

Residency Interviews Prep Guide (2020-2021)

General Interview Tips:

- Make a list of your strengths, goals, values, accomplishments, and abilities. You can reference these in almost any interview situation.
- Identify the top 5 key things you want programs to know about you. What makes you a good candidate? What makes you unique?
- Always be professional, personable and courteous when interacting with **everyone** connected to residency programs, including administrative staff.
- Maintain eye contact as best you can.
- Think about the impression you want to convey and do your best to convey it. Many interviews are loosely structured so you may need to take the initiative to bring forward who you are and what is important to you.

Behavioral Questions

These questions seek to address the skills, characteristics and insight of a strong resident, such as leadership, adaptability, problem solving and commitment to health equity.

[Suggested format to answer behavioral questions:](#)

1. **Situation:** Describe the situation with just enough details to set the scene – the task given to you or needed workplace details.
2. **Task:** Describe the issue or problem were you confronted with.
3. **Action:** Describe what you did to intervene in the situation or solve the problem. This is where you talk about the characteristic/skill/asset you want to illustrate.
4. **Result:** Describe the results of your action. Explain how you helped solve the problem or improve the situation.

Sample Behavioral Questions: Tell us about:

- A time you collaborated on a team to solve a challenging problem.
- A time you felt connected to your passions in medicine.
- A time you had conflict with a team member and how you responded to it.
- An experience that demonstrated how you managed competing priorities.
- A team experience in which you demonstrated leadership to effect change.
- A difficult decision you've made in the last year.
- A time you tried to accomplish something and failed.
- A situation in which you worked effectively under pressure.

Common Interview Questions

Tell Us About Yourself

- Tell us a little about yourself and why you think you would be a good fit with this program?
- What do you see as your top 2-3 strengths? What do you see as your areas of growth?
- What accomplishment are you most proud of?
- What is a challenge you have overcome in your life?
- How do you like to spend your free time? Tell us about a couple of your personal interests.
- How do you deal with conflict?
- You mentioned XYZ in your personal statement or your application. Tell us more about it and how it has shaped your interest in this specialty?

Specialty

- Why are you interested in this specialty?
- What most interests you about our program?
- How do you see your passions and interests connecting in this specialty?
- What do you think are some of the areas of greatest impact in this specialty?
- What challenges might you anticipate as a resident in this specialty and what ideas do you have to address them?
- How would you describe this specialty in two words?
- Tell us about a patient case that you found interesting and what you learned from it.

Career Planning

- Where do you see yourself in five years? In ten years?
- Describe two professional goals and how you see this program helping you achieve them?
- What types of future healthcare challenges are you most interested in?
- How do you see research fitting into your career goals?
- How do you see a fellowship fitting in to your career goals?

Addressing Red Flags/Concerns in Your Application

- Tell us about this challenge you had in your academic record (e.g. a Step fail, a clerkship fail, expansion) and what you learned from it?
- You have spent most of your life on the West Coast. What compels you to think about moving across the country? (addressing geographic concerns)

Prepare 3-4 Patient Cases

- Be ready to articulate what you learned from these experiences. Do not use the same case/s you wrote about in your personal statement.
 - One that you found interesting or complex
 - One that was challenging
 - One in which you had a significant learning experience
 - One that demonstrates your ability to effectively work on a team

Challenging Questions and How to Answer

What are your areas of growth/weaknesses?

Use an example that you can turn into a positive trait.

- “I am very detailed-oriented. For example, my history and physicals notes are quite comprehensive. After talking with my mentor, I am figured out how to streamline them.”
- “I can be soft-spoken, and I like to think through what I say before I offer an opinion. Some people may wish I were more outspoken, but I think that my style can help patients feel at ease. I also hope that this trait keeps me from jumping too quickly to a diagnosis when I have a patient with a complex presentation of symptoms.”
- “Sometimes I find it difficult to delegate work to others. For example, at patient sign-out. I would much rather finish things up myself then let someone else do it.”

Tell us about your Step or Clerkship Fail

- “I learned a lot from this experience. When I began medical school, I quickly became involved in the pediatric interest group, as well as a group providing care to urban underserved communities. I also helped organize student panels on health care reform. I have a lot of interests so it was difficult at first for me to realize that I couldn’t pursue them all. These involvements took away from time I could have used to study. After I failed Step One, I worked hard to prioritize my studying, seek academic support and I went on to receive a good score when I retook Step One.”
- “My family was going through a crisis at this time and I was struggling to balance supporting them and being fully present to the demands of the clerkship. After I failed the clerkship I had to reset and reflect on what I needed to do differently to ensure I could jump right in to learning and fully participating on the team. I worked closely with my mentor and the School’s student support team to prepare to retake the clerkship and I ended up doing really well the second time. While this was a difficult experience for me I learned so much about myself and I am a stronger person for it.”

Illegal Questions

In the United States it is illegal for an employer to discriminate against a job applicant because of age, medical information, height and weight, race, ethnicity, or color, gender or sex, citizenship, religion, disability, marital or family status or pregnancy. If you are asked questions about any of these issues, you are not required to answer them. One way to approach this is to briefly answer and then send a follow up email to the Program Director letting them know what occurred.

If you do choose to respond, you can try to deflect by saying:

- “My career is my priority right now.”
- “My focus is on my residency education. I have also been someone who has been able to juggle multiple responsibilities at once.”
- “I am curious to learn how you manage family/how you negotiated family leave/etc.”

Questions To Ask During Your Interview

Familiarize yourself with each program’s website and don’t include questions that are already answered on the site. When asking questions, you could begin with, “I found your website very informative. Your description of “x” was particularly helpful. I wanted to get your perspective on a few additional things.

- What do you think are your program’s greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- What proportion of time is spent in general vs subspecialty rotations?
- How much elective time is there throughout the residency training and when can it be scheduled? (i.e. PGY-2 vs PGY-3)
- How are residents evaluated? How are they given feedback?
- Are there opportunities for teaching? Can you tell me about them?
- Are residents permitted or encouraged to attend regional or national medical conferences? Are there funds available for this?
- What percent of residents enter fellowships and how does this program prepare them?
- What kind of community outreach projects might we be involved in?
- Does the residency offer any formal exposure to healthcare policy and management?
- Is there a formal seminar series? Can you tell me about it and what you are most proud of?

Post Interview Communication

- Many programs discourage post interview communication unless you have a specific follow up question or you want to communicate your commitment to one particular program. Ask your Departmental Career Advisor for advice if you have a specific question about this.
- Be aware of the NRMP Guidelines for Post Interview Communication.