

Medical School Interviews

Learn what to expect...and how to deal with the unexpected

The medical school interview process is the next phase of your prospective medical career. We're here to help you prepare for what is to come and to arm you with tools to help you succeed.

Before the Interview

Research the school and program – due to the competitive nature of medical school applications, chances are that you may be applying to many schools. You will be expected to know something about the uniqueness of their program and why it fits you. Visit university and medical student websites for facts and editorial opinions about facets of the program. Know the differences between three- and four-year programs. Try to talk to current medical students. Research the program's results from the last residency application process (called "CaRMS match"). Build a list of questions that you have for the interviewer(s).

Ask friends and family to give you feedback – on general impressions, nervous habits or gestures, speech punctuated by "ums" and "aahs". Ask for information on the speed and tone of your voice, the logic of your explanations, the frequency of your eye contact. Perhaps record an answer a day on your answering machine. Listen to how clear you sound and whether there is any nervous rambling you would like to curb. Avoid credibility problems by reducing or eliminating "like" as fillers in your vocabulary. Stay away from "up talk" which tends to make every statement sound like a question, thereby undermining what you say. If you tend to speak quickly, slow down.

Read, read and read – newspapers, journals, websites for information about health services in Canada and their challenges, initiatives, and ethics. Be able to articulate and defend your views. Stay current in your community, country, and world so that you can give opinions about topical events. Continue participating in and reading about subjects that interest you outside of school.






Organize Your Travel Budget – you will likely have minimal notice to attend interviews out of town. Preparing for the extra cost the short timeframe can sometimes provoke (especially where air travel is involved) may help avoid surprises with your cash flow. If you are traveling to another city, perhaps arrange to stay with friends to reduce costs. Be sure to allow for travel time during rush hour and bad weather. Give yourself enough time to not only get to the building but also to the interview area. Arriving approximately 10 minutes prior to the interview enables you to relax slightly and freshen up. It may also reduce the chance that you will spend too much time in the waiting room, stressing about the upcoming interview.

Dress for Success – by wearing something professional, yet "you". Suits are the most common choice for many interviewees but they are not necessary. Do, however, dress with care and avoid an appearance that is too casual. Wear colours that make you feel confident. Polishing your shoes, brushing your teeth and using a lint brush are simple things you can do to help you present a tidy and competent image.

Get lots of rest – so you can think clearly and communicate effectively during your interview.



A Good Candidate Shows...

-  Conscious, informed choice
-  Ability to connect quickly
-  Fit with the occupation
-  Concrete experiences
-  Potential as a future physician



During the Interview – General Strategies

Although the interview process varies by medical school, there are some general strategies that can be applied anywhere. Whether you are meeting with a medical faculty member, professor from a non-health-based department or panel with community members and medical students, the following items will help you.

Control your first impressions – It is said that in many instances, people form an impression of you during the first ten seconds of contact. This can also be the time in an interview when you are at the peak of nervousness. Although interviewers will expect that you may be nervous, you have a chance to overcome the jitters and begin a positive conversation. Simple actions like smiling, making good eye contact and standing tall when you walk in the room can all help to calm your nerves as well as form a positive impression with the interviewer(s).

Introduce yourself – In many cases, the people you meet will be conducting many interviews. You need to help them differentiate you from the other candidates. It is wise to have a 30-second “blurb” about yourself at the ready. Hit the high points of who you are: perhaps what school and program you attend, a bit about your recent work/volunteer activities, and a quick summary of how people describe you. Be yourself. Be positive and not too detailed at this point. Help the conversation get going. Remember to make eye contact and smile at everyone you meet (receptionists, people in the hall, waiting room, etc.), not just the interviewer(s).

Think before you speak – In life, it is natural to compose your thoughts before you answer a question, however, in interviews, many candidates leap into answers before they think. Pause to reflect before you start speaking. Sometimes it is helpful to communicate to the interviewer(s) that you need to think for a moment before answering. It is also fine to stop an answer that isn't going well to start again. This is not a *test*, it is a *conversation*.

Help them get to know you – as a unique individual. Some schools refer to your application material during the interview while others start with a completely blank slate. Either way, you need to help them understand how you do things by using examples from your autobiographical sketch and past experiences. The only thing that makes you unique from the other smart, well-rounded applicants is the individuality you give yourself simply by showing yourself through your experiences in life.

Give REAL answers, not “RIGHT” answers – There is often some anxiety associated with interviews and therefore, many sources of information about how you should conduct yourself. Filter the information (including this document!) through your own beliefs and personal communication style. Despite what many candidates hear through the grapevine, *there are no right answers*. Speak authentically using your own words and specific examples from your life. Avoid generalities: (“I am a team player with a variety of experiences”) and naïve statements: (“Being a doctor requires patience, dedication and a thirst for learning...”). Tell succinct but vivid stories that enable the interviewer(s) to get to know you and to see your potential contributions to the occupation of physician and to their medical school.

Use your P-U-L-L

Brainstorm experiences from the following areas of your life:

Paid work

Unpaid work

Learning

Leisure

Using examples from these areas helps you:

Show diverse experiences

Show life/work balance

Increase examples available

Convey information from autobiographical sketch



During the Interview - Types of Questions

The purpose of the medical school interview is to help admissions personnel or committees to gain additional information about your fit with a future career as a physician and your ability to succeed during the rigours of the program. Types of questions and interview processes vary somewhat by school, but they are often composed of one or a combination of question categories:



S-T-A-R Formula

A great framework for
answering questions

Situation

Briefly describe a specific
situation you experienced

Tactics

Convey your rationale for
dealing with the situation

Actions

Outline your step-by-step
course of action

Results

Detail the tangible
outcomes of your efforts

Traditional –

Why do you want to be a doctor and not some other healthcare provider?
What do you think makes you different from other candidates?
Why did you choose your undergraduate degree? Would you choose it again?
What kind of future in medicine do you see yourself having?
What's your "back up plan" in case we don't accept you?
Why should we accept you this year instead of when you finish your degree?
Tell me about yourself.

Off-the-wall –

If you could be any piece of medical equipment, what would you be?
Who do you admire most?
What book are you currently reading?
Describe your favourite sandwich.
If you could spend 24 hours with anyone, living or dead, who would she be?
What's the most adventurous thing you've ever done?
What was your most embarrassing moment in life?
Tell me a joke.

Ethical –

What are your views on abortion/euthanasia?
Do you think that fetal tissue should be used for medical purposes?
Do you think cloning is a good idea?
What's your opinion on genetically modified foods?
Do you think that user fees should be introduced into our healthcare system?

Situational/behavioural –

Tell me about a time when you have had to lead people through difficulty.
Describe your greatest weakness.
Tell me about a time when you have had a conflict with a co-worker.
Tell me about a time when you failed at something you tried.
You have a 12-year-old patient who asks for an abortion and doesn't want you to tell her parents. What would you do?
You see someone in your medical school class cheating. Has this ever happened to you in your education?

Illegal/unethical questions – You do not have to answer illegal questions, but you may wish to interpret what is really being asked and answer that question instead. e.g.: "Do you plan to have children during your training?" Possible answer: "My career is most important to me for the next few years and I will be focusing on that."



Top Ten Qualities – My S-T-A-R stories

Leadership _____

Motivation _____

Health-related experience _____

Problem-solving _____

Multi-disciplinary teamwork _____

Self-directed learning _____

Decision-making _____

Conflict resolution _____

Goal achievement _____

Maturity _____

Closing Remarks – Your “Info”mercial

Supplementary Resources

MCAT
Canadian Federation of Medical Students
Medical Council of Canada
Ontario Medical Association (student site)
College of Physicians and Surgeons (Ontario)
Ontario Medical School Application Service (OMSAS)

www.aamc.org/students/mcat
www.cfms.org/
www.mcc.ca/
www.ssoma.org/
rcpsc.medical.org/
www.ouac.on.ca/omsas/

