

Tips for Applying for a Nonimmigrant Visa at the U.S. Consular Office

Make sure to research what is required of you to prepare for your non-immigrant visa application and interview by going to the appropriate U.S. Consular Office website (<http://usembassy.state.gov/>). Some offices require different information.

- 1. TIES TO HOME COUNTRY:** Under U.S. law, all applicants for nonimmigrant visas are viewed as intending immigrants until they convince the consular officer that they are not. You must therefore be able to demonstrate that your reasons for returning to your home country are stronger than those for remaining in the United States. "Ties" to your home country are defined as those connections that bind you to your hometown, homeland, or current place of residence, e.g., job, family, financial prospects that you own or will inherit, investments, etc. Be prepared to discuss any professional interests, associations, memberships or other social ties you intend to maintain with your own country. If you have relatives, such as a brother or sister, who completed higher education in the U.S. and is successfully pursuing a career back in your home country, mention this. It will greatly strengthen your own application. As a prospective undergraduate, the interviewing officer may ask about your specific intentions or promise of future employment, family or other relationships, educational objectives, grades, long-range plans, and career prospects in your home country. Each person's situation is different, of course, and there is no magic explanation or single document, certificate, or letter, which will guarantee visa issuance.
- 2. ENGLISH:** Anticipate that the interview will be conducted in English and not in your native language. We suggest that you practice English conversation with a native speaker before the interview.
- 3. SPEAK FOR YOURSELF:** Do not bring parents or family members with you to the interview. The consular officer wants to interview you, not your family. A negative impression is created if you are not prepared to speak on your own behalf.
- 4. KNOW THE PROGRAM AND HOW IT FITS YOUR CAREER PLANS:** If you are not able to articulate the reasons you will study in a particular program in the United States, you may not succeed in convincing the consular officer that you are indeed planning to study, rather than to immigrate. You should also be able to explain how studying in the United States relates to your future professional career when you return home. If you can bring evidence of a prospective job offer in your home country, all the better.
- 5. BE CONCISE:** Because of the volume of applications received, all consular officers are under considerable time pressure to conduct a quick and efficient interview. They must make a decision, for the most part, on the impressions they form during the first minute or two of the interview. Consequently, what you say first and the initial impression you create are critical to your success. Keep your answers to the questions short and to the point.

6. **SUPPLEMENTAL DOCUMENTATION:** It should be clear at a glance to the consular officer what written documents you are presenting and what they signify. Lengthy written explanations cannot be quickly read or evaluated. Remember that you will have 2-3 minutes of interview time, if you are lucky.
7. **NOT ALL COUNTRIES ARE EQUAL:** Applicants from countries suffering economic problems or from those countries which have had many students remain in the United States as immigrants will have greater difficulty in getting visas. Statistically, applicants from those countries are more likely to be intending immigrants. They are also more likely to be asked about job opportunities at home after their study in the United States.
8. **EMPLOYMENT:** Your main purpose in coming to the United States should be to study, not for the chance to work before or after graduation. While many students do work off-campus during their studies, such employment is incidental to their main purpose of completing their U.S. education. You must be able to clearly articulate your intention to return home at the end of your program. If your spouse is also applying for an accompanying F-2 visa, be aware that F-2 dependents cannot, under any circumstances, be employed in the United States. If asked, be prepared to address what your spouse intends to do with his or her time while in the United States. Volunteer work and attending school part-time are permitted activities.
9. **MILITARY SERVICE:** If you are a male applicant and your country imposes mandatory military service, be prepared to state that you intend to fully comply with your country's laws concerning military service.
10. **DEPENDENTS REMAINING AT HOME:** If your spouse and children are remaining in your home country, be prepared to address how they will support themselves in your absence. This can be an especially tricky area if you are the primary source of income in your family. If the consular officer gains the impression that your family will need you to remit money from the United States to support them, your student visa application will almost certainly be denied. If your family does decide to join you at a later time, it is helpful to have them apply at the same post where you applied for your visa.
11. **MAINTAIN A POSITIVE ATTITUDE:** Do not engage the consular officer in an argument. If you are denied the student visa, ask the officer for a list of documents he or she would suggest would enable you to overcome the refusal. Also, ask for a written explanation of the reason you were denied.

Good luck!