

# PhD Interview Cheatsheet

Program / School: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## 1 Elevator Pitch (Tell Me About Yourself)

*Goal:* Connect prior training to the target field; show trajectory + motivation + fit.

- **Background:** Final-year undergraduate at \_\_\_\_\_; exchange/research at \_\_\_\_\_.
- **Academic core:** Major/minor in \_\_\_\_\_; strong quantitative foundation in \_\_\_\_\_.
- **Pivot / motivation:** From \_\_\_\_\_ → toward \_\_\_\_\_ due to \_\_\_\_\_.
- **Current focus:** Applying \_\_\_\_\_ (e.g., control/RL) and \_\_\_\_\_ (e.g., networks) to \_\_\_\_\_.
- **Why PhD:** To develop \_\_\_\_\_ models/methods that produce \_\_\_\_\_ insights + translate to \_\_\_\_\_.

### Sample Script (Read/Paraphrase):

"My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I'm a final-year undergraduate at \_\_\_\_\_.

I study \_\_\_\_\_. Early on, I worked on \_\_\_\_\_ (e.g., optimization / ML / theory). Over time, I became increasingly drawn to \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.

Recently, I've been applying \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_. I'm pursuing a PhD to bridge disciplines—using rigorous modeling to understand \_\_\_\_\_, generate predictive insights, and uncover underlying mechanisms."

## 2 Key Research Projects (Deep Dives)

### 2.1 Project A (Template)

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

One-line summary: \_\_\_\_\_

Problem / Why it matters:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Method / What you did:

- \_\_\_\_\_

- \_\_\_\_\_ Results / Evidence:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Your contribution (be explicit):

- \_\_\_\_\_ Possible Q & A:

• **Q:** What is the main takeaway?

A: \_\_\_\_\_

- Q: What was the hardest part technically?

A: \_\_\_\_\_

- Q: What would you do next if you had 6 more months?

A: \_\_\_\_\_

## 2.2 Project B (Template)

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Summary:

• \_\_\_\_\_

• \_\_\_\_\_

**Key contributions (3 max):**

• \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_

• \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_

• \_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_

**Possible Q & A:**

- Q: Why did you choose this modeling approach?

A: \_\_\_\_\_

- Q: How did you validate the model?

A: \_\_\_\_\_

## 2.3 Project C (Template)

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Summary: \_\_\_\_\_

**Key contributions:**

• \_\_\_\_\_

• \_\_\_\_\_

**Possible Q & A:**

- Q: What does this show about the underlying mechanism?

A: \_\_\_\_\_

## 3 Addressing a Non-Linear Background (Seemingly unrelated discipline to the intended area)

*Use this when asked “Why this field now? ” Keep it human + technical.*

**Personal motivation (optional, 2–3 sentences):**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Technical continuity (make the bridge explicit):**

• Common structure: \_\_\_\_\_

• Transferable tools: \_\_\_\_\_

• What changed: from optimizing \_\_\_\_\_ to optimizing/understanding \_\_\_\_\_

**Philosophy (1–2 lines):**

## 4 Soft Skills & Teaching / Collaboration

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- Communication: \_\_\_\_\_
- Collaboration: \_\_\_\_\_
- Mentoring/Teaching: \_\_\_\_\_
- Value proposition: I can \_\_\_\_\_

## 5 Why This Program? & Questions for Them

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### 5.1 Why this program / group? (3 bullets max)

- Research fit: \_\_\_\_\_
- Training fit: \_\_\_\_\_
- Community/resources: \_\_\_\_\_

### 5.2 Questions to Ask (pick 2)

1. “*What does a successful first year look like in your group (skills, milestones, reading, projects)?*”
2. “*How do you decide problem selection and scope—especially balancing publishability vs. risk?*”
3. “*How does collaboration typically work in your lab/group (expectations, co-mentorship, authorship norms)?*”
4. “*What training opportunities exist for my current gaps (e.g., wet-lab exposure, clinical context, data access)?*”