

How to Prepare for an Asylum Interview

Careful, complete preparation is key to convincing an asylum officer that you are believable, and deserve asylum in the United States.

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If you submitted an application for [asylum](#) in the U.S. "affirmatively" (that is, sent in Form I-589 on your own without having been arrested or placed in removal proceedings first), you will be called in for an interview, at which you present your case to an officer of the U.S. government.

During this interview, the Asylum Officer ("AO") will try to test your:

credibility, and
legal claim to asylum.

(See [What Happens During an Asylum Interview](#) for details.)

The purpose will be for the AO to confirm and evaluate information in your asylum application, in order to help decide whether you merit a grant of asylum. Therefore, you must know, and will have to present your story, comprehensively and well. Here, we'll describe exactly what you must do to prepare for your interview.

What if you can't make the date the interview is scheduled for? Act quickly, you might be able to [postpone it](#).

Carefully Following Instructions From Asylum Office

Your interview notice will include many details on time, place, and procedures. Read them many times so you don't miss anything or forget to bring an important document.

Arrange for an Interpreter, If You Are Not Fluent in English

It's mandatory to bring someone who can interpret for you if your English isn't strong enough for this purpose, as described in [What Happens During an Asylum Interview](#). This doesn't need to be a paid professional, but there are some requirements for who can and cannot serve in this role.

Reviewing Your Application to Get Ready for Interview Questions

In order to convince the AO that you are credible (that is, believable), you will need to be honest, detailed, and consistent in all of your answers, and also consistent with what you had stated in your application. For details about credibility, see [Chances of Winning a Grant of Asylum](#).

In order to show these things, you will need to know your entire asylum application very well, and not make mistakes or get confused.

A few days before your interview, start reviewing your [asylum application](#) (Form I-589 and supporting documents). Take your time, and do not leave this task until the last minute. You need to be familiar with every sentence and every detail in your application. Also review all the declarations, identity documents, country reports, and any other documents you submitted to USCIS.

When reviewing all this information, pay attention to whether all the details are consistent with each other, and whether they are all accurate and up to date. If you see any outright mistakes or discrepancies—for example, you stated in one section that the car following you was blue, but later say that it was white—you must point that out to the AO at the *beginning* of your interview, clarifying what is true and, if appropriate, explaining why you made the mistake. Also, if you realize that you had forgotten to mention any details that are important to your asylum claim, tell the AO at the start of your interview.

(We'll discuss what to do about outdated information later in this article.)

Reread your application as many times as it takes for you to remember all of the details in it. Pay attention to dates, places, and names. It's easy to get mixed up about dates, even when talking about your own life—but the AO may not sympathize with this. Also refresh your memory about all the events that constituted the persecution that is the basis of your legal claim to asylum.

Never try to embellish or create additional details if you are not sure of them. Remember, you must be completely honest during your interview.

After becoming familiar with your complete asylum application, practice answering difficult or uncomfortable questions. Even if your lawyer works on this with you, it's worth having a friend ask you general questions such as, "So why are you applying for asylum?" and questions dealing with details in your application, such as, "What happened on ____ [*a precise date mentioned in your application*]?".

If you will be bringing a foreign language interpreter to your asylum interview, it is best to practice questions with that interpreter, and with another person acting as the AO and asking you questions in English. Practice recounting details from your application that are especially embarrassing, painful, and hard for you to talk about. In order to increase your chances of winning asylum, you will have to discuss such details with the AO.

An important part of your preparation is to learn to clearly explain your legal claim for asylum. That is, focus on (1) the incidents of your persecution, and (2) the legal grounds on account of which you were persecuted (such as your religion or political beliefs). Sometimes, because your religion or political

opinions are so deeply ingrained in you, you might have never had to talk about them in detail with strangers. Hence, learn to be comfortable talking about them.

To help you feel more confident going into your interview, you might want to prepare a short outline or a list of the main incidents that constitute your persecution, in chronological order. Also, write down any important details (such as names, dates, places, and any types of instruments your persecutors used to hurt you) that you are having difficulty remembering. Just don't expect to read extensively from these notes, or the officer might suspect you don't know the facts yourself, but have been coached to tell a made-up story.

If you do not have an attorney, you might also want to write down a short closing statement. You will have an opportunity to make that statement to the AO at the end of your interview. You might want to include a quick summary of your persecution, and include the most critical details from your story.

How to Deal With Outdated Information in Your Asylum Application

As you review your application materials, you might notice facts that have changed owing to the passage of time. Perhaps you've moved to a new address, gotten married, had a child, or switched jobs. Such changes are

especially likely given that some asylum applicants wait years for their interview.

Take notes on these, at least for yourself, so that you'll be ready to bring them to the attention of the asylum officer, who will go over your application with you verbally and make notes of any changes.

Or, if the changes are substantial, attorneys have found that it's easiest to prepare a written list of the changes (as well as corrections to any errors). When you go to the asylum office to check in for your interview, give the list to the person checking you in, and they'll get it into the officer's hands in advance.

What to Bring to Your Asylum Interview

Make sure to bring the following documents with you:

USCIS notice informing you when, and where to appear for your interview, and any other notices or receipts you got from USCIS.

Originals of all document copies that you submitted with your asylum application (such as photographs, witness statements, marriage certificates, medical records, and so forth).

Originals of all document copies you submitted to prove your identity (such as passports, travel documents, birth certificates, national identity cards, political or religious organization membership cards).

Documents showing any changes or corrections, including your written list (if you decided to prepare one, following the instructions above) and both original and copies of proof of important new things, such as a marriage or birth certificate.

A complete copy of your asylum application, and any short lists or outlines you wrote for your own use when preparing for your interview.

If your spouse or children are included in your asylum application, bring any of the above documents that pertain to them, as well.

Make sure to bring English translations and original certificates of translation for any of the above documents that are not in English.

Because you might have to wait a while at the Asylum Office before you are called in for your interview, bring something to read (if it will relax you), snacks and water (if allowed at your Asylum Office), and toys for your children if you are bringing them along.

Last Tips: The Day Before Your Interview

You'll want to be feeling your best on the day of your interview. Therefore, prepare everything the day before.

Figure out your transportation arrangements well ahead of time. If unfamiliar with the location of the Asylum Office, make sure to travel there before your

interview to know exactly how long it will take you to get there. Do not forget to consider special traffic conditions at the time of your interview, and if driving your own car, any additional time you will need to find parking.

Collect all of the materials you will need to bring to your interview (see above). Also, lay out your clothes for the interview. They should be neat and clean, and you should be yourself and feel comfortable in them. If you have any scars or other physical markings from your persecution, and you feel comfortable showing them to the AO, make sure that your clothing will make it easy for you to show them.

Finally, prepare emotionally. Try to relax and rest well the night before, and feel confident in all the work you have put into preparing your application and preparing for your interview. You will be asked some difficult questions, and you will have to talk about matters that are personal and private.

It's okay to shed tears or cry during the interview. The AO will expect that you will show emotion when retelling painful events from your past. All asylum applicants have to talk about such things during their interview, and your likelihood of obtaining asylum will depend on how credible you are. Bottling up thoughts and feelings can result in your not revealing either your fear of persecution or details of the events themselves.

If you are a woman, and are uncomfortable speaking to a male AO, you will be able to request a female AO. The Asylum Office will try to provide you with a female AO, if one is available. But your request might also be denied, and you might have to be interviewed by a male AO.

An asylum interview is a tiring experience (both physically, and emotionally). Also, you will probably have to wait for a while before your interview, which will last at least an hour. Therefore, make sure to eat before you leave for the interview.

For what will happen after the interview, see [Timing of the Affirmative Asylum Application Process](#).