

## *A Contest of Academic Strength*

*Providing academic competition to encourage,  
acknowledge and reward academic excellence  
through teamwork among students of all  
achievement levels.*



# CALIFORNIA ACADEMIC DECATHLON

## INTERVIEW Student Guide

**Since 1968**, the Academic Decathlon has grown into the premier scholastic competition in America. The Academic Decathlon was created to provide opportunities for high school students to experience the challenges of rigorous team and individual competition. Designed to provide a forum for celebrating and acknowledging scholastic achievement and academic excellence in the context of a team environment, the Academic Decathlon provides high school students the opportunity to participate in an educational forum that fosters a deep respect for knowledge, cooperation, and self-esteem.

The following information is offered to assist you prepare for your Academic Decathlon interview. Prepared well, your self-introduction is your key to interview success because it helps to create that all-important first impression, and helps you to build the rapport with the judges conducting your interview.

### **FIRST IMPRESSIONS ARE IMPORTANT**

In an interview, first impressions are very important. The first thing the interviewer learns about you, you teach him or her by how you introduce yourself. The interview is your chance to communicate your ability and skills directly to the judges. Because interviewing is a skill, anyone can learn to interview effectively. The key to a successful interview is preparation and careful listening.

The first opinion an interviewer makes is going to be based on how you look. Make sure your hair is neat – get a haircut if possible. Dress in conservative business attire. All clothes should be neat, clean and pressed. Avoid excessive jewelry, makeup, cologne or perfume. It's important to dress professionally for your interview. You'll want that first impression to be not just a good one, but, a great one. A decathlete dressed professionally is going to make a better impression than the decathlete dressed in scruffy jeans and a t-shirt.

Be very assured and self-confident when entering the room. Be willing or ready to offer a handshake and be sure that it is firm and demonstrates confidence. Be sure to remember the names of the judges interviewing you. The interview will progress on better terms if you are able to respond using the name of the person you are speaking with. Do not assume that there is a particular place for you; wait until the judge motions to where you are to sit. Once seated and introductions are over, the interview is ready to begin.

### **DURING THE INTERVIEW**

During the interview, sit up straight in the chair or lean forward slightly and DO NOT slouch! Establish yourself as a self-confident and assertive person without being confrontational, cocky or aggressive. Remember to be yourself but to also present a professional, polished version of yourself.

Answer interview questions directly. Be confident without being arrogant. At the same time, admit to your weaknesses if they are brought up, but do not bring them up. Instead, concentrate on your strengths. Demonstrate energy, determination, enthusiasm, motivation and passion for your work.

### **PREPARING A SELF-INTRODUCTION**

In preparing your self-introduction, ask yourself this question: 'What do I want the judges to know about me? What makes me unique?'

The way to create a favorable first impression is to be sure you appear confident and open. When you meet your interviewer for the first time, make eye-contact at the introduction and repeat the interviewer's name as you shake hands and thank them for inviting you to the interview.

As you get seated, smile to indicate you are ready to get down to business. What often follows is the invitation to you to 'tell them about yourself', which allows you to commence your self-introduction. To avoid possible bias (positive and negative) from a judge try your best not to disclose where you live or what school you attend.

Prepare exactly what you are going to say. This is not some lengthy story about your life, but a short focused statement that sounds interesting to the listener. You make it interesting by keeping it short (30 seconds) and by showing that you are interested in sharing and listening.

In your self-introduction consider including some examples of your strengths and achievements. The way you outline your self-introduction, in particular the way you speak, tells the interviewer whether you are confident in your abilities so don't try to be what you are clearly not.

Practice your self-introduction with someone with a critical ear, because if it sounds false it will set the alarm bells ringing with the interviewers. They will detect that it is not the real you and it will destroy the rapport you are trying to build up. Practice speaking faster or more slowly, louder or quietly and try to vary it throughout.

The key question for a successful and effective self-introduction is: how much and what information do you want the interviewers to know about you? Do not write an award winning autobiography; consider developing an introduction around an aspect of your life. That aspect should feature who you are and what you are about.

### **FOR PRACTICE**

Practice interviewing. Have a friend ask you questions that you may encounter during an interview. Videotape your interview and identify your positive and negative factors, traits, habits and actions.

Look at the sample self-introduction topics below and pick out the aspects of your personal life you want to share with the judges. Approach the list below with the Who, What, Where, Why, How and When questions. It is an effective way to outline your first thoughts for introducing yourself.

1. What activity has played or plays an important part in your life?
2. What is your main personal goal?
3. What do you like very much?
4. Have you developed a very special skill?
5. Can you come up with a turning point or milestone in your life?
6. What is your hobby or interest in your spare time?
7. What distinguishes you from other individuals?
8. What brought you to Academic Decathlon?
9. How has Academic Decathlon changed your goals for college?

## **ANSWERING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Questions asked of the Decathletes can be based on your self-introduction or topics similar to those listed on the Sample Interview Questions.

Answer interview questions honestly and completely - but be wary. Do not dwell on negatives and avoid mentioning them when possible. Sell yourself on your true capabilities and experiences without exaggerating your abilities. If you are asked a technical question and you do not know the answer, don't bluff. If your bluff fails, your character will be seriously threatened. Instead, say "I do not know the answer, but if I were to venture an educated guess I would say...". Never speak negatively about another person or group.

## **IMPORTANT DO'S AND DON'TS**

### **DO**

- Arrive on time.
- Greet the interviewer with a warm, confident "Hello" and a firm handshake.
- Be well rested.
- Dress and groom yourself with perfection (Appropriate business attire, make-up, deodorant).
- Maintain good posture.
- Emphasize positive things about yourself.

### **DO NOT**

- Bring your coach with you!
- Arrive late.
- Speak negatively about another person or group.
- Answer with a simple "yes" or "no." Explain whenever possible. Describe those things about yourself that relate to the situation.