

Pre-Health Advisory Committee Mock Interview

The Interview can make or break your medical/dental/pharmacy/vet school application. With several hundred applicants for every 'seat' in school, the successful applicant must be able to articulate why they are the best candidate for that seat. Failure to articulate an answer to the question 'why you?' may result in failure to get into the school.

The PHAC's mock interview will help you learn to articulate your strengths and how to use every interview question to your advantage. In order to get the most out of your mock interview, you must prepare for it. You have an agenda: you want a seat in the school. Prepare your agenda points so that you can let the admissions committee know 'why you'.

Preparing for the Mock Interview

I. Start with a list of ten experiences.

- A. Consider your experiences in the classroom, volunteering, doing research, shadowing physicians, and other important aspects of your background, which relate to your skills, abilities or knowledge for admission in the school you have chosen. Refer to journals as needed.
- B. Identify 10 *specific* experiences that you would like to relate to the committee. For instance, not just being an ER Scribe, but a particular day on the job or patient interaction you remember.
- C. For each of those experiences, state what you did, observed, or learned in the situation, what positive traits it demonstrates about you, and why having that experience makes you a better candidate to go to medical/dental/vet/pharmacy school.

Example:

- A. When I volunteered in the Red Cross dental clinic, one day we had a patient who needed an extraction and we had trouble controlling bleeding.
- B. The dentist asked me to assist him and I did _____, _____ and _____.
- C. I learned that as a dentist, I will have to be prepared for the unexpected. I also learned that I have a calm ability to deal with an emergency situation. This has taught me that when I am in dental school or when I have begun my practice, I will need to focus on being prepared and that I will look to solve problems in a variety of ways to meet the needs of the patient.

II. Then compile a list of 10 characteristics.

- A. Consider the personal characteristics that make you stand out as a candidate for medical school. Identify 10 that you want to get across to the committee.
- B. For each of those characteristics, give an example of you demonstrating that characteristic.
- C. Comment on how that will be a vital characteristic to have in school.

Example:

- A. I am compassionate. (Don't stop there! Many candidates are compassionate.)
- B. When I was on a mission trip to Nicaragua, I was helping treat patients, many of whom had never had medical treatment. I realized quickly that the patients were frightened and though I spoke only a little Spanish, I was able to comfort the patients by listening and by demonstrating a caring attitude.
- C. Being in that situation, where I was the outsider and the one who didn't speak the language, taught me that compassion is a critical component of treatment and I will work always to be compassionate with the patients I treat. I believe that if I am compassionate, they will more easily accept my medical advice and my treatment.

III. Everything you have done up to this point has prepared you for the next stage of your studies. A few of your 10 experiences may have even occurred outside the medical setting.

- A. Consider that things you take for granted about yourself are the very things that an admissions committee might find astonishing and memorable.

Examples:

- A student was shadowing a doctor who was treating a patient whose abdominal cavity was maggot infested. What might this experience have taught them (about medicine or themselves)?

- A student was on a Division I National Championship Team. What personal characteristics might this student have that would make them a good candidate for medical school?
 - A student saved a fellow Boy Scout's life when they were camping. How might that experience have shaped the candidate's dream to become a physician?
 - A student immigrated here when he was 12—his family was considered politically dangerous and they were forced to flee and he became the sole support of his family. What personal characteristics might this candidate have that are unique?
 - Student majored in art and found similarities between sculpture & the skeletal system. What interesting correlations can the candidate make between their experience in art and their future as a physician?
 - A student grew up with her uncle who was 3 years older and had Down's syndrome. What perspectives might this candidate have about specialty populations that others may not have?
- B. While none of these may apply to you, you have something (perhaps many somethings) that are remarkable, and will help the committee remember you as the candidate. It's your job to make sure the committee knows what those things are!

Structure of the Mock Interview

The mock interview has been designed with a panel format in mind, so there will be 2-4 people conducting it. During the mock interview, you will learn how to make every answer count, but you need to prepare. If you haven't done your homework with the 10 experiences, it will show. The committee will waste valuable time reviewing how to prepare and not how to interview.

When you took Organic Chemistry, you didn't know what questions would be asked on the exam. You studied by learning the material and organizing it into a framework from which you could answer questions. Now your experiences are the material for the interview. Know yourself and your experiences well. Put them in a framework so that you can answer questions.

What to Wear and Bring

Arrive for the mock interview dressed as you would for the real thing. It will help the committee evaluate your attire and give you helpful suggestions about any changes you should make prior to your interview. Candidates are expected to wear professional attire. If you have a suit, wear it, and be sure to include appropriate socks and shoes. Stick to conservative colors. Bring a portfolio or professional-looking folder, much like you might bring to interview for school. Bring a pen and paper so you can take notes.

The Right Attitude

The mock interview process can be unpleasant. The panel will critique each answer you give, in order to present you with honest, constructive feedback. You may be asked to answer the same question more than once, in order to fine-tune your answers. It can be a painful hour, but it's a valuable experience. Be a sponge. Learn from it! Accept the feedback you're given and be prepared to apply the feedback immediately. The panel won't move on until you're progressing in the right direction. You may be asked to come back for a second mock interview.

Types of Questions to Anticipate in the Mock Interview

- Opening question (i.e. 'Tell me about yourself and why you're applying to...')
- Behavioral interview questions (i.e. 'Tell me about a time when...' or 'Give an example of an experience you've had that...')
- An ethical/social question (i.e. requires you to take a stance on an ethical or social issue and defend your point of view)
- An illegal question (i.e. content regarding your ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, political party, marital or relationship status, number of children, age, etc.)

General Tips

- The opening question is tricky because it encompasses so much information. It's comparable to the abstract of a scientific article. Give the highlights from your background.
- Stick to the 3-part formula for each successive question (i.e. Answer the question, give an example from your experiences, relate it back to your candidacy for school).
- Don't get lulled into a conversational mode with the interviewer. Remember that you have an agenda for the interview, and that's to sell yourself and your experiences.
- Don't exceed 60 seconds per answer.
- Work on having open body posture and making good eye contact with each panelist. You never know who the decision-maker in the room may be.
- Practice your handshake.
- For male candidates, remember the general guidelines for buttoning your suit jacket. Always button the top button, sometimes button the middle button, and never button the bottom button. However, unbutton them all when you take a seat.
- Practice using the formula to answer questions.
- Take advantage of the Career Management Center's online mock interview module, Optimal Interview.

Good luck! Remember that you have been preparing for school for the last 3 years. Why would you not prepare for the interview?