

Interviewing for Residency

Overall interview tips:

- Always be professional when interacting with residency programs
- Know number of interviews desired/needed
- Plan interview schedule accordingly
- Allow time for travel
- Plan to attend social events
- Think about what impression you want to convey and make sure to convey it. A lot of interviews are very loosely structured so you may need to take initiative in bringing this forward yourself.
- Be personable, energetic, communicative and courteous to EVERYONE. Maintain eye contact.

Behavioral-type interview questions to prepare for:

The behavioral interview was developed for business but is now used with increasing frequency in residency interviews. It takes the core list of competencies that are required to be a good resident and physician and then develops a series of questions that will allow the interviewer to explore your past performance in these areas.

The answer format for behavioral interviews is:

1. Situation: Describe the situation in detail
2. Action: What action did you take?
3. Result: What was the result?

Sample Behavioral Interview Questions:

- Tell me about a time you worked effectively under pressure.
- Tell me about a stressful situation you experienced in medical school and how you handled it.
- Tell me about a time you made a mistake and had to tell a resident or attending.
- Tell me how you would you deal with a resident who wasn't doing his share of the work.
- Tell me about a time that you had a conflict with a team member and how you handled it.
- Tell me about a time when you were disappointed in your performance.
- Tell me about a time you had to build a relationship with someone you didn't like.
- Tell me about a difficult decision you've made in the last year.
- Tell me about a time you when you tried to accomplish something and failed.

- Tell me about a time your performance was criticized.
- Tell me about what irritates you about other people and how you deal with it.
- Tell me about a patient you had trouble dealing with.
- Tell me about a time when you were upset with the behavior of a team member or faculty and how you dealt with it.

More questions to prepare for:

The Why questions:

- Why did you become a doctor?
- Why are you interested in this specialty?
- Why are you interested in our program? Why did you apply to our program?
- Why should we choose you? (How do you see yourself contributing to our program?)

Questions about your specialty.

- What do you see as the positive aspects of this specialty?
- What do you see as the negative aspects of this specialty?
- What problems do you think this specialty may face in the future?

Tell me about your plans.

- Do you want to do research?
- Are you interested in academic medicine?
- Where do you see yourself practicing?
- Where do you see yourself in five years? In ten years?
- What are your goals?
- Do you plan on pursuing a fellowship?

Tell me about yourself.

- Tell me about yourself.
- What do you see as your strengths?
- What do you see as your weaknesses?
- Tell me about a case that you found interesting and what you learned from it.
- Tell me about a case where you made a mistake.
- What are you looking for in a program?
- What do you do in your free time?
- What was the last book you read?
- What accomplishment are you most proud of?
- How do you deal with conflict?
- Tell me about this problem in your academic record (e.g. failed Step I, failed class, expansion)
- Items on your CV: your research, your extracurricular activities, your decision to expand.

- You have spent your entire life on the west coast and your family is on the west coast.....

The unexpected questions

- What is the last book you read?
- If you weren't a doctor, what would you have been?
- Etc. Use your imagination! One student was asked to "draw a cat!"

Prepare two cases to discuss

- Talk about one that you found interesting, one in which something went wrong. Be able to elucidate what you learned from these experiences. Do not use the one you wrote about in your personal statement.
- What type of patients are difficult and why?
- Tell me about an interesting patient.

Challenging Questions

What are your weaknesses?

Use an example that you can turn into a positive trait that isn't a real weakness.

- "I am very detailed-oriented. For example, my history and physicals notes are quite comprehensive. I am already figuring out how to streamline them."
- "I can be soft-spoken and I like to think through what I say before I offer an opinion. Some people may wish I were more outspoken, but I think that my style can help patients feel at ease. I also hope that this trait keeps me from jumping too quickly to a diagnosis when I have a patient with a complex presentation of symptoms."
- "Sometimes I find it difficult to delegate work to others, for example at patient signout. I would much rather finish things up myself than let someone else do it."

Tell me about your failing grade in this course, on Step I?

- "I learned a lot from this experience. When I began medical school, I quickly became involved in the pediatric interest group as well as one that looked at providing care to the urban underserved. I also helped organize student panels on health care reform. I have a lot of interests so it was difficult at first for me to realize that I couldn't pursue them all."
- "There was one particular test format that an older professor used that I had difficulty with. I was retested using an oral format and it reinforced my sense that the failure didn't represent a lack of understanding of the material itself. I also feel that it gave me

an opportunity to overcome the challenge of not getting something right the first time and having the determination to improve.”

Illegal questions

Interviewers’ questions about marital status and plans for a family are less frequent now than they used to be. Still the law prohibits discrimination based on gender (including pregnancy and childbirth), race, religion, national origins, age and disability. If you are asked questions about any of these issues, you are not required to answer them. If a program is flagrantly pursuing this information, you can contact the Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

- If you do choose to respond, you can deflect. Here are a few ways to do that.
- “I am glad that you brought that up. I was interested in learning what kinds of provisions are in place if a resident gets ill or wants to take a maternity or paternity leave?”
- “My career is the priority in my life right now.”
- “My focus is on my residency education. I have also been someone who has been able to juggle multiple responsibilities at once.”

Items to ask about during your interview:

Familiarize yourself with each program’s website and don’t include questions that are answered on it. It’s always good to start with, “I found your website very informative. Your description of “x” was particularly helpful. I wanted to get your perspective on a few additional things.

- What do you think are your program’s greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- What are your plans for the program’s future?
- What proportion of time is spent in general (surgery, medicine, peds, etc) vs subspecialty rotations.
- Are there opportunities to participate in off site and abroad rotations?
- How much elective time is there throughout the residency training and when can it be scheduled? (ie. PGY-2 vs PGY-3)?
- Does the residency encourage its residents to do research? If so, is there elective time to do it?
- Are there opportunities for teaching? Can you tell me about them?
- Are residents permitted or encouraged to attend regional or national medical conferences? Are there funds available for this?
- Is a thesis or publication required during training?
- Where are the graduates of the program practicing right now?
- How frequently do your graduates pursue careers in academia?

- What percent of graduates enter fellowships? What fellowships did last year's class enter?
- What are the patient mix and the community demographics in the hospital? Clinic?
- What kind of community outreach projects might we be involved in?
- What were the results of the last accreditation visit?
- How are residents evaluated? How are they given feedback?
- Do you anticipate any changes in the next three years?
- Does the residency offer any formal teaching or exposure to healthcare policy and management?
- Is there a formal seminar series? Can you tell me about your seminar and/or lecture series?
- How many graduates do fellowships?
- How many graduates pass Boards?
- Where do graduates practice?
- What are the types of practices of graduates?
- Curriculum specific questions
- Stability of program director, faculty, residents and staff
- Other – research, teaching, public health

After the Interview

- Send thank you cards/emails to program director and interviewer(s) you connected with
- Complete the program evaluation forms
- Begin to prepare rank list
- Follow up with programs in January with specific questions Complete rank list