



# The Interview

## at Health Professional Schools

Congratulations! Gaining an interview is a difficult hurdle to overcome in the admissions process. It means that a school is confident that you could succeed in their program, and now they want to better understand who you are, and whether you're a "fit" for their entering class. They are looking for you to personalize your paper application, to consider your compassion, empathy, self-awareness, maturity, and composure under stress. Above all, they look for an indication of how you will interact with patients. At least one admissions director we know asks herself if she can imagine referring a family member to you for help in the future; if the answer is no, based on any lack of personal qualities, then you're not faring well in her eyes. With sufficient preparation, practice, and confidence in your candidacy, though, you can position yourself for success.

### Preparing for Interviews

1. **Be professional.** Make sure that your answering machine message and email address sound professional. Set strict privacy settings on your facebook profile. These little things are the first impression, and can make a difference.
2. **Get scheduled, and get the details.**
  - a) Aim for the earliest possible date. If the dates that you're offered seem late, you can volunteer to come earlier if a slot opens up (if this is logistically possible for you), and ask how to find out whether an earlier date may become available. If you have another interview scheduled at a neighboring institution, ask if there are dates available that will allow you to combine travel plans/visits.
  - b) When you schedule interviews, ask for the format of the visit (how many interviews, with whom, group or individual interviews, length of the day, what's included, etc.)
  - c) Ask if you can tour the medical school and teaching hospitals, sit in on classes, and visit with a Financial Aid counselor, if these are options and are not included in the interview itinerary and are important to you.
  - d) Find out about lodgings – staying with medical students is generally a good option, since it's cheap/free and gives you a chance to get another perspective on the school. However, if you'll feel more comfortable staying alone, being sure you'll have a soft bed and a quiet space, it's fine to stay in a nearby hotel or elsewhere.
3. **Get a suit.** Medical school interviews are not the place to express your individuality when it comes to dress – you do not want to dress “memorably.” Choose a neutral suit and sensible shoes (you will be walking on your interview). For more tips, see [Career Services' guidelines](#) and HPA Pinterest Boards for [men's](#) and [women's](#) interview attire examples.
4. **Get informed.** A common pitfall for candidates is lack of knowledge and preparation.
  - a) **Know yourself.**
    - i. Review your application – anything that you included in your primary or secondary is fair game for questions.
    - ii. Know what you can do (your strengths, weaknesses, abilities, skills, particularly in reference to the personal competencies, below)
    - iii. Know (broadly) what you want to do (your interests and values)

- iv. Know where you want to go in terms of general professional goals (and how your prior work/education have prepared you)
- b) **You may be assessed on any or all of the following.** Some are obviously more within your control than others. Consider any that you might need to (and are able to) work on, and plan accordingly:
- i. *Physical bearing*: appearance, neatness, and confidence.
  - ii. *Communication skills*: ability to express ideas and opinions, verbal facility.
  - iii. *Personal characteristics*: friendliness and ability to relate.
  - iv. *Motivation*: derivation and strength of desire for medical career.
  - v. *Knowledge*: of self, medical profession, and issues in the field.
  - vi. *Maturity*: ability to handle responsibility, commitment, etc.
  - vii. *Interests*: research, service, hobbies, recreational activities.
  - viii. *Concern index*: compassion, humanism, and empathy.
  - ix. *Emotional stability*: ability to relax, support system.
  - x. *Gut reaction*: overall impression, subjective feeling about the applicant.
- c) **The Personal Competencies.** In addition to the characteristics above, medical schools have identified areas of [personal competency that they seek in new physicians](#) (and thus potential for developing these competencies is valued in medical students):
- i. Interpersonal Competencies: service orientation; social skills; cultural competence; team work; oral communication
  - ii. Intrapersonal Competencies: ethical responsibility to self and others; reliability and dependability; resilience and adaptability; capacity for Improvement
- Come up with 10-15 brief “stories” from your experiences that exemplify your skills, interests, values and abilities, and show how you would be an effective and valuable member of the entering class.**
- d) **Know the School.**
- i. Review the school’s website. Read through the academic catalog. Google search for recent news about faculty, students or other accomplishments.
  - ii. Become familiar with class size, curriculum, facilities, teaching style, mission, philosophy, etc., and how you feel about it. If you’re not sure or want to know how others feel about it, make a note to ask.
  - iii. See feedback online on the Princeton interview reports and at <http://studentdoctor.net/schools/?view=medical>. There, other students share their impressions of the school, and details from their interview experiences.
  - iv. Email hpa@ if you’d like contact information for alums at a given school where you will be interviewing. Be professional and specific in your correspondence with medical students – remember that they are incredibly busy, but also want to serve as a resource for you.
- e) **Know about medicine.**
- i. **Be abreast of current events.** Read the newspaper, and otherwise be sure that you’re informed about and have opinions on current issues in health care.
  - ii. **Learn how to approach and discuss ethical and hypothetical questions**, in health care and otherwise. Acknowledge that these are often complex matters with no absolute right and wrong answers; state the main ideas behind both positions on the argument at hand; don’t be afraid to take a stand but do explain your rationale. See below for some resources regarding bioethics.

5. **Practice out loud.** Sign up for a mock interview at the Career Center, go over answers with a trusted professor or adviser (or even better, your mentors in the health professions), record yourself you're your phone and listen back, talk through answers in front of the mirror. Writing things down uses a different part of your brain than saying them out loud. Make sure you talk through your answers a few times so that you're more comfortable with this aspect of the interview.

### **Before the Interview**

1. Work out the logistics. Book flights and accommodations, print out maps (in case your phone/GPS malfunctions), get suit dry cleaned, etc. Have change for parking and tolls if needed.
2. Check the weather and plan accordingly.
3. Come prepared with questions to ask of different interviewers (students vs physicians vs community members).
4. Get a good night's sleep (and set an alarm).
5. Bring pen, notebook/paper, a copy of your application and resume, and a bottle of water.

### **During the Interview**

1. **Make a good first impression.** A firm handshake and steady eye contact are good places to start. Make sure clothes are pressed and appropriate for an interview.
2. **Be nice to everyone.** This should go without saying, but you're being evaluated from the moment you arrive, by students, administrative personnel, and anyone else with whom you come into contact.
3. **Get familiar with the context, and work within it.** Some interviewers will have access to the entire application file, some just to the personal statements, others to everything but the academic credentials. When interviewers have limited access to a candidate's file, the interviews are referred to as "blind or semi-blind." You may wish to adjust your responses accordingly.
4. **LISTEN carefully, answer the questions, projecting enthusiasm and interest.**
  - a) Look for non-verbal cues and take care in your own verbal and non-verbal interactions.
  - b) Listen carefully. Ask for clarification on questions if needed.
  - c) Think before you speak. It's okay to pause and consider.
  - d) Answer the questions clearly and concisely, in a positive manner.
  - e) Avoid negativity, informal language, and exaggeration.
5. **Ask questions.** You should have different questions prepared for different potential interviewers (the questions you ask of a student are probably different from those you'd ask of a faculty member). There are some sample questions on the AAMC website: <https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/programs/>. Remember, you're trying to learn about them as much as they're trying to learn about you. BUT, do not ask questions that are answered in full on the school's website, or that have been covered in other parts of the interview day.

### **After the Interview**

1. **Follow up on uncomfortable situations.** If you ever feel uncomfortable during an interview, there is always a Dean, admissions director, or other administrator whom you can contact with your concerns. If you're not sure whether a situation warrants being brought to their attention, you can always talk through the situation with HPA first.
2. **Reflect on the interview.** What did you do well? What could you do better in future interviews? How well does the school fit your needs? Have further questions come up that you'd like to address with someone at the school? Adapt your preparation for future interviews based on each interview experience.

3. **Send thank you notes.** Follow up with your interviewers in a memorable way – let them know what you liked about their program, and indicate your continued interest.
4. **Leave feedback on Princeton’s interview reports.** Share your knowledge with your peers, especially if you used theirs in preparation for your interview.
5. **Give feedback to HPA if anything seems particularly good or bad.** Good or bad, it can help to prepare future students for their interviews, and give you some feedback on anomalous situations if they arise.

## The Multiple Mini Interview

The most important things to know about multiple mini interviews are 1) the admissions staff is trying to create an experience for which you cannot prepare in the same way that you can a regular interview; and that is because 2) they want to gain multiple perspectives on your true character/personality. Try not to over think the MMI – be your best, most professional, people-oriented self, and enjoy the opportunity to think on your feet and work through each scenario.

To learn more about the rationale behind the MMI, and read some current literature about its effectiveness, we have a binder of printed articles in HPA, and copies available on Coursesites.

The basics:

- 8-10 stations, 1-2 minutes to read a prompt, 8-10 minutes to respond.
- A different evaluator at each station, who only evaluates that station.
- Four types: discussion, role play, teamwork, written.
- Try to relax. You’re just trying to let your personality show through.
- Always answer the question. It’s easy to go off track briefly and then run out of time. Ask for clarification if needed. Write yourself brief notes if it helps you organize your thoughts.

A few articles and other resources to consider:

- Eva, K. et al (2004). [An admissions OSCE: the multiple mini-interview](#). *Medical Education*; 38: 314-326. (also linked in Coursesites)
- LeMay, J.F. et al (2007). [Assessment of non-cognitive traits through the admissions multiple mini-interview](#). *Medical Education*; 41: 573–579 (also linked in Coursesites)
- Razack, S. et al (2009). Multiple mini-interviews versus traditional interviews: stakeholder acceptability comparison. *Medical Education*; 43: 993-1000.
- <http://www.multipleminiinterview.com/> - website with basic information
- [http://medicine.vtc.vt.edu/admissions/interview\\_day/](http://medicine.vtc.vt.edu/admissions/interview_day/) - How MMIs work at Virginia Carilion (6 minute youtube video)
- <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~nss/nav/pages/school/Med%20School%20App%2012-13/MMItips.pdf> advisor’s perspective on MMI prep, and the McMaster Training Manual for MMI Interviewers
- Univ of Washington School of Medicine/Ethics in Medicine: Bioethics Topics: <http://depts.washington.edu/bioethx/topics/index.html>
- Virtual Mentor: [www.virtualmentor.org](http://www.virtualmentor.org) (ethics journal of the AMA)

## *Sample Interview Questions*

### **“Get to know you” questions.**

- If I were sitting around a table with a few of your close friends, what would they say about you?
- How would you describe yourself?
- Tell me about your family. Any physicians in your family?
- What have you enjoyed most/least about your time at Princeton?
- What do feel are your biggest strengths? And weaknesses?
- Where do you see yourself in 15 years?
- Tell me about your favorite book (movie, television show).
- Tell me more about \_\_\_\_\_ that you talked about in your personal statement / activities list.

### **Questions about you and the profession you plan to enter.**

- When did you first become interested in medicine (dentistry, veterinary medicine, and physical therapy, etc)?
- What field of medicine (dentistry, veterinary medicine) do you see yourself in?
- No career is perfect. What do you think are the downfalls of the profession?
- What’s more important in a doctor (or other healthcare professional), to be able to communicate or think scientifically?
- What qualities do you have that would make you a good physician?
- Why help people as a doctor rather than a social worker (researcher, firefighter, etc)?
- Would you remain a physician if we had socialized medicine? Why or why not?

### **Questions that test your knowledge, opinion, and articulation about health care/social issues.**

- How would you change the health care system?
- What do you think of the Affordable Care Act?
- You have a terminally ill patient who does not speak English. The son is translating and doesn’t want the father to know he’s dying. How would handle the situation?
- Do you believe that the emerging relationships between academic researchers and private industry will be productive?
- Two patients, terminal illness, and the capacity to only treat one. What do you do?
- What are the biggest problems in the country other than healthcare?

### **Questions that demonstrate you did some research about the school.**

- What is it about our school which makes you think it would be a good fit for you?
- How do you think you’d contribute to our student body?
- If you were accepted to your state University would you still want to come to here? Why?

### **Questions that touch upon the qualities that make for a good health care practitioner.**

- Describe a situation where someone close to you was ill. How did you cope with the situation?
- What characteristics would you look for in your fellow students at medical (dental, vet) school?
- What do you think are the most important qualities a health care professional should possess?
- Describe a situation where you were under a lot pressure. How did you handle the stress?
- What do you think patients look for in a physician (dentist, etc)?

### **Additional sample questions:**

<http://www.colorado.edu/advising/pre-health/application-process/interviewing>

<http://prehealth.duke.edu/apply/preparing-for-your-interviews/questions-you-might-be-asked>

<http://ocs.fas.harvard.edu/medical-interview>

## Some Vet School Questions

- What do you believe a day in the life of a vet might be like?
- Are you ready for the academic rigors of vet school? What skills do you possess that might help you succeed?
- Tell us about your experiences with animals and how they have shaped you.
- Do you think it is ethical to use animals in food production, why or why not?
- A client comes in and can't pay for their animal's care. What do you do?
- What is a veterinarian's responsibility to the community?
- Why do you want to be a veterinarian rather than a human doctor?
- You are examining a celebrity client's horse and see what appears to be abuse. What do you do?
- What if someone who came into the clinic that you worked in refused to have their SPCA adopted dog or cat spayed even though they signed a contract agreeing to it? Would you notify the SPCA?
- What if Mr. Jones, who has a 17-year-old cat with kidney failure, is still reluctant to consider putting his pet to sleep after several rounds of relatively unsuccessful therapy? What would you say to him?

## Tough Questions Asked During Medical School Interviews

1. How would you solve what you think is the most pressing issue in medicine?
2. What do you think of the fall of the Roman Empire?
3. What do you see as the similarities between AIDS and Alzheimer's?
4. A young woman who is seven months pregnant wants to abort her child because her father will "kill her" if she has it. You're on a committee that decides whether or not she can do so. What do you decide?
5. Please discuss the most significant challenges facing the medical community.
6. What would you do for a dying patient and his/her family?
7. What's your biggest weakness as a medical school candidate?
8. What should I tell the admissions committee is unique about you?
9. How would you convince teenage girls to practice safer sex?
10. What is your opinion on physician assisted suicide?
11. How do you feel about using animals in research?
12. A benefactor will give you \$5 million a year as long as you work full time in a job other than medicine. What would you do?
13. So you want to help people... why not be a policeman?
14. What has been the hardest interview question you've been asked so far?
15. Tell me about a time when you failed. What did you learn from it? What would you do differently if faced with the same situation again?
16. What turned you away from other professions? Why medicine?
17. What would you change if you could go back to high school/the beginning of college?
18. What's the biggest change in yourself since you started college?
19. What's a good political answer to the increasing crime and violence in our society?
20. I have to convince the rest of the Admissions Committee that we should accept you over a lot of other students. What you would tell them to convince them? Why should we accept you?

*Updated January 2016*



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