

Medical School and Residency Interviews

Interviews are an important part of the application process for both getting into medical school and securing the residency program that aligns with your career goals. Interviewing is a skill that you can improve through preparation, practice, and experience. This tipsheet provides strategies to help you prepare for these important interviews.

In this tipsheet, you will learn how to:

- prepare for medical school and residency interviews
- highlight skills and experiences effectively
- manage professionalism, stress, and other details

Before the Interview

General Preparation Tips:

Research: Research details about the program and school. You will be expected to know what makes each program unique and how it matches both your educational and career goals. Use university websites, attend tours or information sessions, reach out to current students and graduates, to find out more about a program and school.

Practice Common Questions: Review common interview questions and answers. Prepare some answers to common questions such as “tell me about yourself” or “why do you want to be a doctor?” Practice with friends, family, or a career coach to gather feedback on both your answers and your communication style such as body language, “up speak”, speed, and filler speech (ie. “um,” “ah,” “you know”).

Be Informed on Healthcare and Issues Impacting Healthcare: Familiarize yourself with major issues such as access to care, healthcare funding, patient demographics, and the social determinants of health. Be prepared to discuss how these issues impact communities and healthcare delivery. Be aware of emerging trends, policies, and challenges in Canadian healthcare in order to articulate and thoughtfully defend your perspective on important topics.

Engage in Self-Reflection: During any interview, it is common to ask about how previous experiences inform your knowledge, skills, and goals. Take note of specific experiences, whether from your personal life, education, or work. Think about how these experiences have shaped your journey, inform your current knowledge, and influence your future.

Consider Logistics: Plan for all aspects of the interview to help make the process as smooth as possible and to present yourself professionally. For online interviews, set up a quiet, uninterrupted space with reliable internet; ensure your background is neat and you have all necessary materials ready. For in-person interviews, plan to arrive early to be on time and allow

yourself time to settle in. If you are travelling a distance, factor in your travel budget and accommodations. Dress professionally, whether the interview is online or in person.

Medical School Interview Prep Tips

Multiple Mini Interviews:

The Multiple Mini Interview (MMI) is a common interview format to assess a range of competencies such as communication, ethical reasoning, problem-solving, and empathy. In an MMI, candidates rotate through a series of stations with a different scenario or task. Responses are most often timed and may include role-playing, ethical dilemmas, or exercises. Online MMI may be synchronous but are often asynchronous where the applicant records their answer to predetermined questions.

You can help yourself feel more prepared by familiarizing yourself with the MMI process, **paying attention to specific instructions** (i.e. presenting photo id and name for asynchronous recordings) provided before the interview, **practicing timed responses**, and **practicing clear communication** through articulating your thought process effectively. There is often no “correct” answer, but interviewers must be able to see how you approach problems and work through scenarios.

Traditional Interviews:

If your interviews follow a more traditional in-person format, you can prepare by practicing common interview questions with family and friends, or a career coach. Prepare for questions about career motivation, patient empathy, and resilience. Similarly to an MMI, practice clearly communicating your thought process.

Residency Interview Tips:

Residency interviews are designed to assess your clinical skills, knowledge, professionalism, and suitability for the program. These interviews often focus on previous experience and career aspirations. You may also be presented with case-based or situational questions that require critical thinking and problem-solving.

To feel more confident, **familiarize yourself with the specialty** and the program. **Research faculty as well as graduates** from the program to understand the possible career paths so you can highlight links to your learning and professional goals. Be **prepared to discuss clinical experiences** in detail to showcase your skills and achievements. **Think about experiences** that highlight your teamwork, professionalism and other qualities that make you a strong candidate. **Prepare insightful questions** to show your interest and understanding of the program.

On the Day of the Interview

On the day of the interview, focus on presenting yourself as a confident, professional, and engaged candidate. Remember, you worked hard to earn this opportunity, and the interviewers see your potential and genuinely want to learn more about you. The interview, whether MMI, traditional, online or in person, is your opportunity to showcase your knowledge, skills, personality, and suitability for the program. Keep these tips in mind:

- Maintain professionalism.
- Use confident body language: good posture, eye contact, and controlled gestures.
- Listen actively and adapt to the conversation.
- Show genuine enthusiasm and engagement.
- Speak clearly, using accessible language and specific examples.

Response Frameworks

There is no required method for answering interview questions. However, using a framework to answer interview questions can help you provide complete, organized responses that clearly convey your thoughts to the interviewers. The way you answer will depend on the type of questions.

For questions that ask for past experiences to illustrate your knowledge and skills, **the STARR method** breaks down the response into:

- **Situation:** Describe the context or background of the scenario.
- **Task:** Explain what needed to be done and your responsibility.
- **Action:** Detail the specific steps you took to resolve the situation.
- **Result:** Share the outcome of your actions and their impact.
- **Reflection:** Explain how the experience influenced your thinking and future approach.

For questions where you discuss yourself, such as “tell me about yourself” or “why did you decide to become a doctor?” using a **Past-Present-Future framework** can help you organize your story.

- **Past:** Highlight the key experiences or influences that shaped your decision to pursue medicine.
- **Present:** Share how your current education and experiences have equipped you with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed.
- **Future:** Outline your goals for the program, including what you hope to learn and how it will support your long-term aspirations as a doctor.

For situational questions where you are presented with a scenario or a case, structure your response by addressing the following areas:

- **Immediate Situation:** Focus on how you would manage the situation in the moment. Consider your role, your relationship with the patient or others directly involved, and the immediate steps required.
- **Broader Issues:** Identify the medical and social factors affecting the scenario, including social determinants of health that may play a role.
- **Limitations and Constraints:** Acknowledge any limitations, such as your scope of practice, knowledge gaps, or institutional policies that might influence your actions.
- **Options:** Outline potential approaches to address the situation and explain why you would choose each option depending on the circumstances.
- **Resources:** Determine who you should consult for guidance, such as a supervisor, and identify other available resources to support your decisions.

Handling Difficult Questions

When faced with challenging questions, stay calm and composed. If needed, ask for clarification. Address the question directly and honestly, especially for topics like weaknesses or past challenges. Focus on demonstrating self-awareness and emphasizing how you've grown or learned from those experiences. This approach shows maturity, resilience, self-management, and a commitment to personal and professional development.

After the Interview

After the interview, here are a few key steps you can take to support the outcome and prepare for the next stages:

1. **Reflect on the Experience:** Identify what went well in the interview, what you could have done better, and which questions were challenging. Use this information to help you prepare for future interviews.
2. **Consider a Thank-you Note:** While thank-you notes for medical school interviews are not common, they are often appreciated. For residency interviews thank-you notes are more common. Use this time to express gratitude, rather than highlighting your qualities.
3. **Maintain Professionalism:** Keep interactions respectful and professional during the post-interview period. This includes maintaining good communication with administrative contacts, following-up with any outstanding items you promised to provide during the interview (i.e. additional documents), and being patient while waiting for decisions.
4. **Prepare for Next Steps:** Whether that means preparing for another round of interviews or evaluating other opportunities, staying proactive will help you manage feelings of uncertainty during the post-interview time and help prepare you to make informed decisions. Meet with a Career Coach to explore alternative opportunities and career paths that align with your personal and professional goals and match your interests.

Still Have Questions?

Do you need assistance with preparing for your medical school interviews or mock practice, reach out to Career Services. You can book a 1-1 appointment through [MyCareer](#) or come during the [drop-in hours](#).