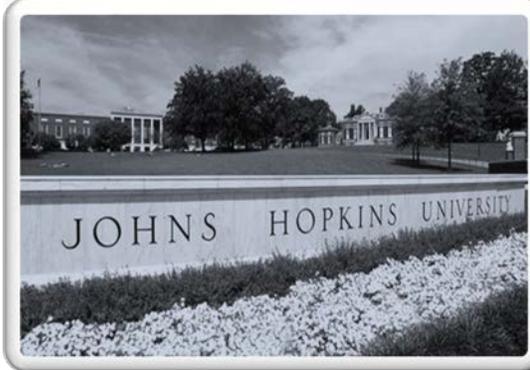


GUIDE FIVE

The Pre-Med/Pre-Dental Interview Process

Johns Hopkins University



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Preface

The guidelines presented in this document provide important details for Johns Hopkins undergraduates and alumni as they relate to the intention of applying to allopathic (MD), osteopathic (DO), and dental (DDS, DMD) school, all of which utilize the Committee Letter process offered at Johns Hopkins University. Details of the support provided for applicants to other health professions schools, including veterinary medicine, nursing, optometry, pharmacy, etc., are covered in individual guides available on the Pre-Professional website: <http://web.jhu.edu/prepro/health.Health.professions.guides>.

Reference in this Guide to “medical school” refers to applicants to allopathic (MD), osteopathic (DO), and dental (DDS, DMD) school.

Focus of Guide Five

“Guide Five: The Pre-Med/Pre-Dental Interview Process” focuses on the questions applicants have as they prepare for medical and dental school interviews. In Guide Five, we have chosen to present information in a Q&A format, under specific categories. Please keep in mind that some of your questions also may be addressed in “Guide Four: The Ongoing Application Process,” so it is important to review both documents for access to information. The ongoing medical school application process is complicated and requires endurance, considerable attention, organization, and professionalism. We wish you the best of luck in the months ahead!

Professionalism

It is critical that you are professional throughout this process, particularly in how you approach, provide information to, and express appreciation for the efforts of those members of Johns Hopkins University and medical school communities involved with the admissions process. Be mindful of your verbal and non-verbal communication, including eye contact, handshake, interview attire, and courtesy. Remember that you are representing yourself as well as Johns Hopkins University, and that professionalism is a key ingredient of a successful applicant and successful career!

The decision to grant you an interview commits the resources of the professional school admissions process to you for the interview day and, of necessity, eliminates another candidate from the interview process. If you are offered an interview, take the first available appointment and make plans to keep this appointment. Canceling an interview or not showing up causes great problems for a professional school, for our future applicants to that school, and often for your premed advisor, who then gets a phone call from that school's dean asking for help in assuring that our other applicants will appear for interviews. If an emergency occurs, we encourage you to contact one of us immediately to discuss the issues and the appropriate response.

Overview

You should look forward to your interviews as an opportunity for the admissions committee to know you and understand your commitments and goals. Before the day of your interview, review both your primary application and the secondary application for that school. You should review the material the school has sent you, look closely at their website, and be prepared to discuss why you are specifically interested in their program.

Each professional school will approach the interview process in different ways, but they will all generally be working to understand your strengths and weaknesses in the following areas:

- **Interpersonal skills.** You must demonstrate throughout the interview day the interpersonal skills needed to be successful in practice. Strong communication skills, awareness of the needs of others, and the compassion to respond to those needs must be evident.
- **Problem-solving skills.** Interviewers will want to know how you approach decision-making. They may ask about your problem-solving, attention to detail, flexibility, and acceptance of opinions that differ from your own. When asked a question around a complex issue, do not simply answer "yes" or "no" but give the interviewer insight into how you have arrived at that decision.
- **Challenges faced.** What challenges or obstacles have you faced, and how have you overcome them? What mistakes have you made, and how did you change or learn as a result of the issue? How have you dealt with academic difficulties, challenges in the lab, a failed leadership situation, or overcome a personal conflict?
- **Diversity.** Many medical schools want to know how you will bring diversity to the medical class. For some people, the answer may be about race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. But other applicants need to think in broader terms. It may help to give thought to your volunteer experiences within the community, working with underserved or underrepresented populations.
- **Teamwork.** Working in health care means you'll be working in teams for the betterment of your patients. Medical schools will want to hear your beliefs about what constitutes good teamwork, as well as examples of teamwork that went awry.
- **Leadership.** Certainly it's great if you hold a formal leadership position within a club or organization. But leadership doesn't always equate to a title such as president, vice president, or secretary. Think of situations in which you have lead, supervised, or organized others or an event.
- **Commitment to your chosen profession.** You must convince the interviewer that you have made a mature, well-informed decision to pursue a career in medicine. You must demonstrate an understanding of the demands and realities of a life in that profession and of your emotional, intellectual, and physical ability to meet these challenges.



- **Academic readiness.** The admissions committee will need to be assured that you will be successful in the school's curriculum. If there are questions that ensue from your academic record, be prepared to answer them openly and honestly.

Preparing for Interviews

Q. Does the Pre-Prof. Office offer mock interviews?

A. No. We encourage our students to utilize the services of our Career Center and [Handshake](#). As an alternative, we encourage you to ask a work associate, friend, or family member to conduct a mock interview with you. We suggest you share with him/her the list of interview questions in this Guide (see next page).



Q. How can I best prepare for an interview?

A. There is no one right way to prepare for a medical school interview. There needs to be a balance between (1) preparing for anticipated interview questions along with reviewing your responses on primary and secondary applications and (2) formulating in your mind some very clear and distinct take-away messages that you would like the interviewer to remember about you and your candidacy. Be sure to have very well developed questions to ask about the medical or dental school and make sure you have carefully read the web site of the particular school, and ask only those questions that are not already obviously covered online. Asking questions that are germane to a particular school is more impressive than generic questions. To get you thinking about appropriate questions, go to: [Thirty-Five Questions I Wish I Had Asked](#).

Q. In preparation for the interview should I carefully practice "canned" answers for any possible questions?

A. No. Remember the ideal interview is a conversation. There is nothing more frustrating for an interviewer than talking with a candidate who is simply responding to specific questions with general, rehearsed answers. While you should certainly practice your answers, they should never sound "canned" or robotic. Engage in conversation and enjoy the opportunity to discuss your vision and goals.

Additional Resources for General Interviewing

As with any interview, it is important to be well prepared for whatever questions may come your way. Here are some typical interview questions that you should be prepared to answer (provided by the National Association of Advisors for the Health Professions). Remember, preparation is important, but you don't want your answers to sound over-rehearsed.

Tell me about yourself.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

Why have you chosen medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, etc. as a career?

Why did you choose to major in _____?

What has been the most rewarding experience of your college (or post-college) years?

What have you recently read for fun?

Why do you want to go to this school?

Why do you think you are a good candidate?

What do you consider your greatest weakness?

Tell me about your research.

What would you do if you were not accepted to medical/dental school?

Tell me about your job/internship from last summer?

What was your most enjoyable course in college, and why?

What do you like to do in your spare time?

What do you see as the greatest problem facing our healthcare system today? (In general be prepared to discuss current events in healthcare.)

Although this is not an exhaustive list, it gives you some idea of what to expect from your interviewer.

We also suggest you review AAMC.org for extensive interview resources.

Interview Etiquette

Q. Is it acceptable to take a school up on its offer to stay with medical school students overnight?

A. Yes. Students volunteer to host applicants because they are genuinely interested in sharing information about their school and community. These student hosts are not coerced into offering a space on their couch. This is a great way to gain insight into a medical school. Be pleasant and polite and full of thanks. No need to stay in a hotel when you have a chance to get an insider's perspective!

Q. Do applicants need to dress in black or navy blue suits and ties to be successful in gaining admission?

A. No. It is important to dress appropriately, but it is not necessary for everyone to be dressed in the same conservative uniform. Be yourself. Do not wear jeans, but there is nothing wrong with a red sweater and black skirt or gray suit with a pink tie. Ladies—make sure you can sit in your dress or skirt, and that you can walk in your shoes. It's better to err on the side of dressing conservatively.



Q. During the interview day, is it advised to speak only when spoken to and never ask unsolicited questions?

A. No. The interview day should be a series of conversations and opportunities to get to know some interesting people and for the school's representatives to get to know you. Hopefully, there will be a comfortable exchange of questions and answers. Enjoy the day and approach your interviews with an open and engaging attitude.

Q. Since the applicants are competing against each other, is it ok to be sociable and make the other applicants in the group feel relaxed or comfortable?

A: Yes! You should not think of fellow interviewers as competition because they may be future classmates. Successful applicants will be the individuals who are able to look beyond their own anxiety and reach out to make everyone in the group feel more relaxed and comfortable. The schools are looking for people who are confident enough to care about others.

Q. During the interview, will I be asked "why is medicine your career choice?"

A. The answer to this question must be revealed in some way during the interview. If the response during the interview is "well, I don't really know," OR "I can't really put it into words," the committee response will be very clear: "NO!"

Q. One must be nice to the doctors and deans during the interview day, but is it acceptable to "let your hair down" with the students and support staff?

A. Committees want you to be yourself. However, if you are disrespectful, unprofessional, or exhibit rude behavior, the admissions staff will assume that you respond to patients in the same manner.

Q. During an interview should I admit to having faced difficult experiences in life?

A. Admissions committees would rather accept students who have learned from an experience of failure or frustration over someone who has yet to have this learning opportunity. Be straightforward about any challenges, and then explain what you have learned from the experience and how it will ultimately make you a better physician.

Q. During an interview, is it ok to say "I don't know anything about that subject" or should I fake my way through a vague response, in hopes that the interviewer will not notice?

A. Just as a physician needs to say "I don't know" at times, so does a medical school applicant. Be honest about the limits of your knowledge, perhaps express an interest in researching the answer after the interview, but never simply pretend to know something about an issue.

Q. If an interviewer asks inappropriate questions during an interview, should I tell anyone at the school or would telling hurt my application?

A. Committees are aware that even the most extensive training programs for interviewers sometimes fail. You can share specific and immediate concerns if the school provides an "end of the day" evaluation form. In many cases, it's best to first discuss the scenario with a Pre-Prof advisor so that we can offer guidance on sharing your concerns with the Dean or Director of Admissions in a professional manner. The medical schools genuinely want to get to know you and can best do this with a fair interview process.

Q. When we get invited for an interview and are given the name of the interviewer, should we contact him/her prior to the interview?

A. No, that's not necessary.

Q. Do you have any tips for group interviews when you're with multiple applicants?

A. Be aware of group dynamics. Acknowledge and recognize others in the group; talk as a team.

Q. How do I prepare for a Multiple Mini Interview (MMI)?

A. We have an entire section devoted to this unique interview style. Please see the next page.

Q. For lunch interviews with medical students, what should we say? How reserved should we be? Is this a safe time to let our guard down a little?

A. This is still part of your interview, so you need to maintain a level of appropriateness at all times. You may be able to relax a bit, but still remember you are in the middle of a medical school interview.

Q. How should we answer a medical school interviewer who asks, "What other schools have you applied to?"

A. In general, medical schools should not be asking you this question. However, if someone does ask, give careful consideration to your reply. It is best to avoid listing the schools to which you applied, since it is unethical for the medical schools to know this information during the interview process. If you feel pressured to answer, however, be diplomatic and courteous in your reply. Do not be combative.

Q. How should I follow up with a medical or dental school following an interview?

A. After an interview, send thank you notes or emails to everyone who interviewed you. When sending a thank you note, it is your responsibility to know the mode of communication (email or snail mail) preferred by each school. When writing your thank you, you will want to remember to (a) appropriately greet the person, (b) express your appreciation for the interview, (c) refer to something specific or personal about your visit to the school, (d) reiterate your appreciation, and (e) sign off. Be careful when emailing multiple schools that you do not state a specific school name.



We also recommend you send a formal letter to the Dean/Director of Admissions, expressing your appreciation and recalling an aspect(s) of your interview experience that stood out. **Keep this correspondence to one page or less.**

The Multiple Mini Interview

The Multiple Mini-Interview (MMI) is used by several medical schools as part of the admissions process. The purpose of the MMI is to assess your analytical and problem solving skills, communication skills, integrity, and ethics. It is not a cognitive assessment to test your knowledge. This approach to interviewing typically consists of six to ten timed stations through which applicants rotate. Many applicants like that MMIs offer less interviewer biases since you meet a number of people during the MMI process (rather than just one or two interviewers in a traditional setting).

Here is the basic format:

- Outside of each station (a room), the applicant is presented with a question, scenario, or task.
- The applicant has approximately two minutes to read the question and form an answer, and then five to eight minutes to discuss it with the interviewer.
- Each station has a different question, scenario, or task. Possible stations may include a question about health care policies, an ethical dilemma, a writing prompt, an open-ended question for you to speak about any topic of your choice, or even just a rest station for which you can take a break and regroup.

MMIs are significantly different than the traditional interview, so it is helpful to become familiar with the structure, logic and expectations of the format. More information about the MMI is available on these sites:

- [AAMC](#)
- [New York University School of Medicine](#)
- [Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine](#)
- [Prep for the Multiple Mini Interview](#)
- http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/11/health/policy/11docs.html?_r=2&

Not Been Invited to Any Interviews?

Q. What should I do if I have not received any invitations to interview?

A. Once your file is complete at the medical and dental schools, it can be acted upon in a relatively expeditious manner or put into a holding status for continuing review or, in some cases, put into a category where the likelihood for future review is unlikely. Unfortunately, when applicants are put into the latter category, a rejection is not always forthcoming until later in the winter or spring. If you submitted your application by August or September and have not been invited for an interview by December, it may be acceptable to send a letter that indicates your interest in the school that states (1) why you are a good fit for their program(s), and (2) includes any updates. If you choose to send fall semester grades, an unofficial transcript attached to your letter is sufficient. (The Pre-Professional Office does not handle transcripts before or after you have applied.) Please make sure you know how each school prefers to receive supplemental materials. **We strongly recommend you make an appointment with a Pre-Professional advisor to further discuss your situation.** It is very important to assess what might be holding you back from being offered interviews, so that you can immediately address any identified weaknesses.

Q. What if I am on “hold” prior to a potential interview invite?

A. If you have a “hold” status before you are interviewed, it means that your application is being set aside for the time being and that you may be reconsidered for an interview at a later date. Unfortunately, medical schools typically do not offer many interviews to applicants who are on “hold.” When you are notified of a “hold” status, you should send a follow-up letter to express your continued interest in the school.

Q. Why haven’t I received an invitation to interview?

A. It is important to realistically assess your qualifications throughout the application process. A single low score in an MCAT section or a low overall MCAT score can result in an application not being competitive. The same goes with GPA cutoffs. A low science (BCPM) GPA can disqualify an applicant. Similarly, this can also be the case for an applicant with a low “all other” (AO) GPA. It is very hard to overcome a low MCAT or GPA. Applicants must also remember that having strong numbers is not enough. The candidate must show a proven commitment to service, notable medically-related experience, leadership, teamwork, etc.

Q. What do I do if I received a rejection from a school where I was sure I would receive an interview?

A. Figuring out how a particular medical and dental school makes its admissions decisions can be bewildering. Even the strongest applicant should prepare to receive rejections in the application process. While it is very difficult to accept not receiving an interview to a particular school, you must work to keep this in perspective. Sometimes students can be invited for multiple interviews only to find out that they were put on hold or rejected from the very school they believed to be their best bet. Focus on schools that show interest in you and follow up where appropriate.

Q. At what point in the process should I be concerned that I might not be accepted?

A. If a few months have passed and you have not moved off of a waitlist or hold, or if you have had no interviews, we strongly recommend that you speak with one of the Pre-Professional advisors to help you assess the strengths and weaknesses of your application. We consider each

applicant on a case-by-case basis, so we will discuss next steps and possible reapplications at your individual meeting.

More information about update letters, letters of interest, and letters of intent is addressed in [Guide Four](#).

In Closing

Navigating your way through academic requirements at Johns Hopkins is, in itself, a challenge that takes careful planning and great patience. If you are pursuing pre-medical or pre-dental requirements, the academic planning process requires precision, adaptability, and flexibility. Each student's academic path is unique and the one you set for yourself should take into account your ability to handle multiple sciences, your emerging strengths as a student, and a timeline that is yours alone. Most of all, we encourage you to seek input from your advisors to make sense of your situation and to devise a plan that is appropriate for your emerging academic and professional goals.

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