



Interview Preparation Guide 2023-2024





Welcome to our interview preparation guide! We hope you find this helpful ahead of interview season. If you are interested in scheduling a mock interview with an expert resident advisor in your dream specialty, reach out to us on our website, matchpalmedical.com, or via email at matchpalmedical@gmail.com to schedule a free consultation!

Part 1: Structure of Interview Day

The structure of residency interviews varies widely by specialty and program. With most interviews still occurring virtually, it is important to make the most of this experience to learn about your potential training program and city! Generally, you can expect the following:

- Pre-interview “Meet and Greet”
- Opening remarks
- Informational session
- Time to interact with residents
- Interviews
- Closing remarks

Some programs will offer additional sessions, such as a virtual tour or information on unique initiatives at the program. Other programs will forgo informational presentations in favor of sending a brochure via email. Interview days for preliminary positions can be particularly abbreviated.

Face time with residents is particularly important in the era of virtual interviews as it gives an insight into program culture. Make the most of it!

All in all, the interview day can range from 15 minutes to 8 hours depending on the program.

Generally, the interview itself will consist of between 1 and 6 interviews. You may be interviewed by a single faculty member or resident, or by a small panel. Generally you will be interviewed by at least one of the program directors or assistant program directors. Individual interview sessions most often range in length from 10 minutes to 30 minutes.

For most cases, interviews will be purely conversational. It is possible to be “pimped” on clinical knowledge, or asked to demonstrate technical skills on camera (e.g. suturing), particularly in procedural specialties, but this is the exception rather than the rule. It is to your benefit to get in touch with mentors and peers who have received similar interviews in the past to make sure you are well prepared for any scenario!

Part 2: Top 10 Most Common Interview Questions

- Tell me about yourself?
- Why do you want to do this specialty?
- Why do you want to come to this program?
- Tell me about a challenge or failure and how you overcame it?
- What are your strengths / most desirable attributes ? What are your weaknesses?
- What questions do you have for me?
- What do you do when you aren't studying?
- How do you deal with stress?
- Where do you see yourself in 10 years?
- Tell me about an interesting case or time you had an impact on a patient?

Part 3: Formulating Your Responses

When responding to an interview question, you are being asked to perform in multiple areas: being genuine, seeming affable and articulate, and, importantly, providing a good answer to the question itself. There are several types of questions that can be asked in a residency interview, which will vary widely by interviewer, program, and specialty. If you find yourself struggling with consistently providing strong responses in an interview setting, keep reading to learn about tips on giving more structured answers.

Many questions that give applicants pause are “behavioral” interview questions, which ask how you have approached or would approach challenging scenarios. A commonly used technique to optimize your responses is called the STAR method: describe a Situation, talk about the Task that you were responsible for, detail the Action you took, and finally give the Result from or your Reflection on the experience. This method can be highly effective at keeping you on track to deliver an excellent answer to the question posed, but remember to be genuine and avoid coming off as formulaic or too rehearsed in your response. An example might be if an interviewer asked you describe a time you dealt with conflict in a team-based setting, and you used the STAR method to describe the time you resolved a disagreement between two classmates during one of your didactic sessions in medical school.

It is common to be asked about experiences, projects, jobs, or hobbies from your ERAS application and CV. If you are asked to describe an experience in detail, consider using a similar technique for answering these questions. This has never been coined before, but we can call this the 4 C's method. Give Context to the experience, describe the Conflict that had to be overcome, detail the Climax or the biggest highlight, and give your Conclusion or reflection on the experience. This will naturally create a narrative, be more engaging, and show your genuine passion for what you have spent your time doing! For example, as opposed to giving an unstructured response about how you like rock climbing, you can describe how you started rock climbing 3 years ago at your school's gym, you had to overcome an ankle injury that set you back, but you still managed to persevere and climb a route that you couldn't have imagined doing when you started, and you have a new level of grit from participating in this sport.

STAR Method

Situation
Task
Action
Result

4 C's Method

Context
Conflict
Climax
Conclusion

If you list a research project on your application, you are expected to be an expert on this topic. Your response should reflect this. Some interviewers will know very little about your area of research, while others could be at the forefront of the field. Your job is to explain why the topic was investigated, the clinical importance and implications of the results, and what your roles in the project were. Be sure to mention research productivity that arose from the project (e.g. publications, presentations).

Remember, if you are thrown off by a question, it is perfectly acceptable to state: "That is a great question, and I have not been asked that before. I'm going to take a moment to ponder that." Taking ten to fifteen seconds to collect yourself and deliver an organized response shows poise and maturity, and no one will fault you for it.

Sometimes interviewers will ask "illegal" questions, i.e. questions that are against the law or in violation of NRMP rules. Examples include questions about certain demographic characteristics (e.g. What is your religion? Are you married? When do you plan on having children?) or information about your application (e.g. Where else are you applying/interviewing? What is your top choice program? Where will you rank our program?). If you are asked any of these questions, keep in mind that you do NOT have to provide answers if you are uncomfortable in doing so. It is also important to keep note if this happens so you can factor that into your rank list.

Overall, the most important thing is to practice, practice, practice. Mock interviews are instrumental in making your responses more polished, and training you to be more adaptable when faced with a novel question. Keep a word document with your responses to common questions, and update this throughout the interview season. Develop a bank of anecdotes that demonstrate your best qualities and can be deployed in response to a variety of questions. If you follow these tips above, your responses will surely be articulate, organized, and effective, and you can focus on letting your genuine self shine on interview day!

Part 4: Select Interview Questions with Sample Answers

Why do you want to live in Boston?

Having lived in New York City my entire life, I am accustomed to the metropolitan lifestyle and the patient demographic that comes along with it. Boston offers everything I seek in terms of city living, nature, and social offerings, while maintaining the diverse population needed to have a comprehensive training experience and encounter a wide range and volume of pathology. Boston is also a short ride away from my family and friends that live in New York City. Additionally, my significant other is employed in Boston and it would be advantageous for me to live with her to have access to my biggest support system during my training.

What are your greatest strengths?

I am self motivated and am able to balance multiple interests and responsibilities effectively by staying organized and constantly reprioritizing my daily and weekly goals and objectives. This enables me to be more efficient with my time despite having many different responsibilities. An example of this was when I balanced my medical school coursework with my part time job as a college tutor as well as leadership roles in student government and on the surgery research team. This balancing act is one I am sure will come in handy as I take on the rigors and responsibilities of residency and will hopefully be an asset as I juggle clinical responsibilities, family commitments, and personal interests.

Tell me about an impactful/memorable patient encounter?

As a sub-intern, I was asked to see a patient in the ED who was having abdominal pain and was recently discharged after having a nephrostomy tube placed for ureteral obstruction. My resident was in the OR and I was sent alone to assess the urgency of the situation. When I got to the ED, I found the patient in pain and very frustrated that he was back in the hospital, demanding pain medications so he could leave as soon as possible. Upon looking at his name ID and hearing his accent, I asked if he spoke Russian, my first language. His eyes immediately lit up and we proceeded to have a conversation that shifted from his complaint and symptoms to our shared heritage and culture. Connecting with this patient on a deeper level eased his frustration, increased his willingness to comply with our recommendations, and ultimately enabled us to admit him for replacement of his nephrostomy tube. This experience taught me to never shy away from taking an opportunity to connect with my patients

Part 5: Pearls From the Pros

Think of the above information as absolute must knows ahead of your interview day. The rest of this section and document will focus on some hidden pearls that are expert visors. Wish we knew about and will help you stand out even further on your interview day.

Scheduling Interviews

As interview start to trickle in, it is important to try to be strategic about how you schedule your interviews. You will likely want to interview at lower stakes programs first, i.e. programs that you are less interested in attending or are preliminary year programs or safeties. These will give you the opportunity to submerge yourself an interview environment without the stress/pressure of having to perform well for a top choice contending program. This way, if you do make mistakes, they aren't ruining your chances at a place that you would be really happy to attend. This is not always going to be possible because it is relatively hard to predict the order of which you receive the interviews so our advice is to schedule your top choice program interviews for the last date possible when you get the invite email and this will leave the earlier slots available to you when your lower priority program, interviews trickle in.

Setting

I know this is a little bit different from the rest of this document, but let's take a few moments to discuss setting and the importance of it. Make sure you have a clean and professional background behind your zoom camera. It is not a bad idea to purchase a WebCam as most laptop cameras have extremely poor quality which can result in grainy appearance. You can easily purchase a WebCam from Amazon for \$50-\$70 that has high definition and high resolution. You can make a huge difference when your face pops up clearly on your interview her screen as it looks more professional and inviting.

As far as your background, you can never go wrong with having something simple. But if you were going to have any sort of plans or objects or art, you should be prepared to discuss it. We have heard stories of interviewers asking students about a guitar that is visible on the screen behind them yet the students were not actual guitar players, and it left the sour impression in the program directors mouth, so please only include things that are worth discussing or are important to you if I asked about.

Most people will have a simple blank white background, and that's completely fine.

Please make sure that you were in a quiet setting where you can be undisturbed for the duration of the interview without any noise or visual distraction even though the interview is virtual, it is very easy to tell when somebody is even for a second distracted by some thing else going on in the room, and obviously any loud noises would be unprofessional, if perceived by the person on the other side of the screen. If you were setting up your interview outside of your home, for some reason, please make sure the Wi-Fi connection is stable enough to sustain a long zoom call and test it out before hand.

Questions to Ask

Always have questions prepared to ask your interviewer- remember this is your opportunity to get to know your home for 3-7 years !I asked awful questions that actually matter to you don't try to game the system and ask questions that you think will be impressive. They are here to make sure that you have the information you need to decide on whether or not the program is a good fit and vice versa. Not asking any questions at all as an obvious sign of this interest in the program. Examples of questions that you may ask your interviewer include things about living in the city or region, specific research opportunities within your subspecialty of interest, resident, happiness/quality of life, and availability of mentorship and support.

Know Your Interviewers

It is vital that you research your department and program that you were interviewing for ahead of time and you show up with a solid foundation awareness of how their program is structured, and what they pride themselves in. On that same note, it is recommended to be aware of the subspecialties and research focuses (if applicable) of your interviewers. This is not only a really nice way to be able to ask thoughtful questions, but it is also a will give you a good idea of the program itself to gauge if you would mesh well.

Know Your App. Cold.

You should be prepared and comfortable talking about literally anything in your application. Any word hobby activity, experience, or award is completely fair game for your interviewer to ask you about. Not only should you have an answer, but it should be thoughtful, enthusiastic, and meaningful to you if it is on your application. Please do not include filler, or any activity that you would not be excited to discuss. It will likely do more harm than good.

Name Drop Thoughtfully

During the interview itself, if you are going to mention the name of any residence, or faculty, please do it in a thoughtful manner. Do not discuss the names of anyone that you have not directly worked, with who can advocate in your behalf in a positive way. If you're not sure, think about it twice before mentioning them. Anyone that you mention is opening up a potential back door conversation about you with that person once the interview ends. You have to think about if you trust that person to advocate in your behalf, because they can make or break your candidacy for a program. All recommendations to only say that you've worked with people that you've left a positive impression on.

We hope you found this document helpful in your preparation for interview day! As a reminder, our team offers 1:1 specialty-specific residency advising for interview prep, personal statement and ERAS editing, USMLE/COMLEX tutoring, and general medical school mentorship and guidance. Don't leave your future up to your institution's poor advising office. If you are feeling confused, underprepared, overwhelmed, or just want to get ahead, reach out to us at matchpalmedical.com to schedule a free consultation to learn more about how we can help you match your dream specialty.