



The Interview

The interview is the last step – and in many ways may be the most important step in getting into medical school. Prior to this, you have compiled your academic record, completed your MCAT, written your personal and secondary statements, completed the application and found people to write your letters of recommendation. Those all provide a two-dimensional look at who you are, and if done well, will land you an interview.

The interview is an opportunity to confirm the information in your complete application, and to provide a three-dimensional look at you as a person. Think of online dating. Some people sound almost too good to be true, and sure enough you meet them and say “not what I thought I was getting”.

Medical schools want to find and admit individuals who will be excellent students, but even more importantly become outstanding physicians. Patient satisfaction research points to the need for physicians to be both technical experts and caring, ethical professionals who communicate well and express compassion. What they are generally looking for in an interview is

- Do you have experience and knowledge of the profession?
- Do you have good interpersonal skills?
- Can you demonstrate responsibility and commitment?
- Are you going to the professional school for the right reasons?
- Are you mature and organized enough to handle the heavy academic load?
- Are you able to handle and work under high stress conditions?
- Are your answers to questions consistent with your personal statement and letters of recommendation?
- Do you “fit” the interviewer’s preconceived ideas of a typical student?
- Can you be a team player and work as part of a team?

The medical school interviewing process continues to evolve. There are many methods used, and more being added all the time. Some schools interview applicants in small groups, others use a single interview with a faculty member, student or school administrator. Traditional interviews tend to be screening in nature. A couple of new interviewing formats include behavioral interviewing and the multiple mini-interview.

Traditional Interviewing

The traditional interview process allows an applicant to interact with one or more interviewers and provides an opportunity for the school to assess the interpersonal skills of an applicant. However, each applicant will not necessarily be interviewed by the same interviewer or interviewers. These interviews can be very formal, or very informal, and can be very reflective of the personality – and sometimes mood of the interviewer. The questions in the traditional interview are often basic and straight forward,

occasionally you will find an interviewer does their best to intimidate you and rattle your composure. More and more schools try to find ways to learn about student's character through interviewing and they are turning to behavioral interviewing.

Behavioral interviewing

The fundamental premise behind behavioral interviewing is that the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in a similar situation. During a behavioral interview, always listen carefully to the question, ask for clarification if necessary, and make sure you answer the question completely. The STAR technique (see below) has been designed to help you respond to behavioral interviewing.

Multiple Mini-Interview (MMI)

The Multiple Mini Interview was originally developed by researchers at McMaster University, and has recently been adopted by several U.S. medical schools as part of the admissions process. Following are some characteristics of the MMI:

- Typically consists of six to ten timed stations through which applicants rotate for eight to ten minutes each.
- At each station, the applicant is presented with a question, scenario or task to assess specific skills and qualities and assigns the same interviewer to rate all applicants at a station in order to address some of the weaknesses of the standard interview format.
- The instructions for the station may be posted outside the room and the applicant is given two minutes to read and analyze the instructions prior to entering the room.

The types of situations that you may be asked to reflect on are often ethical, social or political in nature. You may actually find yourself in a "role-play" situation where you are asked to do something. For example, you are given a description of a situation and told to go interact with the person. An observer will take notes on how you interact. This type of role play may actually require you to work with other interviewees. Some schools actually ask you to solve problems, or complete a writing exercise at a station.

Preparing for these types of interviews can be more challenging. This type of preparation involves both practice and reflection. Understanding yourself and how you really feel and act will be essential to performing well. Spend time reading about medical ethics, as well as important issues in the field. Understand your own feeling and reactions to questions that might upset you at an emotional level. Identify personal strategies to innovate. Remember that these are timed – so find someone to help you practice, and force yourself to think rapidly!

Some additional things to keep in mind:

Many interviewers admit that they have largely made up their minds about a candidate within the first five minutes of meeting him or her. Why is this? What do they base this on?

Once a negative judgment is made, it is almost impossible to change. Can you tell when someone is not receiving you or your message the way you want it received?

If the initial impression is positive, it must be reinforced through verbal skills during the remainder of the interview. How do you know if you are connecting to someone?

Success or failure in the interview will depend solely on your ability to convince the interviewer that you fit his/her perception of a typical student, and that you have unique abilities and experiences that differentiate you from other candidates? How can you do this?

In many instances the interviewer will not have access to your application and will know only your name and the college you attended. How does this influence your approach in the interview?

STAR

Interviewing Response Technique for Success in Behavioral Interviews

One strategy for preparing for behavioral interviews is to use the STAR Technique, as outlined below. (This technique is often referred to as the SAR and PAR techniques as well.)

S – Situation, background set the scene

T – Task or Target, specifics of what's required, when, where, who

A – Action, what you did, skills used, behaviours, characteristics

R – Result – Outcome, what happened as a result of your action.

Illegal Questions

Most Interviewers know that it is illegal to ask about age, ethnic background, national origin, marital status, family planning, or sexual, religious, or political preference. If you should be asked an illegal question, don't make any assumptions, and try to answer the underlying concern in the question. For example if you are asked about your marital status, or if you have children – the concern may be that you would not be committed to being a physician. "If you are concerned about my ability to practice medicine, I can assure you that my family responsibilities will not interfere with my ability to treat patients."

Your Questions

At the end of the interview, you will be asked if you have any questions. You must do your homework, and have at least a couple of questions. This can also be used as an opportunity to frame, reframe or confirm information you want them to remember.

Thank you

Make sure you thank the interviewer, and if you are interested in the school, make sure they know that! A thank you note – the old fashioned kind – can be very important as well. If you send a note, make sure you write clearly and state your appreciation of their time. Do not start into a full letter of application again!

Interview Questions to help you Prepare

1. What are important issues in medicine today?
 - a. What is contributing to rising medical costs?
 - b. What are the pro's and con's of our health care system?
 - c. What do you know about health care reform?
 - d. What type of research would you consider cutting edge in medicine today?
2. Why do you think you would be a good physician?
3. What value does research add to the profession of medicine?

4. What do you know about the work of a physician?
5. Are you sure you want to be a physician?
6. How did you choose a career in medicine?
7. What was your favorite subject in school and why?
8. What do you know about the patient experience?
9. How do you describe yourself?
10. What motivates you?
11. How do you prepare for a significant challenge?
12. What is the most important experience you've ever had and why?
13. Are your values in alignment with your goals?
14. What do you do particularly well?
15. What is your greatest weakness?
16. How do you deal with disappointment?
17. What do your grades say about you?
18. What will you do if you are not accepted?

Behavioral style interview questions

1. Give an example of a time when you faced a significant challenge, how did you deal with it?
2. Are your values in alignment with your goals?
3. Tell me about a time when you demonstrated your trustworthiness or integrity in school or at work.
4. Tell me about a time when you were working hard to complete a task and you were asked to leave that task before completing it and start a different job.
5. Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty to get a job done.
6. Give me an example of a time when you had set a goal for yourself and tell me how you went about accomplishing it.
7. Give me a specific occasion on which you followed a policy with which you did not agree.
8. Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully communicate with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa).
9. Describe what will be your greatest challenge in medical school.
10. In what kind of a work environment do you do your best work?