obtained
- Operated
- Organized
- Performed
- Persuaded
- Prepared
- Presented
- Prioritized
- Produced
- Proposed
- Reorganized
- Repaired
- Researched
- Revised
- Revitalized
- Secured
- Spearheaded
- Strengthened
- Submitted
- Supervised
- Targeted
- Trained
- Traveled
- United
- Upgraded
- Verified
- Won
- Wrote

Advice from the Experts

Be genuine. Tell your story in a way that it shows what you have learned rather than as an excuse. Why are you worth the investment?

Richard Alvarez, Vice-President
City University of New York

If you are in survival mode, you have to get out of that mode to facilitate excellence.

Nancy Sanchez
Kaplan Educational Trust

Think about what you want to study and why you will benefit. Think seriously about three or four things that you want to do with your life.

John Buckley, Vice-President
Fordham University

The power of setting specific and tangible goals has been well documented throughout history. It is often what separates the successful from the mediocre.

Andy Masters

*Author of From High School to College
and 37 Keys to College Success*

Your effort is evident. If you throw it together at the last minute, just know that you are competing with students who spent a great deal of time perfecting their applications.

Kevin Ladd

Scholarship.com

The Nina Haven Scholarship Fund

The Nina Haven Scholarship Fund gives scholarships to high school graduates from Martin County schools who are continuing their education at a two-year or four-year college or university and who show both academic promise and financial need.

Students who receive a Nina Haven Scholarship become members of The Nina Haven Scholars, a group that numbers almost 1,000 individuals who have been past recipients of a Nina Haven Scholarship and who have gone on to establish themselves as productive citizens in a wide variety of fields.

Students apply for Nina Haven Scholarships in the fall. Awards are given at a ceremony of Nina Haven Scholars in the spring.

A scholarship recipient who maintains good grades at a college or university can receive continuing scholarship aid from The Nina Haven Scholarship Fund for a period of four years.

For further information, visit the website:

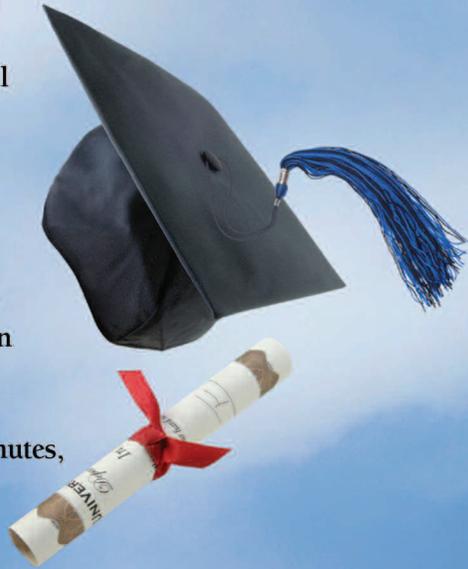
www.ninahaven.org.



A scholarship interview may seem to students to last for an eternity, but actually they have about seven minutes to create an impression on the interviewers and sell themselves as a worthy investment.

This breezy guide to those tortuous seven minutes gives practical advice and also builds students' confidence. It takes some of the mystery out of the interview process and puts humanity in its place.

When the future is riding on seven minutes, it's well worth the time to read and learn from ten separate pieces of advice that are only secrets to those who remain oblivious and never figure out, "What happened in there?"



Nina Haven Circle of Scholars 2009



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CHARITABLE FOUNDATION

The Nina Haven Scholarship Program

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