

Interviewing for Medical School



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The interview is a very important step in the selection process. It allows the school to learn more about you through elaboration of your application, and it allows you to learn more about the school. The latter is very important since your next four years may be spent there.

Interviews are offered on a rolling basis from August to December annually. Apply early – 60% of all interviews come from applications received between May 1 and June 1 annually! Offers are sent out beginning in late January and, for the most part, the incoming class is completed by April. The rules with respect to accepting more than one offer and the time frame for acceptance vary from year to year and are communicated in the application materials.

If a medical school offers an interview, the date is usually non-negotiable. Schools have thousands of interviews to conduct, so the logistics of scheduling are complicated. To prepare for your interview, read about the school (they may ask why you applied there), think about your qualifications (self-evaluation, work experience), and think about some of the questions they may ask. **You should reread your application and know it completely.** Be flexible in your answers and, most of all, be yourself. If you feel a question is unfair, you have a right to say so; however, evaluate the situation and use careful judgment when you respond. Unfair questions are often asked to elicit a spontaneous answer. The interviewer is probably more interested in seeing how you think “on your feet” than in *what* you say.

Some schools hold regional interviews. If possible, though, interview on site so that you have a better idea what each school is like. Once you have scheduled your interview, you may be able to arrange early interviews with other schools in the area at the same time. Try to arrange a student tour and/or stay with medical students while on the interviews. Students often provide the best information regarding unique features and programs of their school and can tell you what it's like living in the area.

At most schools you will have two one-on-one interviews of varying lengths. Frequently one interview is with a student. A few schools have just one interview and, more rarely, group interviews. Some interviews may be “blind,” and the interviewer will only know your name. More commonly, interviewers have reviewed your complete file prior to meeting with you. Occasionally interviewers only have access to part of your file (e.g. the personal statement). You will also likely have a campus tour and lunch, often with medical students. Check with the admission office before your interview to learn what format to expect. Also, be assured that every person with whom you come in contact will be evaluating you in some way. Be friendly and professional at all times.

Appearance

First impressions are very important. Your personal appearance is the outward expression of your manners and

personality. Wear clothes that are in good taste. Men and women should wear conservative business suits (matching jacket and pants/skirt). Appearance also includes cleanliness, composure, non-verbal and other intangible things that convey confidence – the very traits you like to find in other people. Take a shower, brush your teeth, put on deodorant, and don't wear perfume or cologne. Cover any tattoos and remove piercings (other than one set of earrings for women). For more information, see our Business Attire Resource Guide.

Interview Manners

Above all, be on time. Don't be a “no-show” – it reflects very poorly on you and SU if you do not meet your interview commitment. If you change your mind about an interview, let the school know as soon as possible so that their interviewers are not inconvenienced and other students can be scheduled in your time slot.

Pronounce the interviewer's name correctly. Ask to have it repeated if you are not certain. Take your cues from the interviewer. Greet him/her in a friendly but formal manner with a firm handshake. Don't slouch, tap your feet, or nervously play with pencils or other objects. Maintain eye contact but don't stare. If looking directly at the interviewer's eyes makes you uncomfortable, look at the area between his/her eyebrows.

If a question or comment is unclear, ask to have it repeated or clarified. If a question is particularly difficult, ask for some time (not too long) to think over your response. Demonstrate that you have good listening skills. Listen to the question/comment and do not ramble; be specific. If you cannot answer a question, it is better to say “I don't know” than to make up something. The interviewer will usually indicate when s/he will want to close the interview – do not attempt to extend it. S/he will probably ask if you have any more questions. Intelligent questions about the school and its environs are in order but do not make up questions for the sake of asking.

Tips for Successful Interviewing

Do

- Review your entire application (including secondary).
- Act natural.
- Be prompt, neat, and courteous.
- Express yourself clearly and make yourself understood.
- Give direct answers to questions.
- Discuss yourself in a positive manner (turn negatives into positives).
- Allow the interviewer to express him/herself.
- Show interest in the school.
- Be forthcoming. (The interviewer should not have to ask persistently to obtain information from you.)

- Tell the interviewer if you have relatives or friends in the area. The presence of an “outside support group” may be a helpful factor.
- Be prepared to address any discrepancies in your school record (e.g. low grades, low MCAT, leaves of absence).
- Be prepared to answer specific questions about any research projects in which you participated.

Don't

- Take notes.
- Criticize yourself.
- Be late for the interview without a good reason.
- Freeze or become tense.
- Oversell or undersell yourself.
- Make elaborate promises.
- Be overbearing.
- Be passive or lack enthusiasm.
- Be cynical.

Sample Interview Questions

The following list consists of questions that may be asked in an interview. It is not necessary to prepare an answer for each question. However, you should formulate well-organized and logical responses for related questions. Select those questions that can help you learn more about yourself and practice answering them with friends. If necessary, use a tape recorder and speak in front of a mirror. Ideally, schedule one or more practice interviews with Career Services, who will tailor the interviews toward med school. Preparation and rehearsal will enhance your relaxation and, thereby, your self-confidence.

1. Why do you want to be a doctor?
2. What are your specific goals in medicine?
3. What motivated you to pursue your career goal?
4. What do you see yourself doing eight years from now, and how are you preparing yourself for it?
5. Which is more important to you, prestige or the type of job you do?
6. How would you describe yourself?
7. How do you think a friend or professor would describe you?
8. What is your greatest strength and weakness?
9. What qualifications do you have that make you think you will be successful in medicine?
10. In what way do you think you can make a contribution to medicine?
11. If you were me, what would you look for in an applicant?
12. What aspects of your life's experiences do you think make you a good candidate for medicine?
13. What are the best and worst things that have ever happened to you?
14. What value can you be to our school?
15. Why do you consider yourself disadvantaged?
16. What is your relationship with your family?
17. Why should I select you over other equally qualified applicants?
18. What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?
19. Why did you select your college or university?
20. What was your favorite college subject? Tell me about your favorite non-science course.
21. Do you think your grades are a good indication of your academic achievement?
22. What was your least favorite subject in college?

23. What have you learned from participating in extracurricular activities?
24. In what part time or summertime jobs have you been most interested?
25. What book have you read in the last month?
26. What do you do in your spare time?
27. Why did you apply to this particular medical school?
28. What are your feelings on physicians being compensated through salaries as opposed to fee for service?
29. What comes first, your family or your commitment to your patient?
30. If there were an accident on the freeway would you stop and help the victims knowing about the present malpractice climate?
31. What would you do to solve the current maldistribution of doctors in the US?
32. What do you think is the most pressing issue in the medical world today?
33. Have you followed any medical-themed story in the media that you've found particularly interesting?
34. Should doctors be required to serve some time in public service?
35. What will you do if you're not accepted to medical school this year?

Close of Interview

Usually at the close of an interview, you will have the opportunity to ask questions. Formulate a few questions in preparation for this opportunity. Don't ask questions that can be easily answered by catalogs, but it is appropriate to ask for clarification or elaboration of information contained in catalogs. For example:

- What do you consider to be the salient feature of your school and its curriculum?
- How will my application be processed after this interview?

Inappropriate Questions

If you are asked a particularly personal or intrusive question, you should bring those questions to the attention of the admission dean. Examples could include:

- Tell me what you think about abortion.
- Are you planning on having any children while you're in medical school?
- Are you gay?
- You're fairly overweight. How do you plan on being a healthy role model for your patients?

Follow-Up

Every time you interview for any kind of opportunity, you should follow up within 24 hours with thank you notes. In particular, you should:

- Mail a handwritten “thank you” note to the Dean of Admissions thanking him/her for the opportunity to interview.
- Mail a handwritten “thank you” to your interviewers with “a memory tag.”
- Communicate with the Admission Office regarding timeline issues (e.g., for 2014, when is the first wave accepted?) but not for specifics about your application.