

# Preparing for your Interview

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Preparing your Responses for Your Interview

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## Answering the First Question

The first question of an interview sets the tone for the rest of the interview. You want your answer to appear prepared but not rehearsed. Interviewers often begin with a general, open-ended question such as "Tell me about yourself?" A candidate can begin with personal information about him/herself, lead into academics, and wrap up with professional goals and history. (*From Dr. Provost – Always end with why you want to be a physician. This is the hardest and most important part of your statement. It MUST be patient centered, show empathy and your passion for what you want to do. How do you do this? Your experience and personality must be the judge.*) ... This easy method helps structure responses while focusing on all the major areas that these types of opening questions are aimed at. This style is short and to the point, and it allows the interviewer to ask some follow up questions.

## Managing Your Responses

The length of an answer to a question should be decided by factoring how much is needed to answer the question and how much the interviewer appears to want to hear. The interviewer may ask a simple "yes" or "no" question and hope that the applicant responds with a more complete answer. The interviewer will often give cues to how long he/she expects the answer to be. If the interviewer nods his/her head in interest or asks for more information, that is a cue that he/she wants to hear more. If the interviewer interrupts with another question or appears to want to say something, he/she has probably heard enough information. Facial expressions can also indicate how much of an answer is warranted.

After the question has been asked, the candidate should briefly reflect before responding. In general, a response can be structured by beginning with an introduction that tells the purpose, gives prethoughts, and creates an overall picture. The introduction is then followed by the body of the response. In the body, the candidate should remember to keep the points areas or categories that he/she wishes to convey (three points are easy for people to remember). After the body, the candidate should finish his/her response with a strong conclusion that tells what he/she wants the interviewer to know and that ties up the answer neatly.

A candidate's answers should reflect who he/she is and not what the candidate believes the interviewer wants to hear. The candidate should speak about things that he/she knows or feels passionately about and allow some enthusiasm to show in his/her voice and accompanying facial expressions and gestures. Facial expressions add emphasis to the words spoken, set the tone of the interview, and the candidate's natural self. Gestures illustrate points, involve the interviewer, are easy to follow, and add impact to the candidate's responses. The candidate should remember that his/her eyes are also crucial in establishing rapport with the interviewer. Holding the interviewer's gaze for 3-5 seconds or until a thought or sentence is complete is needed for successful eye contact. This will connect the candidate with the interviewer and will also communicate interest and confidence to the interviewer.

A candidate should manage his/her speaking voice and speech habits during an interview. He/she should regulate voice volume using the diaphragm. Lowering the voice projects authority and is important because a person's voice often rises in pitch when excited or nervous. Important points should be emphasized with voice inflection. Candidates should try not to use padding. Padding is the use of non-words, non-working words, and connectors in an answer...

## Give a Strong Conclusion

Before arriving at the interview, the candidate should have his/her closing planned and memorized. This is a brief, two- to three-sentence summary that captures the key characteristics, values, and strengths that the candidate would bring to the program if accepted. (*Dr Provost note – You should also think beyond med school and consider the same characteristics that you would bring to your patients as a physician.*) The interviewer will ask the candidate either for a closing or if she or she has anything else to say at the end of the interview. This is the time to give a strong closing statement. Interviewers won't remember everything a candidate says, but they will remember how they felt when the student spoke. That is why a strong closing is

recommended that includes a plan, a summary of points, a tie-in with the entire interview, and a solid delivery. With a strong closing statement, the candidate finishes by leaving the interviewer with a solid idea of who he or she is. (*Note from Dr. Provost – Don't forget to think of a few questions for them. Some interviewers see no questions as a lack of interest or motivation.*)

### **Moving from the Basic to the Advanced**

Candidates must also be prepared for both the basic and advanced questions. Classic basic are straightforward and include:

- Where do you see yourself in 10 years?
- Tell me about your strengths and weaknesses?
- What are your interests outside of work or school.

Advanced questions illustrate to the interviewer how the candidate can think on their feet. They also show if the candidate can answer all parts of the question without prompting and organize his/her answer in a clear way. These questions may be structured as any of the types of questions mentioned in the previous section. Examples of advanced questions include:

- If you could invite three people real or fictional to dinner who would they be? Why?
- If you could not enter the field of medicine, what would be your second career choice? Why?
- Describe a difficult event in your life and how you have dealt with it.

Advanced questions tell the interviewer how a candidate can answer a difficult or unusual question. These are often asked, not for the information, per se, but for how the interviewee responds to such a question. It is important to show how the question reflects upon the candidate's life up until that point in his/her development.

### **Conclusion**

Well thought out, prepared and skillfully delivered answers to interview questions greatly increase your chances of acceptance. Stumbling, stammering and answering the questions in an awkward fashion will not help you; being prepared and composed will help. Before you interview, you need to plan for possible questions and your responses. If you wait and appear less than composed and confident, the spot may go to another who has equal qualifications but gave better responses. The key to remember is that your responses in the interview must reflect on yourself, your story/journey, and ultimately who you are and where you want to go. No you know, "Whatcha gonna do when they come for you!"

**Note from Provost – PRACTICE is the only way to do this. Practice out loud and completely for all of the possible questions. Practice to your friends and family. Practice with a professional if possible. The biggest failure, I have seen in the past ten years is students who say they know what they want to say, but don't practice and massage their responses well in advance.**