

Interview Strategies for Prehealth Students



Prehealth Advising, University of Colorado Boulder

Before we begin

Do you have ...

- Packet of handouts for the Interview Strategies Presentation
- Copy of PowerPoint slides
- Writing utensil

What this presentation will cover

Part One:

Preparing for the questions

Part Two:

Logistical considerations and tips for success

Holistic Review in Professional School Admissions

"Threshold" approach for assessing academic readiness for professional school.

Balanced consideration given to the multiple ways in which people can prepare for professional school.

Each school places special value on the attributes that are most relevant to that school's educational mission.

What this presentation will cover

Part One:

1. What are the interviewers hoping to learn about you?
2. What types of questions are they likely to ask?
3. How to craft excellent answers
4. Tips for preparing for your interview

What Are Admissions Teams Hoping to Learn About You?

1. Are you academically ready?
2. Are you making a well-educated career choice?
3. Are you a great fit for this line of work?
4. Are you a great fit for this particular school?

Do you appear to be a good fit for their school?

People tend to think first of location, but that shouldn't actually be your top priority.

Your goal: To get a great education at a school that is the best fit for you, as determined by your learning style and your career interests.

Topics to consider regarding school "fit"

- Particularly strong programs (or special tracks) in your area(s) of interest
- "Student culture": supportive vs. competitive
- Type of curriculum
- Student organizations
- Learning support: office hours, mentoring, tutoring, support for preparing for licensing exams
- Approach to clinical training:
 - When do you want to start working with patients?
 - Types and locations of clinical sites?
- University campus vs graduate school campus
- Location:
 - Nearby personal support network (friends, family)
 - Access to activities that you enjoy for stress relief

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Tell Stories

Stories are memorable and give the interviewer a sense of your personality.

Share **specific anecdotes**. (Avoid general references to past events.)

- Step 1: Set the scene – describe the situation
- Step 2: Describe the action you took.
- Step 3: Convey the outcome of your action. (No cliffhangers, please!)
- Step 4: Reflect upon the experience:
 - What insight did you gain? -or-
 - What lesson did you learn?

When asked a question, think to yourself:

- "What is motivating the interviewer to ask this question?" (In other words, what attribute is the interviewer trying to assess?)
- Answer in a way that satisfies that motivation, sharing one of the stories you identified in advance.

A few more tips for answering interview questions

- Listen carefully to each question. Be sure to answer the question that was asked, not the question you *expected* to be asked.
- Most interviewees pause for a few seconds before answering, to gather their thoughts.
- Each answer should be about 2 to 3 minutes long.
- Be aware of your eye contact and body language.
- Answer the questions completely but concisely, and then stop talking. It's okay to have some silence in the room between questions.

A few more tips for answering interview questions

- Use professional language, not casual terms you would use with friends.
- If asked a question to which you do not know the answer, admit, "I don't know."
- When applicable, you can also offer, "I do know more about _____. Would you like to discuss that?"
- Be sure to practice OUT LOUD ahead of time to make sure you can articulately explain/describe your experiences.

Try this:

"Tell me about a time when you had a challenging interaction with a patient. What was the situation, and how did you handle it?"

Make a bulleted list of the key elements you would like to cover in your response.

Try this out loud:

"How do you know you want to be a [insert your desired profession here]?"

This question is intended to assess your knowledge of the profession and to give you a chance to explain why you think you will be a good fit for it.

Tips for answering a few challenging interview questions

Dealing with a couple of common concerns

Academic record: How to address poor grades?

- Acknowledge responsibility. Maturely explain what you've learned from the experience and how it has prepared you to be successful in professional school. Don't blame anyone else.
- Emphasize upward trend since then.

How to address personal issues (run-ins with law, difficult life experiences you have overcome)?

- Be prepared to discuss these issues
- Demonstrate maturity, and discuss what you learned from the incident.

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3. How to craft excellent answers
4. **Tips for preparing for your interview**

Tips for preparing for your interview

1. **Know your strengths.**
 - Ahead of time, identify 3-5 personal strengths you hope to convey.
 - For each one, develop a "skill statement" that illustrates that strength.
2. **Cover your bases.**
 - Have an answer and, where applicable, an anecdote ready in response to each self-assessment prompt on the "Preparing for Interviews" handout.
3. **Know your personal mission statement.**
 - What is the positive change you hope to bring to the profession?
4. **Be ready to articulate why you are interested in this particular school.**
5. **Prepare a short list of written questions you'll want to ask them.**

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Part Two:

1. An overview of the interview process
2. Tips for making a great impression

Overview of the process

1. Receive an interview invitation
2. Arrange scheduling, travel, accommodations
 - Plan your travel so that you arrive the day before the interview
3. Interview day
 - Go on a campus tour
 - Typically, you will attend a "welcome" session by the Dean and several group or individual information sessions
4. Complete your interviews
5. Wait (perhaps for *months*) for a response

Who are the interviewers?

- Faculty
- Current students
- Professionals in that field or related fields
- Researchers

Their goal: To find a good fit between their professional school and a potential student.

Most are NOT trying to discourage you. Most interviews are conversational, relatively relaxed.

– But what if you end up with a difficult, unreasonable, or distracting interviewer?

What will the interviewers know about you ahead of time?

Open File

Interviewer has read your entire application file

Closed File

Interviewer knows nothing but your name

Partial File

Interviewer has some, but not all, of your application information (most common: grades/test scores withheld)

Types of Interviews

Individual Interviews

One-on-one

Panel Interview

One interviewee, with several interviewers

Group Interviews

One interviewer, with several interviewees

Multiple Mini-Interviews (MMI)

Series of brief interviews, one question per interviewer (more on next slide)

Expect additional interviews for dual-degree programs

Multiple Mini Interviews

- Seven to ten short (6-8 minutes) interviews, each with a different interviewer.
- You go from room to room. You read the prompt and get a couple of minutes to prepare your response. You may have a "rest" station during one of the time periods.

Common topics:

- Standard interview questions, with emphasis on ethical dilemmas
- Interacting with an actor (you will be given a scenario before walking in). A third person serves as evaluator.
- Group task: teamwork
- Writing an essay

Great list of resources from the prehealth advisors at Portland State University:
[https://careercenter.wustl.edu/students/prehealth/Documents/MMI%20information%20for%20Med%20ScSchool\[1\].pdf](https://careercenter.wustl.edu/students/prehealth/Documents/MMI%20information%20for%20Med%20ScSchool[1].pdf)

As you enter interview season . . .

Express professionalism throughout interview season.

- Voice mail message
- Email address
- Social networking sites
- Responding promptly to interview invitations

The day before your interview

- Go to the campus to scout out your transportation options/parking/building location
- Re-read your application (which stories have you already told them?)
- Re-read all of the information you have on the school
- Write out your list of questions to ask *them*.

Making a Great Impression On Your Interview Day

- Be polite to *everyone* you meet!
- Be positive about your past experiences. Express enthusiasm for this particular school.
- Introduce yourself using your **full name**
 - Example: "Hello, it's nice to meet you. I'm Jane Smith."
 - This may feel awkward at first, but force yourself to do it.
- Use your interviewer's formal title (e.g. Dr. Greene) and refer to him or her by name during the interview
- Handshake
- Take comfort in knowing that you have already survived a significant cut.
 - Expect to feel nervous on the day of the interview. Find your peace with that feeling. Think of a time/place where you typically feel happy and confident.

What to Wear/Bring



A few tips on attire

- Clothing:
 - Pack your suit in your carry-on luggage
 - Bring extra shirt/tie/stockings
 - You will need a professional-looking overcoat
- Comfortable, professional-looking shoes (lots of walking on tour)
- Hair (recent haircut, professionally styled, out of face)
- Portfolio holder or professional bag/conservative purse
- Water bottle, chapstick, small snack
- Note pad, list of your questions, pen
- ~~Cell phone~~
- ~~Distracting jewelry~~
- ~~Perfume/cologne~~

Making a Great Impression: At the end of the interview

- Say "thank you" and express enthusiasm for that school by citing one or two specific reasons why it feels like a great fit.
- Ask for business cards (unless you've been directed to send all correspondence directly to the admissions office)
- Write a thank you letter or email: within a couple of days is best
 - Indicate the date of the interview.
 - Thank them for their time.
 - Bring up a topic from your discussion that was meaningful to you.
 - If you were asked a question that stumped you, provide a thoughtful, organized response in writing.
 - Reiterate your interest in the school and why you would be happy there.

What to start working on now, to prepare for your first interview

1. On Pre-Health Advising Website, read our Interview section
2. Read the interviewing chapters in [Get Into Medical School!: A Guide for the Perplexed](#) (2nd ed.), by Kenneth Iserson
3. Read [The Premed Playbook: Guide to the Medical School Interview](#), by Ryan Gray (Kindle download on Amazon)
4. Schedule a practice interview with a career counselor in Career Services.
5. Participate in the next Pre-Health Practice Interview Event.