

Target

Interview preparation tips

In today's competitive academic world, knowing your school syllabus is not enough. You need to be prepared to think outside the box as well

“WHAT draws you to this university?” and “Why do you want to study Law?” are questions routinely rehearsed by students. So what do you do if the first question you are faced with is, “Tell me about a banana” – an indirect question quoted from an Oxbridge interview?

Think on your feet

THE question is often quoted by those who want to mock or ridicule the Oxbridge admission process, but there is a reason for this kind of testing. Beyond the generic “tell me about yourself” questions, academics are keen

to discover how a student thinks on their feet. Ultimately, by entering the realm of the peculiar, interviewers can learn more about a student than by testing them on their knowledge of their school syllabus.

“If you were to redesign the human body, what would you do differently?” This question, used at a Cambridge Medicine interview, does not target the students’ grasp of A-level Biology, but asks them to think outside the box and consider what biological features might be redesigned to achieve a more efficient, intelligent or healthy human body. Alternatively, students could suggest a change and then consider the potential negative consequences or inevitable connotations of this proposal; for example, what would happen to the ecosystem if we were all supermen? What social problems might be created by a species that lives forever? These creative interview questions distinguish the rote learners from the critical thinkers, and those who study for grades from those who learn for passion.

Genuine engagement

STUDENTS interviewed for modern languages need to show more than just an aptitude for linguistics. A question used at Oxford – “What is language?” – prompts students to break down the genuine interest that comes with this kind of academic pursuit. Wanting to order a croissant in Paris is not a good enough reason for wanting to study French. A good answer may analyse the way language has evolved over time, or consider the relationship between language and the way we perceive and understand the world. It is important that students reflect upon the relevance of the

subject beyond the realm of academia, and make connections with the real world.

Interviews in Hong Kong

WHAT about interviews for Hong Kong universities? Interestingly, there is a wide variety of assessment formats in Hong Kong, ranging from one-on-one to panels and group interviews. Over the years, the type of questions has become more creative. A Medicine applicant, highly accomplished in music, was posed the question, “How would you compare playing in an orchestra to working in a hospital?” The student must think laterally; how might the orchestra be similar to a hospital? How do different parts of the orchestra – or hospital – work together to achieve a shared goal? On the back of such an interesting question, the resulting conversation can certainly be a long one.

Many students feel group interviews are the most challenging. They worry about not being able to generate points to participate, or not being able to facilitate a discussion with the other participants. We urge students to broaden their knowledge base by studying global news. They should avoid hypothetical examples and cite real-life examples. Finally, while many may feel the need to excel by constantly speaking up, it is important to realise the need to address the group and encourage others to share thoughts too. This way, one can demonstrate leadership and teamwork skills as well.

These skills can be nurtured. Make sure you learn to evaluate others as well as receiving feedback. Learn, practice – and good luck!