

Girton Interviews

Interviews are an important part of your application, and you must certainly take them seriously. However, you must not take them so seriously that you become too nervous to perform well. The following information is provided in the hope that both applicants and interviewers get as much out of the interview as possible.

First, forget all the myths about interviews. At Girton we will not be asking trick questions or trying to 'catch you out' in any way. We simply want to create a situation in which you can be yourself. The most important advice anyone can give you is to try to enjoy the interview. Although this may sound unlikely, the best way to perform well in the interview is to view it as a real opportunity. It is an opportunity to discuss economics with professional economists who are interested in your views and keen to give you more ideas to think about.

What you should expect to happen. You will receive detailed instructions from the Admissions Office about how interviews are to be conducted, including the online software to be used and the timings and conditions of the interviews

Your interviewers will be Dr Clive Lawson, Dr Collin Constantine, Dr Nico Rosetti and Dr Carolina Alves. You will have two interviews, each with two of these interviewers. Different interviews will involve different types of questions. For example, one interview is likely to ask quite technical questions, one will ask about a pre-circulated reading, another will ask about your personal statement.

If the interview goes well, you should expect to talk both about things that you are interested in and know something about and things that you have little knowledge of. So, yes, you do need to prepare for the interview. You need to read the newspapers and look over the topics you have covered at school. However, it is important to stress that you will not be penalised if you have not done economics before; we will make sure that we take this into account when we ask you questions (but this does not mean we will not ask you about economics of course!). You do need to think hard about what has attracted you to the subject and you should show evidence of some awareness of current economic issues. Most importantly (for both economists and non-economists), you will be required to 'think on the spot'. And, given that you are likely to be asked about your personal statement, you should make sure you remember what you wrote about and the books you cited.

Given that you will be encouraged to think on the spot, you should not think that the interview has all gone horribly wrong just because you are asked about things you have little knowledge of. Listen carefully to the questions you are given and always ask for clarifications or definitions if you are not completely clear. Asking questions is often the key to a good interview. The worst thing you can do is to trot out practised responses when a favourite topic is brought up, without really thinking about whether you are really answering the question being asked. This is most often a problem with applicants who have convinced themselves that an interview is simply a matter of giving the 'correct' answers. But an interviewer is as much interested in your reasoning abilities as with the amount of information you have acquired from your school. You will not normally be penalised for a gap in your background knowledge (again, this is especially the case for non-economists), but

you will be penalised if you give the impression that you understand what is being talked about when you do not.

So, to sum up - just be yourself, be confident, ask about everything you do not understand or that interests you. Listen to the questions you are given and try to answer each one, not some question you wish you had been asked. Those applicants who do best tend to be those who enjoy the interview and make a real attempt to learn something from it. Don't make excuses if you have got something wrong - just try to get to the bottom of the problem!

At the end of the interview you are given an opportunity to ask questions and mention anything you think is relevant to your application but which was not talked about in the interview. To repeat, you will not be disadvantaged if you have not studied economics before. Many very successful economics students have come to interview with little previous knowledge of the subject. Not having much maths is more of a problem. Although at Girton we have always been sympathetic to those who do not have a strong background in maths, the Economics course is now so mathematical that it is just not practical to take the course without a very good background in A-level (or equivalent) maths, indeed many current students have also taken the further maths A-level.