

Post-Baccalaureate Health Professions

How to Prepare for Interviews



Continuing Education
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

Part One: Preparing for the questions

Part Two: Logistical considerations and tips
for success



Continuing Education
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER



Continuing Education
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

Part One: Preparing for the Questions

1. What are admissions teams hoping to learn about you?
2. What types of questions are they likely to ask?
3. How to craft excellent answers
4. "Homework" to prepare for your first interview

Before we get started

Make sure you have...

- Packet of the handouts
- Copy of the PowerPoint slides
- Whatever you need to take notes and respond to a writing prompt



Continuing Education
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

Holistic Review in Professional School Admissions

- "Threshold" approach for assessing academic readiness for professional school science curriculum.
- Balanced consideration given to the multiple ways in which people can prepare for professional school and their intended profession.
- Each school places special value on the attributes that are most relevant to that school's educational mission



Continuing Education
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER



Continuing Education
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

Part One: Preparing for the Questions

1. What are admissions teams hoping to learn about you?
2. What types of questions are they likely to ask?
3. How to craft excellent answers
4. "Homework" to prepare for your first interview

What are admissions teams hoping to learn about you?

1. Are you academically ready for professional school?
 - (And able to succeed on high-stakes standardized tests?)
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?

... And, if applicable, what challenges have you overcome to get to this point?

- Rural or inner-city upbringing
- Economically disadvantaged
- First-generation college student, etc.



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

Your goal:

- To convey how your interests and motivations align with this school's mission, values, and the opportunities they offer.
 - Explain why this school is the best fit for you, as determined by your learning style, past experiences, and career interests
 - (Note: Liking their geographic location is not enough!)

Gather information from:

- **School website:** carefully read everything they've posted there
- **Virtual Fairs, Admissions Info Sessions:** ask admissions reps what they love about their school, what the school's strengths are.
- **Conversations with current students or alumni**



Part One: Preparing for the Questions

1. What are admissions teams hoping to learn about you?
2. What types of questions are they likely to ask?
3. How to craft excellent answers
4. "Homework" to prepare for your first interview



Part One: Preparing for the Questions

1. What are admissions teams hoping to learn about you?
2. What types of questions are they likely to ask?
3. How to craft excellent answers
4. "Homework" to prepare for your first interview

Crafting Excellent Interview Answers

First, let's talk about your goals:

- To let the interviewer get to know you, what you care about, and what motivates you.
- To connect with the interviewer as a fellow human being. Most interviews will feel conversational (think: having coffee with a respected superior).
- To share genuine reflections on the experiences you've had along your path to a career in a clinical health care profession.

Intentionally NOT Included on the list above:

- Giving the interviewer a sales pitch.
- Reading rehearsed answers to common interview questions.
- Reiterating the exact same information from your application.
 - Although you *should* reinforce the same key themes.



Tell Stories: STAR Method

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

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

- **Situation:** Set the scene (who, what, where, when) – describe the premise for the situation
- **Task:** Describe the task at hand. This could be an **Individual** task or a **group** task
- **Action:** Explain the action that **you** took in this situation
- **Result/Reflection:** State the outcome of your action. (No cliffhangers, please!)
 - Reflect upon the experience:
 - What insight did you gain?
 - What lesson did you learn?
 - What went well? Or what didn't go as expected?
 - How did the experience shape your values, motivations, or personal development?



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.
- Pause for a few seconds before answering to gather your thoughts.
- 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?)
- Each answer should be about 1 to 3 minutes long.
 - Exception: For 15-minute interviews, aim for ~1 min per answer
- Answer the questions completely but concisely and then stop talking. It's okay to have some silence between questions.



A few more tips for answering interview questions

- So important: Be sure to practice OUT LOUD ahead of time to make sure you can articulately describe your experiences. (Use a timer or record yourself.)
- Use professional language, not casual terms you would use with friends.
- Be mindful of filler words, laughter, and jokes – it diminishes your credibility
- Be aware of your eye contact and body language.
- 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?"



Tips for Answering a Few Challenging Interview Questions



Practice

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

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



Practice

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



Practice

*If applicable:
"Tell me about your research"*



Dealing with a couple of common concerns

Academic record: How to address poor grades?

- Acknowledge responsibility. Don't blame anyone else.
- Identify specific strategies you used to improve your academic performance, acknowledging upward trend.
- Maturely explain what you've learned from the experience and how it has prepared you to be successful in professional school.

How to address other sensitive topics (run-ins with law, institutional action (academic infraction/conduct violation), difficult life experiences you have overcome):

- Reflect on what you learned from the experience and how you changed your behavior accordingly.
- If applicable, express remorse in a mature manner.
- Practice talking about this in advance.



Part One: Preparing for the Questions

1. What are admissions teams hoping to learn about you?
2. What types of questions are they likely to ask?
3. How to craft excellent answers
4. "Homework" to prepare for your first interview

How to prepare for your first interview

1. Know your strengths
 - Identify 3-5 personal strengths you hope to convey.
 - Consider completing the Clifton Strengths assessment and 1:1 interpretation
 - Prepare "STAR Method" anecdotes for your top 3-5 personal strengths (templates in handout packet)
2. Cover your bases
 - Have an answer and, where applicable, an anecdote ready in response to each self-assessment prompt in the "Preparing for Interviews" handout.
3. Know your personal mission statement
 - What is your vision for what you hope to contribute to the profession, above and beyond becoming competent? (How do you hope to address existing needs in the profession?)
4. Be ready to talk about social determinants of health and the strengths/weaknesses of the U.S. healthcare system
5. Be ready to articulate why you are interested in this particular school
6. Prepare a short list of written questions you'll want to ask them



Part One: Preparing for the questions Part Two: Logistical considerations and tips for success



Part Two: Logistical considerations and tips for success

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

Overview of the process

1. Receive an interview invitation (schedule ASAP: good dates fill up quickly)
2. If applicable, arrange scheduling, travel, accommodations
 - Plan your travel so that you arrive the day before the interview.
 - Do a dry-run (go to campus, scout out transportation/parking, etc.).
 - **Review your written application materials**, review school website, have your list of questions ready.
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
 - Complete your interviews
4. Wait (perhaps for months) for a response – this is normal.



Who are the interviewers?

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

Their goals:

- To identify and recruit applicants who would be a great fit for the profession and their program
- To build a cohort of students who each will contribute to the educational experience of the whole group

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

- Topic to discuss: What if you end up with a difficult, unreasonable, or distracting interviewer?



What will the interviewers know about you ahead of time?

****You can ask about this when scheduling your interviews.****

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

Two types:

- Group activity
- Each person taking a turn answering same question

Multiple Mini-Interviews (MMI)

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

Expect additional interviews for dual-degree programs and branch campuses



Multiple Mini Interviews (MMIs)

What are they?

- Seven to ten short (about 8 minutes long) interviews, each with a different interviewer.
- You go from station to station. You read the prompt and get a couple of minutes to prepare your response.

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.
- Collaborative group task with fellow interviewees
- Writing an essay or an activity

****More to come at Spring Practice Session #2****



As you enter interview season...

Express professionalism throughout interview season.

- Voicemail message
- Email address
- Social media profiles
- Responding promptly, and professionally, to interview invitations



Part Two: Logistical considerations and tips for success

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

Making a Great Impression On Interview Day

- Be polite to *everyone* you meet!
- Take comfort in knowing that you have already survived a significant cut.
 - Expect to feel nervous on the day of the interview. Try to incorporate exercises that calm your nerves before the interview starts (deep breathing, visualization, go for a walk, etc.).
- Be positive about your past experiences.
- Express enthusiasm for the profession.
- Express enthusiasm for *this particular school*.



Making a Great Impression On Interview Day

- 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.
- Handshake: comfortably firm, not bone crushing or limp
- Use your interviewer's formal title (e.g. Dr. Greene, not his or her first name). Use your interviewer's name during the interview.



Making a Great Impression On Interview Day

Virtual Interviews

- Virtual Interview Tips in handout packet
 - Logistics and Equipment
 - Location considerations
 - What to wear and how to prepare
- Watch the video recording of *Zoom Interview Tips from a Medical School Interviewer* that's posted on our website



What to Wear



What to Bring

- Clothing:
 - Pack your suit in your carry-on luggage
 - Bring extra shirt/tie/stockings
 - 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, mints (no gum), small snack
- Note pad, list of your questions, pen/pencil
- Cell phone (turn it off or silence it)
- **NO** Distracting jewelry
- **NO** Perfume/cologne/strongly scented laundry detergent



Making a great impression: At the end of the interview

- Say "thank you"
- Express enthusiasm for that school one more time, citing one or two specific reasons why it feels like a great fit.
- Within a day or two of the interview, send a thank you email – this is your "Letter of Interest"



Making a great impression: At the end of the interview

Topics to include in your thank you note:

- Indicate the date of the interview.
- Thank them for considering your application and for offering you the opportunity to interview at their school
- If you can include any specific noteworthy details from your interview conversations, that will help the interviewers remember their conversation with 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. Be specific!
 - Potential topics include:
 - How their approach to the curriculum is a great fit for your preferred learning style
 - Special programs or opportunities available at that school that are a wonderful match your professional interests
 - Ways in which you appreciated the students and faculty you met at the school



Continuing Education
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

Next Steps

1. Complete the "homework" tasks covered in Part 1
2. Review the resources that are available on the CE Pre-Health Advising website
 - DO Applicants: Read the "Interview tips for applicants to osteopathic medical schools"
 - List of suggested questions to ask your interviewers, from Dr. Kenneth Iserson's Get Into Medical School: A Guide for the Perplexed, 2nd Ed.
3. Read *The Premed Playbook: Guide to the Medical School Interview* by Ryan Gray
 - Link to a pdf version is available on our website
4. Attend Spring Practice Session #1, #2, and #3
5. Complete 1 to 2 practice interviews



Continuing Education
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER