Interviewing

There is no question that your residency interview is an important factor in determining your place on the rank list of programs. Your credentials and accomplishments are what landed you the interview. As highlighted in the figure below, the impression you make at the interview becomes the most important factor in determining a rank order. Therefore, it certainly makes good sense to make every effort to prepare yourself so that you will be seen in the best possible light.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent Citing Factor</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal skills</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactions with faculty during interview and visit</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback from current residents</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USMLE Step 1/COMLEX Level 1 score</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters of recommendation in the specialty</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USMLE Step 2 CK/COMLEX Level 2 CE score</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Student Performance Evaluation (MSPE/Dean’s Letter)</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived commitment to specialty</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of professionalism and ethics</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived interest in program</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership qualities</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal prior knowledge of the applicant</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class ranking/quartile</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate of U.S. allopathic medical school</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Statement</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audition elective/rotation within your department</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades in required clerkships</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passing USMLE Step 2 CS/COMLEX Level 2 CE</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honors in clinical clerkships</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honors in clerkship in desired specialty</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaps in medical education</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades in clerkship in desired specialty</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpha Omega Alpha (AOA) membership</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other life experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consistency of grades</td>
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<tr>
<td>Volunteer/extracurricular experiences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demonstrated involvement and interest in research</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate of highly regarded U.S. medical school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other post-interview contact</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interest in academic career</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visa status*</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applicant was flagged with Match violation by the NRMP</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluency in language spoken by your patient population</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gold Society membership</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honors in basic sciences</td>
<td>3.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second interview/visit</td>
<td>3.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Away rotation in your specialty at another institution</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USMLE/COMLEX Step 3 score</td>
<td>3.7</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* Ratings on a scale from 1 (not at all important) to 5 (very important).
* International Medical Graduates only
You have two purposes for the interview:

1. You are attempting to assess how compatible you are with a program, how comfortable you feel, and how well the program meets your stated goals.

2. You are also trying to convey your sense of compatibility with the program to your interviewers. This goes beyond making a good impression; you are demonstrating to the faculty and residents that you would be a welcome addition to their ranks.

The best time to visit programs participating in the NRMP is mid-October through January. Programs participating in the early matches: ophthalmology, urology, and the military, will have interviewing schedules that begin earlier. There is no reliable data to conclude that it makes a difference in outcome whether you interview first, in the middle, or last at a given program, so try not to worry about it. There is general agreement, however, that you should schedule the interview for your most highly desired program after you have had some experience with one or two interviews in other programs.

It is a good idea to email or call and confirm your appointment about a week before your scheduled interview. This will give you an opportunity to reconfirm the place and time of your meeting, name of the individual with whom you are to meet first, and other details such as parking arrangements.

Interviewing is expensive, so save money when you can. Try to cluster interviews in the same geographic location. Be sure to ask for student discounts at motels and residency interview discounts on airlines. Contact local VTC alumni to see if they can assist you in finding inexpensive lodging.

Just before the interview, take time to research the information you have received from the program. Write down the facts that you want to double-check as well as any initial impressions you may have formed based on the written material. Pay special attention to the names and positions of people you are likely to meet. Remind yourself of the specific questions you had about this program and write them down in a convenient place so that you will be sure to ask them. You should have some interesting questions prepared ahead of time to let the interviewers know that you have seriously considered the qualities of their particular program. The interviewer gets as much information about you from the questions you ask as from the answers you give. You may want to formulate a list of standard questions which you will ask every program for comparison, or you may develop a checklist of program characteristics to fill out after each interview. Don't be surprised if the interview begins with your questions.

As important as knowing what to ask is knowing what NOT to ask during the interview. Areas to avoid are salary/benefits, vacation, the competition, moonlighting, and topics that may put the interviewer on the defensive. You can get most of the answers to these questions from the residents.

Despite what you might think, there are a finite number of questions that are recurrently asked during interviews. It is really worth the time and effort to sit down before the interview and plan an angle of approach for each of the questions listed below. Don't be caught at the interview wishing you had thought of a good answer beforehand. Consider practicing a mock interview with someone but be careful not to have canned answers.
Miscellaneous points to keep in mind when interviewing:

1. Be familiar with your specialty: typical procedures, types of sub-specialties, outlook for the future.
2. If you arrive early, check out the facilities on your own and get a feel for the city.
3. Be on time; better yet, be early. Allow yourself time for parking and using the restroom before the appointed hour. Allow a full day to each interview.
4. When flying, carry your interview attire on the plane with you!
5. Dress in business attire for the interview.
6. If there is an “informal” event for applicants the night before, remember that this too is part of the interview. Residents and attendings who attend will be looking for your “fit” with the program. If alcohol is served, imbibe in moderation or not at all.
7. Remember that everything you say is part of the record. Even when speaking informally with residents, be careful what you say.
8. Be polite to everyone, including the residency coordinator/assistant. You never know who has a say in the process.
9. Know how to pronounce each interviewer’s name.
10. Take the initiative by shaking your interviewer’s hand and introducing yourself. Sit forward in your chair and maintain good eye contact. At the conclusion, thank the interviewer and be sure to convey your pleasure in meeting them.
12. For procedural specialties, be prepared to demonstrate a skill.
13. According to federal law, you do not have to answer certain questions. Although it is not illegal for interviewers to ask nor is it illegal for you to answer, it is illegal for employers to discriminate on the basis of this information. Discrimination based on race, sex, age, religion, national origin or handicapped status is illegal. "Sex" includes discrimination on the basis of child-rearing plans. It is perfectly acceptable for you to politely decline to answer on the basis that you do not feel it is pertinent to your candidacy. Sometimes a joking rebuke of the question works well, but you must develop your own style for handling these difficult and frequently asked questions.
14. It is usually best NOT to take notes during the interview, but DO take notes during the day to jog your memory about significant comments, concerns, or particularly good or bad points about the program.
15. Don’t let a bad interview get you down!
Sample Interview Questions

1. Why do you want to go into ________?
2. How did you become interested in our program?
3. What are you looking for in a program?
4. Where do you see yourself in 5-10 years? What are your future plans?
5. Tell me about yourself.
6. How would your friends describe you?
7. What motivates you?
8. Do you see any problems managing a personal and professional life?
9. What one event are you proudest of in your life?
10. I am not familiar with your medical school; tell me about it?
11. How has being a student at a new school been for you? (not to give you and answer here, but I would suggest spinning something like this, “Forced me to take ownership of my education”, “Gave me an opportunity for growth”).
12. Where else have you applied?
13. What are your strengths and weaknesses?
14. What leadership roles have you held?
15. What do you do with your spare time?
16. Tell me about your research.
17. Why should we take you over other candidates?
18. How will you choose a program? What are you looking for in a program?
19. Why did you choose medicine as a career?
20. What if you don’t match?
21. If one of your fellow residents spoke disrespectfully to a nurse or fellow resident, what would you do?
22. How do you see your role on a medical team?
23. Tell me about your most interesting case?
24. Current events questions, especially medical reform.
25. What do you think will be the most/least enjoyable aspect of this specialty?
26. What qualities do you respect in a mentor?
27. Who is your hero?
28. With which patients do you have trouble dealing?
29. With which people do you have trouble working?
30. What are the major deficiencies in your medical school training?
31. What do you think the future holds for medicine?
32. What do you think the future holds for this specialty?
33. What error have you made in patient care?
34. How have you been employed, and what have you learned from such jobs?
35. With what subject or rotation did you have the most difficulty?
36. What is the worst thing that happened to you in medical school?
37. If there are red flags in your application, you will be asked to address them.
38. What are your professional goals?
39. What are your personal goals?
40. What is your favorite book?
41. How do you manage conflict?
42. Tell me about a time when______________
43. Tell me more about__________________(something of interest from your personal statement).

Questions to Ask the Interviewer

1. Where do graduates end up, both geographically and types of jobs?
2. What changes have been made in recent years?
3. What changes are anticipated in the near future?
4. What are some of the major research interests within the department?
5. What role do private MD’s play in the residency training program?
6. What role do fellows have in the residency training program?
7. What are the major strengths and weaknesses in the program?
8. How much time is spent in lectures, seminars and other didactic sessions?
9. How do your graduates do on the specialty board exam?
10. How do you like living in ________?
11. What percent of residents go on to fellowships? Which fellowships?
12. Do residents have any difficulty landing the fellowship of their choice?
Questions to Ask the Residents

1. Are you happy with your decision?
2. How is the didactic teaching?
3. Other requirements: research, administrative, built in moonlighting, etc?
4. What is the most frustrating part of your residency?
5. How much scut do you do?
6. What is the best part of your residency?
7. Do you operate with attendings on every case?
8. How is call? How much call?
9. Do outside attendings direct admit or are most patients seen in the ER first?
10. How is the cost of living in ____________?
11. How do you like living in ________________?
12. Electives? Can you do away electives?
13. Inpatient versus outpatient experience?
14. Do the fellows run the service?
15. Are there any call free months?
16. Work load?
17. How are weekends covered? Any "golden weekends"?