

20 Tips to Help You Succeed on Your Interviews

1. **What does an interview offer mean?** Celebrate that schools are interested enough to invite you to interview. You wouldn't be invited to campus if you weren't being seriously considered. Admission staff have liked what they have seen on paper and now they want to learn who you are in person. An interview is a great opportunity to let your unique personality shine through. Develop a strong interview preparation plan to increase your chances for continued success!
2. **Understand the format:** Make sure you understand the format of your interview. Will it be a traditional interview, a Multiple Mini Interview (MMI) or a combination of different formats? Will your interview will be open, blind or semi-open file? In other words, how much access will interviewers have to your application? Open file means an interviewer would have full access, blind means he/she has no access and semi-open means he/she would have access to only certain sections of your application. Will you be meeting with one or more individuals at a time? If you are not sure of the format from your invitation, then review the school's website or call and politely ask for more detailed information.
3. **Research your schools:** Make sure to thoroughly research the website of each school you will interview at including any mission and vision statements. You should understand the focus of their programs and as much as you can about the school's curriculum. Be prepared to answer, "What would you contribute to our incoming class?" Also think about how you might respond to, "Why are you interested in our program?" Questions like these focus on if you are a "good fit" for a particular program from a school's perspective.

You should also consider if a school is a "good fit" from *your* perspective. Does the program offer the type of opportunities that fit your interests and goals? On interview day observe what you can about the culture/atmosphere of the school through your interactions with faculty, staff and current students. If offered, consider being hosted by a student. Staying overnight with a current student before your interview day can be a great way to learn what it is really like to attend the school. Just remember to always be professional and to thank your host.

4. **Reread your application:** It will likely have been months since you last read your application. Take the time to review all the details before your interview day. You never know if an interviewer or other staff member may ask you a question about specific information in your application. This will not happen during an MMI, but it could happen at a different point of your interview day.
5. **Bring a list of questions:** Bring a list of questions to ask on interview day that cannot be easily found on a school's website. If you ask obvious questions, they will know you haven't done your homework and might think you aren't very interested in their program. Instead think about questions that go deeper than what can be found on their website or ask about topics you don't find covered. Ask these questions when it is most appropriate depending upon the structure of the interview day. For example, it wouldn't be appropriate to ask your prepared questions during an MMI, but it could be appropriate at the end of a traditional interview or during a question and answer session.

- 6. Familiarize yourself with health care issues and current events:** Spend time learning about health care issues/topics and current events in general. Interviewers aren't looking for you to be an expert on a specific matter, but they do want to know you are interested enough to be following current health care issues/topics and are willing to continue to learn new information. Ethical questions can often be based upon current topics and events. Interviewers also want to know that you are aware of the world around you (in general) and actively engaged in more than just your studies.
- 7. Formulate a position and adapt as needed:** Practice forming an opinion and discussing a previously unknown topic. Think not only about how you can logically support your opinion (without being extreme), but also how you might be able to show you are aware of more than one side of an issue or topic. It depends upon the specific prompt you are given, but it is good to demonstrate that you are open-minded and able to see other people's viewpoints too. Show them you can adapt to new information and situations quickly – after all, you will need to “think on your feet” every day of your health care career.

For certain types of interview questions, consider what strategy you want to employ. Strategizing for different categories can be very helpful in advance. For instance, if you find yourself needing to role play during an MMI, think through different situations and what the possible next steps might be? Then determine what your response would be for each next step. It is also important to have a strategy for ethical and teamwork related scenarios and questions.

- 8. Practice, practice, and more practice:** Find multiple ways to practice. Consider speaking out loud while looking in a mirror, practicing with friends, family, mentors or individuals who don't know you well at all. Record video of yourself interviewing then review it. This can be a great way to see how you appear to others. Sometimes we appear very differently to others than we think.

Practice to become comfortable, but don't be overly rehearsed for commonly asked questions like: “Tell me a little about yourself?” or “Why are you interested in _____?” Interviewers aren't looking for “canned” answers, but genuine thoughtful conversation. Make sure to practice timing! This is especially true for the MMI format where you may only have 6 to 8 minutes to respond to a prompt or task. Practice watching the body language of your interviewers to see if they are non-verbally asking you to continue or are they really asking you to wrap up your answer?

Practice until you have the confidence that you are ready. Then believe in yourself and your abilities!

- 9. First impressions:** First impressions matter. Unless advised otherwise, be sure to introduce yourself with a firm handshake and a warm smile. If in a small setting, introduce yourself by shaking everyone's hand in the room. Maintain good posture, make appropriate eye contact and demonstrate genuine enthusiasm! Remember you will be evaluated on your communication skills and how comfortable you are meeting individuals for the first time.
- 10. Attire:** Plan to wear professional attire that you have worn at least once before. You don't want to appear uncomfortable on your interview day just because you have unanticipated wardrobe concerns. Avoid wearing strong fragrances.

For many programs, professional attire can mean a suit for both men and women. Don't be too casual and underdressed. Dress conservatively and think about dress shoes that will be comfortable for a walking tour. Take enough time for personal grooming so you look neat and professional on interview day - consider your hair, shaving (for men), condition of nails etc. Take time to look in a mirror to see what others will see. Consider how you will sit (especially for ladies wearing a skirt). You want to be remembered for who you are, what you communicated and not for standing out because of what you wore on interview day.

If traveling by air, consider having your interview suit in your carry on and not in checked baggage just in case your baggage is delayed or lost.

11. **What to bring?** Decide what to bring with you on interview day. You don't want to carry a lot of extra items, but you should have some basic necessities with you. Keep in mind it's recommended to have a notepad portfolio for taking notes during a traditional interview, but during an MMI you may be asked to leave ALL your belonging in a separate room. Bring what you can easily carry and what will help keep you comfortable and confident during the day. You may want to consider bringing a small snack, water bottle, breath mints, updated resume, copy of your application (for your reference), list of questions to ask, etc.
12. **Arrive on time!** Make sure you know where you are going on interview day. If possible, visit the location ahead of time. Rushing around at the last minute will only add to your nervousness. So allow for extra time the morning of your interview day so you will be sure to arrive on time - even if something unexpected occurs.
13. **It's an interview DAY, not hour:** Understand the "interview" actually begins as you approach the campus. You never know who you might encounter that may have a connection to an admission committee. Be courteous and respectful to everyone you meet and treat everyone as you would like to be treated. Receptionists, custodial staff and other applicants have been known to report negative incidents/occurrences to admission committees about the actions of applicants.
14. **Be attentive:** Make sure you pay attention throughout the entire day. Demonstrate this both through your actions and your body language. Although this seems like common sense, applicants have given the impression that they aren't very interested when they have: dozed off during presentations, spent time speaking to someone next to them at the wrong time, slouched in their chair or tried to monopolize the question and answer session. Try to be aware of social cues and how you are likely being perceived.

Make sure your phone is turned off or to silent mode. You do NOT want to be *that person* whose phone rings during a presentation or interview. Also, do not text unless you have an actual break. If you have an unusual circumstance like a serious family illness or situation and you must stay in contact through your phone, then explain this to the admission staff ahead of time.
15. **Avoid nervous habits:** Try to avoid showing any nervous habits. See if others you practice with pick up on any like: nail biting, hair twirling, pen thumping, tapping your foot, etc. Hopefully, if you have been made aware of such habits, you will be less likely to continue them. Enough practice and being aware of the scheduled flow of the day can help reduce your jitters too.
16. **Be honest and humble:** Two things you should try to avoid is coming across as dishonest or arrogant. Schools have many other applicants to choose from so they don't need to put up with someone they don't want to be around. It's better to state what you know, acknowledge what you don't know and explain that you plan to do more research on a topic rather than to attempt to "bluff" your way through a question. After all, people in real life search for additional information everyday – no one knows everything. Strive to be genuine and the type of person you like to spend time with. Remember schools are not only choosing individuals for their incoming class, but alum and future colleagues too!
17. **Move forward:** If you have a difficult time in an MMI scenario or a traditional interview, do your best to "regroup" and move on. Although difficult, it is important to focus on the present and what is ahead of you with a positive state of mind instead of worrying about what you cannot change from the past.
18. **End well:** At the end of an interview be sure to briefly verbally thank your interviewer(s). If appropriate this may also involve a handshake. At the conclusion of the interview day, thank your host(s) for the

opportunity to have learned more about their program and continue to demonstrate enthusiasm (as long as you genuinely feel this way). It is usually fine to ask the people you met with for their business cards if it is a smaller number of individuals.

19. **Send thank you messages:** Send written thank you notes in a timely manner – shortly after interviewing. If you have contact information from the few interviewers you met with you could consider sending your thank you cards/messages directly to them. However, if you met with a panel of individuals or had an MMI experience then reaching out to the admission’s office/committee may be more appropriate. Try to follow whatever guidelines your school recommends or politely inquire if you are not sure of a school’s preferences.

Some students will send email thank you messages while others prefer to send handwritten notes. Either option may be fine, but recipients of handwritten notes may appreciate the extra time involved and may consider this option a more personal form of communication. With either method, just be sure to keep your message brief with the emphasis on being grateful for the opportunity to interview and learn more about the school/program. Don’t try to continue a conversation, ask for feedback, or correct something you thought you could have done better.

20. **Take time to reflect:** After your interview day, take enough time to think about what went well and what you might consider improving before your next scheduled interview. Think about the interview process itself or perhaps what additional health care topics or issues you could research. Learn from each experience and strive to be a life-long learner.

INTERVIEW RESOURCES:

Oakland University:

- Your academic adviser(s) . . . <http://wwwp.oakland.edu/advising/findmyadviser/>
- Pre-Professional Advising/Pre-Health website . . . <http://wwwp.oakland.edu/advising/pre-professional>
- Career Services . . . <http://wwwp.oakland.edu/careerservices/>

Other:

- Acing Your Medical School Interview - Tips from Interviewers:
<https://students-residents.aamc.org/video/acing-your-medical-school-interview/>
- What it’s Like to Participate in Multiple Mini Interviews (MMIs):
https://aamc-orange.global.ssl.fastly.net/production/media/filer_public/f5/07/f507bc65-7273-40a4-8ddd-14923f59e76e/multipleminiinterviews.pdf
- American Student Dental Association (ASDA) Interview Tips:
<http://www.asdanet.org/predental/interview-tips.aspx>

Look for similar links on the website's of your target schools:

- OUWB - Interview Day Agenda:
<https://www.oakland.edu/Default.aspx?id=16523&sid=340&CWFriendlyUrl=true>
- UMMS - 24 Hours in Blue FAQ:
<http://medicine.umich.edu/medschool/education/md-program/md-admissions/interview-day/faqs>