

GUIDE FIVE

The Pre-Med/Pre-Dental Interview Process

Johns Hopkins University



Office of Pre-Professional Programs and Advising
<http://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/preprofadvising/>

Preface

This guide provides important details for Johns Hopkins University undergraduates and alumni who are in the process of applying to allopathic (MD), osteopathic (DO) and dental (DDS, DMD) school. Reference in this guide to “medical school” refers to allopathic (MD), osteopathic (DO) and dental (DDS, DMD) school.

Focus of Guide Five

Guide Five: The Pre-Med/Pre-Dental Interview Process answers applicant questions related to medical school admissions interviews. 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 a complete picture of the medical school interview process. 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!

Overview

Interviews are an opportunity for the admissions committee to learn more about you and understand your goals. If you have been invited to an interview, rest assured that the medical/dental school considers you a qualified candidate and hopes to evaluate whether you would be a good fit for their school. Each school will approach the interview process in different ways, but they will generally be working to understand your strengths and weaknesses in the following areas:

- **Interpersonal skills.** Throughout the interview day, you must demonstrate 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.** What challenges or obstacles have you faced and how have you overcome them? How have you dealt with academic difficulties, challenges in the lab, a failed leadership situation, or overcome a personal conflict? What mistakes have you made, what did you learn, and how did you change as a result of the issue?
- **Diversity.** Many medical schools want to know how you will bring diversity to the medical class. For some applicants, the answer may be their 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, including time spent working with underserved or underrepresented populations.

- **Teamwork.** A career in health will require you to work 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 and what you learned from those experiences.
- **Leadership.** Certainly, you may reflect on a formal leadership position within a club or organization. But leadership doesn't always equate to serving on the executive board. Think of situations in which you have led, supervised, or organized others, or taken the lead on coordinating an event or other initiative.
- **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 daily demands and realities of that profession and of your emotional, intellectual, and physical ability to rise to the challenge.
- **Academic readiness.** The admissions committee will need to be assured that you will be successful in the school's curriculum. If there are questions related to your academic record, be prepared to answer them openly and honestly.



Professionalism

It is critical that you are professional throughout the entire medical school application process, particularly with respect to how you approach, provide information to, and express appreciation for the efforts of all those 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 medical career!

Logistics:

If you are granted an interview, take the first available appointment and make plans to keep this appointment. If you need to reschedule or cancel your interview, promptly contact the Office of Admissions. Failing to show up to an interview greatly inconveniences a medical school and negatively impacts our current and future applicants to that school.

Attire:

An organized, clean appearance matters. Most applicants choose to wear dark suits with a solid color dress shirt or blouse, but that's not to say you can't add a pop of color. Be yourself, but remember that it's better to err on the side of dressing conservatively.

Preparing for Interviews

Mock Interviews

Medical school applicants are invited to participate in the Pre-Professional Office's [Virtual Mock Interview Program](#). Applicants must have at least one scheduled interview with a medical or dental school in order to be eligible to participate in the mock interview program. 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 Appendix). We also suggest reviewing the interview preparation materials on Blackboard and on the Pre-Professional Advising [website](#).



General Interview Prep Tips

There is no one right way to prepare for a medical school interview. You must maintain a balance between (1) preparing for anticipated interview questions, (2) reviewing your responses on primary and secondary applications, and (3) formulating in your mind some very clear and distinct points that you would like the interviewer to remember about you and your candidacy. Be sure to prepare thoughtful questions to ask your interviewers. Make sure you have carefully reviewed the website of the school and ask only those questions that are not already answered online. Asking questions that are specific to a particular school will be more impressive than asking generic questions. To start thinking about appropriate questions for your interviewers, go to: [Selecting a Medical School: 35 Questions I Wish I Had Asked](#).

Do Not Memorize “Canned” Answers

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.

During Your Interviews

Avoid behaving in a disrespectful or inappropriate manner to *anyone* you encounter on your interview day, including support staff, medical students, and other applicants. If you are unprofessional or exhibit rude behavior, the admissions staff will assume that you respond to patients in the same manner and this behavior will negatively impact your chances of admission.

During an interview, give direct, thorough answers. If you are asked a question that you do not know how to answer, be honest about the limits of your knowledge. Perhaps you can express an interest in researching the answer after the interview, but never simply pretend to know something about an issue. That strategy will undoubtedly backfire.

If you have a group interview, acknowledge and recognize others in the group, treat your fellow applicants as a team, and demonstrate your teamwork skills. You should not think of fellow

interviewees as competition—they may become your future classmates. Medical schools are looking for people who are confident enough to care about the comfort of others and who have the soft skills to build a rapport even among people who are in competition with one another.

After Your Interviews

If an interviewer asked inappropriate questions during an interview, you can and should share specific and immediate concerns if the school provides an evaluation form for you to rate your interview experience. In many cases, it's best to first discuss the scenario with a Pre-Professional Advisor so that we can offer guidance on the appropriate way to express your concerns with the medical school admissions staff in a professional manner. The medical schools genuinely want their interview process to be fair and would appreciate receiving feedback so that they may address your concerns.

After an interview, send thank you emails to everyone who interviewed you. If you were unable to obtain an interviewer's email, you may send your message to the Office of Admissions, who can then forward it to your interviewer. You should 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 misstate 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 fewer 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 of the MMI:

- 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.

The MMI is 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](#)

Haven't Been Invited for Any Interviews?

Once your file is complete at the medical and dental schools, you may receive an immediate response, your file may be put on hold (for continuing review) or, in some cases, put into a category where the likelihood for future review is unlikely.

If you have a “hold” status, 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.

Unfortunately, when the likelihood for future review is unlikely, a rejection is not always forthcoming until later in the winter or spring. If your file was complete by August or September and you have not been invited for an interview by December, it may be acceptable to send a letter of interest to schools that states (1) why you are a good fit for their program(s), and (2) includes any updates. Please make sure you know how each school prefers to receive supplemental materials and updates. **If you have not received an interview by December, we also 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.

It is important to realistically assess your qualifications throughout the application process to understand why you may have not received any interview invitations. A single low score in an MCAT section or a low overall MCAT score can result in an unsuccessful application. The same goes with grades. A low BCPM GPA or cumulative undergraduate GPA can hurt an applicant's chances. It is difficult to overcome a low MCAT score or GPA in the application process. On the other hand, applicants must remember that having strong metrics is not enough to succeed. All

applicants must also demonstrate a commitment to service, substantial clinical experience, leadership, teamwork, etc.

Nevertheless, determining 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 medical school application process. While it is very difficult to accept not receiving an interview to a particular school, you must keep this process in perspective. This is a very competitive process and success is not guaranteed even for the strongest applicants. Focus on schools that show interest in you and follow up when appropriate.

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 plans for reapplication in an individual advising meeting.

More information about update letters, letters of interest, and letters of intent can be found in *Guide Four*.

In Closing

Interviewing for medical and dental schools is an exciting, but stressful, time. We encourage you to stay active, socialize with friends and family, engage in hobbies, etc. in order to manage your stress during this time.

We wish you all the best during interview season, and we suggest you keep in touch with a Pre-Professional advisor if you have questions or concerns about your application.

APPENDIX

Sample Interview Questions

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. Remember, preparation is important, but you don't want your answers to sound over-rehearsed.

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why have you chosen medicine/dentistry as a career?
- Where do you see yourself in 10 years?
- What has been the most rewarding experience of your college (or post-college) years?
- Tell me about a time when you made a mistake.
- Tell me about a time you worked in a team.
- Why do you want to go to this school?
- Why do you think you are a good candidate for medical/dental school?
- What do you consider your greatest weakness?
- Tell me about your research.
- Tell me about your job/internship from last summer.
- What would you do if you were not accepted to medical/dental school?
- Why did you choose to major in _____?
- What was your most enjoyable course in college, and why?
- What do you like to do in your spare time?
- What have you recently read for fun?
- What are three adjectives that your friends would use to describe you?
- 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 the extensive interviewing resources found on primary application websites:

[AMCAS](#)
[AACOMAS](#)
[TMDSAS](#)
[AADSAS](#)