

Professional School Interview Preparation

Preparation: Prior to Your Interview

- Perform a thorough mental inventory of your background: Be able to articulate what makes you **unique**.
- Learn everything you can about the field you wish to enter: history, recent developments, trends, specific disciplines, leaders, problems, etc.
- Learn everything about the school you wish to enter: faculty, curriculum, requirements, specialties, uniqueness, history, organization locations, expansion plans, reputation, major achievements, etc.
- Be aware of current events: local, state, national, and international.
- Learn everything you can about what happens during admissions interviews
 - Ask about the itinerary of the day: How long should I plan on being on-site?
 - Will there be any activities scheduled?
- Confirm location, time, date, parking directions, and who you should ask for upon arrival
- What do interviewers look for and assess?
 - What kinds of questions are asked?
 - What kinds of interviewing approaches do students encounter?
- Prepare your credentials carefully: What kind of image do you want to communicate prior to the interview?
- Be prepared to clarify or elaborate on anything in your application. **Study it!**
- Make a list of questions you would like to ask. If given the opportunity, it is important to ask appropriate questions of the interviewer.
- Be prepared to face a multiple-person interview committee.
- Find out what the complete interview process involves such as a tour, lunch, and meeting with other students. Sometimes, schools will make arrangements for you to stay overnight with another student.

Self-Analysis Prior to the Admissions Interview

- What are my personality strengths and weaknesses?
 - Am I dependable, honest, moral standards, motivated, assertive, outgoing, open-minded, mature, conscientious, ambitious, punctual, emotionally stable, ability to motivate others?
- What are my intellectual strengths and weaknesses?
 - Am I creative, intelligent, analytical, organized? Do I have the ability to follow instructions or learn quickly?
- What are my communicative strengths and weaknesses?
 - Do I have a strong ability to communicate with people orally and in writing? Am I a good listener?
- What are my professional strengths and weaknesses?
 - What formal and informal training, vocational and volunteer experiences have I participated in? What are my references or memberships in professional organizations?
 - What are my on-the-job strengths and weaknesses? Examples might include: attendance, willingness to work long hours including evenings and weekends, ability to make good use of time, desire to work hard, ability to accept criticism, attention to detail, ability to work under pressure?
- Instead of talking about weaknesses, talk about areas of improvement and explain how you are working on those areas.
- What are my professional interests and disinterests? Can I articulate areas of study, specialization, administration, travel, relocation, short and long range goals?
- Why do I want to be a (Physician, lawyer, research scientist)?
 - Examples include: challenge, responsibility, job security, people contact, independence, involvement in decision-making, duties, benefits, salary, societal impact?
- What are my most valued needs as a human being?
 - Examples may include: professional recognition, advancement, success, family, lasting relationships, salary, and free time?
- Why did I attend my University and how happy am I with this decision?

- Examples include: size of school, prestige, areas of study, students, faculty, nearness to my home, recommendations of others, sports?
- Why did I study and how happy am I with this choice?
 - Examples might include: job opportunities, personal abilities, reputation of the school, subject matter, challenge, and advice from parents, advisors, or faculty.

Taking Part in the Interview

- Be on time -- even early, but no more than 10 minutes.
- Be neat and appropriately dressed.
- Bring a leather binder and pen to take notes.
- Be polite and courteous to **everyone** you meet.
- Go into the interview with the mindset **they want you!**
- Do not arrive at the interview expecting the worst; the worst may happen because you expect it.
- Remember that the first 3-4 minutes are crucial to a successful interview.
- Be interested in the interview and the school and show it! SMILE! A positive attitude makes a great impression.
- When answering questions:
 - Listen carefully to each question and to information given.
 - Do not interrupt or try to second guess the interviewer.
 - Think before answering tough questions.
 - Do not try to bluff the interviewer; if you do not know an answer, say so.
 - Answer all questions thoroughly, honestly, to the point, and with good grammar and choice of language.
 - Avoid overkill in answers.
 - Avoid under kill in answers.
 - Do not make excuses or be defensive; give reasons and explanations for weaknesses or past problems.
 - Refrain from developing phony, canned answers to commonly asked questions.
 - Do not dismiss a question too quickly as "irrelevant" or "dumb."
- Close the interview in high gear, not a sigh of relief. Use a firm handshake, smile and thank the interviewers. Show them you appreciate their time.

What Interviewers Look For and Assess

Three (3) general criteria

- *Intellectual ability*: assessed by GPA, reputation of undergraduate school, difficulty of courses taken, and overall performance in courses related to the field that you want to study.
- *Work/field-related skills*: work experience (whether you have managed resources, people, projects, or portfolios).
- *Personal characteristics*: evidence of leadership, maturity, integrity, responsibility, and teamwork.

Integrity: ethics, morals, sincerity, honesty, responsibility, dependability, and genuineness.

Ability to communicate: nonverbal communication (voice, eye-contact, gestures, posture, nervous mannerisms, handshake, facial expressions), verbal communication (language, grammar, ability to organize and express ideas in answers and questions, ability to listen).

Personality and human relations skills: ability to create a favorable first impression, understanding of others, tolerance, empathy, sense of humor, warmth, ability to relate, interest in and desire to help people, compassion, objectivity, tactfulness, open-mindedness, independence, self-reliance.

Maturity: Goal orientation; understanding of the field and daily work of a.....; knowledge of trends, issues, problems, strengths and weaknesses, and developments in the chosen field realistic self-concept.

Motivation: strength of desire to enter the field, knowledge and desire to attend this school, initiative, drive, enthusiasm, perseverance.

Emotional stability: ability to handle pressure and stress, ability to carry out responsibilities, self-discipline, self-confidence, mental alertness.

Experiences: vocationally oriented curricular and extra curricular activities in college, work with people in the chosen field.

Knowledge and exposure to: of current events and trends, of the theories and practical applications of these theories to the chosen field.

Physical bearing: poise, appearance (neatness, appropriate dress, grooming).

Sample Interview Questions

Maturity

- What major decisions have you made on your own?
- What responsibilities have you had? How did you solve a difficult problem in your life?
- What have you learned by dealing with problems or disappointments in the past?
- How do you manage stress?

Leadership

- What experiences have you had leading large or small groups of people?
- Are you more comfortable leading or following? Why is that?
- What did you learn about people, situations, and yourself?
- What did you contribute as an organization's leader?

Motivation

- Why do you want to become a (physician, dentist, psychologist)?
- What and who influenced this decision?
- What activities or accomplishments indicate your interest in this type of career?
- How have you demonstrated self-motivation in other aspects of your life?
- Why would you be a good (doctor, dentist, psychologist etc...)?
- What do you have to offer the field?
- What would you do if you don't get into professional school?

Logical Thought

- Tell me about a time when you tackled a novel problem in a logical, step-by-step fashion.
- The interviewer is likely to present a hypothetical problem having no right answer. The idea is to see how you can think on your feet. The nature of the solution doesn't matter as long as you arrive at it in a logical fashion and can support your ideas.

Open-Mindedness

- Tell me about a time when you saw both sides of a problem regardless of your personal opinion?
- Can you describe a time when you changed your mind when you learned more about a particular situation?
- Did your extra-curricular activities expose you to individuals with cultural backgrounds different from yours? What did you learn about yourself from those experiences?

Sensitivity & Compassion

- How can you tell if someone is truly passionate?
- How have you shown your sensitivity to others' problems?
- If you want to help people, why don't you go into social work?
- Would you share your religious beliefs with your clients?
- What do you feel are the most important qualities in being a good (doctor, dentist, psychologist)?

Goal Orientation

- What are your ultimate goals or dreams? (They may or may not be related to your career.)

- What events in your background reflect an ability to rise above adversity? Can you demonstrate a “self-starting” ability?
- How will you pay for professional school?
- How do you measure success?
- What is your “cause”?
- Who is your hero?

Strengths and Weaknesses

- What are three things you want to change about yourself?
- What is the one thing that distinguishes you from the rest of the candidates?
- Describe a time when you failed. How did you handle it?
- How would your friends describe you?
- Name something you are most proud of?

Specifics to the School or Program

- How are you a match for our school? Why should we admit you?
- What scares you the most about _____ the course of study _____?
- Where else have you applied?
- What would you do if you got in everywhere and what would you do if you got in nowhere?

Additional Questions for a Medical School Interview (Random, hypothetical, ethical, controversial - which do not have a right or wrong answer) **Use the concepts below to help guide your responses:**

1. Realize a correct response is one which falls within a fairly broad range; in other words, there is not necessarily a right or wrong answer.
2. Be consistent in your remarks.
3. Always answer with a patient-focused approach.
 - What would you do if you caught your roommate cheating on his AMCAS application?
 - What do you think about the disadvantages and advantages of managed care?
 - Would you tell a patient they are dying?
 - If you had a magic pen, what would you do to remedy healthcare in America?
 - What is your opinion of the Teri Schiavo case?
 - Do you believe in Stem Cell research?
 - Would you perform abortions as a doctor? Under what conditions?
 - How would you describe the relationship between science and medicine?
 - Are you familiar with the lifestyle of students and professionals in this field?
 - Where did you get your information?
 - Are you ready to commit yourself to a healthcare career at this time? What are some of the things you will have to give up?
 - Describe a current controversial healthcare issue related to your intended field.
 - What is the biggest problem facing medicine today?
 - In what field do you think will be the next major advancement in the medicine?

<h3>Post-interview Analysis</h3>

- Caution: Do not overreact to feedback or your perceptions that the interview did not go well.
- Do a thorough review after each interview:
 - What communication problems did you encounter?
 - What information did you not have?
 - Which questions did you have trouble answering?
 - How well did you handle stress situations?
 - How did this interview compare to previous interviews you have had?
 - What weaknesses were revealed, and what can you do about them?
 - What "surprises" did you encounter and how might you prepare for them for the next interview?
- Write a thank you note to the interviewer or members of the committee.