

Medical School Interviews



Queen's
UNIVERSITY

STUDENT AFFAIRS
Career Services

Strategies to help you prepare for panels, one-to-one, and MMI formats

In this tipsheet, you'll learn about the medical school interview process. We'll show you tips and tricks on how to navigate your interviews before, during and after the process.

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"). Many schools offer a tour as part of the interview process. Build a list of questions that you have for your visit.

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, and the frequency of your eye contact. Perhaps record an answer per day on your phone. 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 often 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. Leave parents or supporters outside. 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.

Successful candidates tend to show...



Conscious, informed choice



Ability to connect quickly



Fit with the occupation



Reflection and maturity



Potential to succeed as a
future med student

Dress for success – dress professionally and with care to 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.

During the Interview

Although the interview format 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, panel with community members and medical students or in a Multiple Mini Interview (MMI) format, the following strategies can help.

Practice your first impressions – 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. Be ready to introduce yourself. You may wish to include 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.

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 by connecting your unique experiences and approaches to your future potential success.

Give REAL answers, not “RIGHT” answers – naturally, there can be 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. Speak authentically using your own words and specific examples from your life. 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 your resume/sketch:

Paid work

Unpaid work

Learning

Leisure

Using examples from these areas helps you:

Prove diverse experiences

Demonstrate themes/passions

Increase examples available

Convey information from the rest of your application

During the Interview - Example 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 assess the qualities they are seeking in potential students. Types of questions and interview process 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 describing
examples from
your experiences

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

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 degree(s)? 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 they be?

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 –

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."

Supplementary Resources

Medical school interview resources are available in the [Career Advising and Resource Area](#). It is also recommended you thoroughly read through the resources on respective programs' admissions webpages, as there could be potentially helpful information or examples there as well.

Source: <http://multipleminiinterview.com/mmi-questions/>

A close friend in your 1st-year medical school class tells you that his mother was recently diagnosed with breast cancer. He feels overwhelmed by his studies and is considering dropping out of medical school to spend more time with his mother. How do you counsel your friend?

“Liberation Therapy” (LT), a vascular operation developed to potentially cure multiple sclerosis (MS) in certain patients, has recently come under very serious criticism – delaying its widespread use. Among other experimental flaws, critics cite a small sample size in the original evidence used to support LT. Your job as a healthcare policy maker is to weigh the pros and cons in approving novel drugs and therapies. Please discuss the issues you would consider during an approval process for LT.

Because of federal and provincial subsidy policies and return-of service agreements, international medical graduates (IMGs) now make up an increasingly large proportion of rural doctors. As a consequence, the shortage of doctors in rural areas has prompted many family medicine residencies to increase their quotas for IMGs in their programs. Effectively, this development is leading to a relative reduction in spots available for Canadian medical graduates. Please discuss the pros and cons of such a development.

You are a family physician seeing Jane, a 67 year old woman with a recent history of multiple fragility fractures. You diagnose her with osteoporosis and prescribe some bisphosphonate drugs and other pharmacological treatments. Jane tells you that she has heard some good things over the internet about alternative medicine treatments such as Chinese medicine, and she is adamant on trying these as well. You are concerned about the use of these alternative medicine treatments and the possible negative effects they could have on Jane’s health. How would you handle the situation and what would you recommend Jane do? Discuss any ethical considerations that are present.

<i>Medical schools indicate they are seeking the qualities listed below. What evidence/examples can you describe that demonstrate each?</i>
Commitment and achievement
Problem-solving
Critical thinking
Informed choice
Self-directed learning
Scientific reasoning
Ability to function as a team player
Ability to communicate effectively
Sensitivity to the needs of others
Adaptability and ability to cope with stress
Demonstrated interest in living/working with under-served populations
Demonstrated interest in cross-cultural experiences
Involvement in volunteer work and extra-curricular activities