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Introduction

An interview is your best opportunity to demonstrate that you are an excellent candidate with the skills for a successful career in your chosen field, and to explain why you want to attend that university in particular. Throughout your studies, you have spent countless hours working to ensure that you have an academic portfolio worthy of admission to a professional program. Preparing for an interview is equally important, to ensure your secure a spot at the school of your choice.

This guide aims to provide you with suggestions, tips and techniques to maximize your chances of acing your interview. Please note that because the interview process differs from one institution to another, this information is meant as a general guideline. Make sure to visit the website of each institution you are interested in for all the necessary information on how you should prepare.
Before the interview

Step 1 – Research

Find information on the program that interests you

It is very important to gather information on the school you are interviewing for. The selection committee will be interested to see if you are the type of person who will fit well with their vision.

Tips:

- Do research on the school’s website to ensure that you understand its methods of teaching and to be aware of characteristics or features specific to the school.
- Contact current students at the school to get helpful tips or to hear about their experience with the admission process.

Find out about the school’s interview style

Universities use different interview styles to assess your skills and to see if you would be a good match. The most popular styles are panel and multiple mini interviews (MMI).

Panel

A panel interview is often described as two or more interviewers who alternate their questions. In many ways, a panel resembles the traditional interview process. The questions asked will usually be general, behavioural, situational (critical thinking, communication skills, societal issues) and ethical questions.

Sample interview questions for medical panels:

- Why have you chosen medicine as a career path?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of Canada’s health care system? Do you have any suggestions for improvement?
- How would you treat a patient who wants to die?

Sample interview questions for graduate programs:

- How would your professors describe you?
- Tell us about your research.
- What do you believe your greatest challenge will be if you are accepted into this program?

Multiple mini interviews (MMI)

MMIs usually take place at a variety of stations, the interviewee travelling from one station to the next. At each station, interviewees have two minutes to read the question and then enter the room. They then have five to eight minutes (depending on the university) to answer the question to a panel of interviewers. The process repeats itself at the next station. The types of questions include general, behavioural, situational (critical thinking, communication skills, societal health issues in Canada) and ethical questions, and role plays (which may sometimes involve the use of an actor you must interact with). Sometimes questions might not seem directly relevant to the field of study but are asked in order to assess specific skills.
Sample interview questions:

**General**
- The interviewer says he or she has a 16-year-old daughter who is adamant about getting a tattoo next week. The interviewer is against this, which is causing much friction in his or her household. What advice would you give?
- You are the shift supervisor at a MacDonald’s. The owner of the franchise has called you over. He is very upset, as he has received three complaints in the last 30 minutes about the meat in the hamburgers being poorly cooked. There are two people (one male, one female, both 15 years old) who have been cooking the meat for the hamburgers for the past two hours. The culprit is the owner’s daughter. How would you handle this situation?
- A friend of yours has hit her three-year-old after the child has had a temper tantrum. She becomes very emotionally distraught after doing so and swears it has never happened before. How do you respond to the situation?

**Pharmacy**
- If you worked for a pharmaceutical company, and found out that a certain drug could possibly — only possibly — harm people, would you breach confidentiality and risk your job?

**Medicine**
- A surgeon sees a patient who had a heart problem due to heavy drug abuse. He treats her and she comes back one week later with the same problem. He suspects she is abusing drugs again. Halfway through the treatment, she says she has to leave because of personal problems. The surgeon says, “If she comes back, I will not treat her.” What issues do you see with this situation?

**Veterinary medicine**
- You have given the wrong medication to a cow because you were not paying attention. You know that this mistake will have consequences. What do you do? Nobody knows about the error but you. Does this change your reaction?

**Occupational therapy, audiology, physiology, speech-language pathology**
* NOTE: At the University of Ottawa, the MMI questions used for these programs are general ones. Please refer to the general question section for sample questions for these programs.

- See more sample MMI questions.

**Modified Personal Interview (MPI)**

Created and used by the University of Toronto’s medical school, the MPI consists of a series of four brief (10 to 12 min) individual interviews, each of which involves a one-on-one interaction with a single interviewer (e.g., a physician, health professional or senior medical student). The MPI promotes the flow of natural conversation. While the interviewer does have a list of prompting questions relevant to the subject of his or her station, he or she is able to deviate from the listed questions, making it a semi-structured, conversational interview.

The individual MPI stations are tailored to showcase aspects of the candidates. Some assess applicants’ ability to evaluate an ethical dilemma, some are aimed at getting to know applicants and their achievements and some require applicants to engage in self-reflection about past experiences. (These past experiences will often pertain to a key attribute sought in applicants, such as leadership or teamwork.)

Sample interview questions:
• Burnout is a very real possibility in the medical field. What strategies do you use to deal with your stress effectively and prevent this from happening?
• If you had to decide which patient would be the first to receive a life-sustaining organ transplant, who would you chose:
  o A homeless 25-year-old man with substance abuse problems
  o A 40-year-old otherwise healthy man with a wife and two children
• Probe:
  o Would it make a difference if they were admitted at different times? The same time?

**Open and closed interviews**

This refers to whether the interviewers have access to your application file or not. If it is a closed interview, it is crucial to make sure not to leave out any details while answering a question, to ensure that the interviewers are sufficiently familiar with your background to understand your answer.

**Sample interview questions for:**

**Open:**

• Your résumé indicates that you have worked as a (INSERT JOB TITLE HERE) for (INSERT COMPANY\ORGANIZATION NAME HERE). How do you feel that job experience has prepared you to become a physician?

**Closed:**

• Tell us about any relevant work experience that has prepared you to become a physician.

**Global awareness**

Find out what’s going on in the world today by staying on top of current events. Here is a list of a few important subjects you should form an opinion on before any type of health care-related interview:

**Ethical dilemmas:**

• Abortion
• Euthanasia / end-of-life care
• Dual relationships
• Conflicts of interest
• Informed consent

• Substitute decision-making
• Embryonic stem cell research
• Patient autonomy
• Patient confidentiality
• Vaccines
• Marijuana

**Tips:**

• As a potential future professional, you should have a solid understanding of the trends in your field or industry (e.g., medical students should know about the different health care systems).
• Check the available resources to understand the current topics of debate and subjects of interest. Newspapers, the radio, the Internet and TV news can be valuable resources for this type of information. You must be able to effectively convey your point of view on events going on in the world today.
• Pay particular attention to events going on in your community and to subjects that you are passionate about outside of the classroom.
Many schools like to ask candidates questions on common ethical dilemmas. Make sure to familiarize yourself with these dilemmas and the laws pertaining to them.

- Example for medical school: What would you do if your patient asks you to prescribe drugs under someone else’s name (family member) since they don’t have insurance?

**Step 2 – Practice and repeat**

Knowing yourself is essential to being successful in the interview process. Your resumé/med sketch can be very useful in helping you prepare for your interview, as it is essentially a summary of your professional and personal experience. It is important to be able to clearly communicate your experience, skills and abilities to the members of the selection committee and explain how they have prepared you to become a contributing member in your field of study.

**Tips, tricks and resources**

- Prepare a list of 10 skills that are related to your ability to succeed in your chosen field (such as communication, problem-solving, etc.) Then find examples of them from your personal, professional and academic experience so that you are ready to present them during your interview.
- Develop your answers to common interview questions in point form. This will allow you to find the appropriate vocabulary to describe your skills, while helping you practice your answers without memorizing them.
- Review each of the sections of your resumé to be able to talk about them:
  - Accomplishments and distinctions
  - Extracurricular activities
  - Volunteer work
  - Paid work experience
  - Academics
  - Research
- Schedule a mock interview at the Career Development Centre to practice your interview skills and receive valuable constructive feedback to improve your performance.

*NOTE: The Career Development Centre will be organizing a mock-MMI day event in late January/early February. For more information, contact us at 613-562-5806 or cdc@uottawa.ca in early January.*

**The day of the interview**

Here are a few tips for a successful interview:

- Arrive 10 to 15 minutes early.
- Dress appropriately and professionally.
- Greet your interviewers by making eye contact, and offering a smile and a firm handshake.
- Maintain eye contact and good posture throughout the interview, because 55% of the communication process is non-verbal. It involves body language such as facial expressions, gestures, posture, etc.
• Answer questions clearly and concisely. Stay focused and do not deviate from the topic.
• Follow the lead of the interviewer and ask questions for clarification whenever necessary.
• Always include a concrete example in your answer that supports the skills or experience that you are highlighting.
• Thank the interviewers for their time, shake hands and say goodbye.
• Before answering, try to determine why you are being asked this question. What do you think the interviewer is trying to evaluate?
• When entering the interview room, pause to introduce yourself (unless instructed otherwise), smile, and consider your body language.
• Summarize or rephrase a question at the beginning of the answer if you do not properly understand it. Repeating the question out loud may allow you to revise it and understand it better.
• Structure your response so that the interviewer has an idea of what you will be discussing.
• Pace yourself.

Frequently asked questions

❖ For MMI’s, panels and general interviews

1. Q: Are there “right answers”?
   A: No. The issues are all complex. You should be able to choose a side, and adequately defend your point of view. If a question deals with a controversial area or some topic of public debate, it is equally possible to do well taking one position as it is taking the opposite view. Other than you expressing attitudes or beliefs that are inconsistent with the practice of modern medicine, interviewers are much more concerned with how you think than what you think.

2. Q: How early should I arrive?
   A: As a general rule, it is best to arrive to the interview 10 to 15 minutes prior to the start time, unless indicated otherwise. You should also visit the location the interview will be taking place the day before in order to be familiar with the travel time, parking arrangements and exact location. This will ensure you find the location the day of the interview and are not late. Indeed, by arriving to an interview early, you are not only demonstrating that you are punctual but also that you are very interested in the medical program in question.

3. Q: What should I wear?
   A: The best thing to remember is to be professional. Here are a few key points to remember:

   **Women**
   - Dark suit or business dress with traditional (not coloured) hosiery.
   - Accessories such as makeup and jewelry should be kept to a minimum.
   - Dress shoes should be worn (low-heeled pumps are recommended for women).
   - Hair should be clean, neat and styled. Also, avoid unnatural hair

   **Men**
   - Two-piece matched suit (navy and dark grey are safe and conservative colors). The suit should be in a solid or very subtle wave pattern or plaid.
   - Leather, lace-up or slip-on business shoes, preferably black. The belt should match the shoes.
   - Facial hair, if present, should be well-groomed
   - Avoid wearing any cologne or
4. **Q: What should I bring?**  
   **A:** It is always good to bring the information provided by the school concerning the interview and identification, if required. In addition, although it might not always be necessary, it is always best to bring your resumé, your portfolio and a pad and paper to take notes. You may also want to bring some water, seeing as it might be hard to excuse yourself for a water break during the interview.

5. **Q: Who should I make eye contact with if there is more than one person in the room?**  
   **A:** Don’t let the number of people on the panel intimidate you. On the contrary, it is important to make eye contact with everyone. Also, remember that some interviewers will not smile. You should be prepared for that and make sure not to react inappropriately.

6. **Q: The interview is tomorrow and I’m really stressed. What should I do?**  
   **A:** It is normal to be stressed the night before the interview. This is why it is important to take this opportunity to review examples you plan on discussing, re-read practice questions and review relevant issues in the news, as well as the school’s mission statement. To relax, you might also consider activities such as exercise, yoga and taking a bath. Finally, go to bed early in order to be properly rested.

For more information, see the Career Development Centre job interview tips.

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