

Effective Communication Skills and the Medical School Interview

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1. Start Early:

Many health professional advisors recommend that you enhance your interviewing skills by practicing early—as early as your first year in college. Your goals are to develop an understanding of the importance, cost and function of the interview in the medical school admissions process and to strengthen your ability to enter the medical school interviews as a confident and personally effective candidate.

There are several ways to prepare for your interview. First, ensure that you understand your reasons for applying to particular medical schools. Early research will allow you to gain insight on whether or not your choices are appropriate. Second, find a “coach.” Look for someone who can provide feedback on aspects of your personal effectiveness.

2. Prepare a Pre- Interview Day Checklist:

This may include:

- Develop a chart to track status at each school
- As soon as interview is scheduled, make arrangements for time away with professors, roommates, volunteer coordinators
- Make needed travel arrangements
- Overnight Stay Arrangements
- Prepare Interview Wardrobe; find out if iron is available at overnight stay
- One week before interview give special attention to diet, exercise, rest
- Purchase easy to eat snack for interview day
- Choose book to read (also a conversation starter)
- Prepare outlines of themes to respond to (general questions)
- Prepare three copies of application/resume for interview day
- Speak with interview “coach” and advisor
- Be determined to be confident

3. Prepare an Interview Day Checklist:

Things to keep in mind:

- Plan an extra hour for getting ready
- Have usual breakfast
- Read newspaper, listen to news
- Pack snacks, book, copies, directions, contact numbers
- Arrange for cash, including change
- Arrive 15 minutes early
- Check appearance in restroom before entering admissions office
- Do relaxation exercises
- Greet everyone in pleasant, enthusiastic manner
- Participate fully
- Address people by name, using titles when appropriate
- Focus on the needs of others
- Thank everyone
- Be centered and enjoy

4. The Interview: Aspects of Personal Effectiveness:

When interview time arrives, focus on the needs and comforts of others. Points to keep in mind (and ask “coach” about) include:

- Appropriate Eye Contact
- Prompt Arrival
- Appropriate Handshake (let interviewer extend handshake first; don’t be “limp”)
- Appropriate Greeting
- Appropriately Groomed
- Appropriate Control of Moods and Emotions
- Appropriate Use of Humor and Smiles
- Appropriately Demonstrates an Interest in Others
- Appropriately Inspires Confidence and Trust
- Adequate Communication Skills

Some advisors recommend “mirroring”—attuning to the body language of your interviewer/s.

5. Key Questions:

Interviewers may question you on anything: your daily reading, current ethical issues or favorite people. Below are a few “standards”:

- Why do you feel you will be successful in medical school?
- What is your greatest strength and weakness and how will they affect your performance as a physician?
- Tell me about a time when you were faced with helping someone change their views or behavior.
- What do you consider your most significant accomplishments and why?
- Under what conditions do you learn best?
- Why is this school the right match?
- Why do you want to be a physician?

Questions referring to your plans to raise a family, sexual orientation and economic background are not legal. If such questions arise, don’t try to educate your interviewers, but let the admissions office know that these are not acceptable questions.

6. Prepare a Post-Interview Day Checklist:

This will help you to decide on the best choice of school for you:

- Within two hours of your interview, make a journal entry of all impressions, questions answered and questions remaining to be answered
- Update application tracking chart
- Debrief with “coach” and advisor: what was learned from this interview that will allow for greater success in the next one?
- If welcomed (not all schools want this), send “thank you” notes
- Treat yourself!

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