

THE 3 MOST COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS DURING INTERVIEWS AND DO'S AND DON'TS BY SPECIALTY

ANESTHESIOLOGY

3 most commonly asked questions in the 7 minutes I spend with every candidate:

- What did you like most and least about college? Medical school?
- What do you see yourself doing in 5 years?
- Do you have any questions for me?

3 Do's:

- Write a personal statement that gives me a “hook” on which to ask a question – something personal or detailed about you. It’s an opportunity to help yourself during the interview, so use it.
- Show up on time. Stay to the end. (well, “duh,” but, you’d be surprised!)
- Mingle with my residents and ask them all the questions that might make you appear selfish or lazy if you asked them to the interviewer.

3 Don'ts:

- Do not write a personal statement filled with platitudes about what an anesthesiologist does (we know that already !!) or how you decided to become an anesthesiologist when you had your appendix out when you were 4 years old. Instead, write what kinds of things you like to think about and do, what academic and intellectual pursuits you enjoy (hopefully, physiology and pharmacology!!).
- Don't tell me during the interview that you like anesthesiology because of the lifestyle. It shows you haven't a clue what's involved in being an anesthesiologist.
- Respond to my inquiry about the research project you listed on your application, with anything less than a concise, cogent statement of its hypothesis, design, results, and limitations. Alternative: don't list it on your application!

DERMATOLOGY

The number one question I raise is to describe in detail any project, paper, presentation or scholarly activity they list on their CV, and not only that but what input they had in the project but what resulted from it. The second is their role in any listed outside activity—like what they actually did in that Habitat for Humanity experience. The third is to describe their favorite med school course (other than the one they are applying for) and their least favorite and why.

The biggest “Do” is to know your CV—everything on it I consider fair game; the second biggest “do” is to find out what the major emphasis of the dept they are applying for is, and flesh out how they would fit into that program. This is

not easy, but at our “meet and greet” the night before (that is just with residents and not faculty) applicants can get a very good idea of what our program is about. The third “do” is to consider every interaction part of the interview, especially the night before. This also includes interactions with the secretaries and program coordinators.

The biggest “don’t” is to “dis” some other professional at their home school or at the site they are applying for. We had a situation last year where an applicant ranted at the fiancé of one of our residents the night before in a totally inappropriate way. The next biggest “don’t” is to take too much propranolol (or equivalent) and be a “zombie” at the interview. If you haven’t taken it before, try some to see what the appropriate dose is for you. The stuff really works for “stage fright”, but too much puts you to sleep. Next don’t is to appear too “cocky”—humility, even feigned humility goes a long way. Next don’t is to limit yourself to yes and no answers. Exxxpppaanndddd a little; you’ll get a feel for that with the way the flow of the interview is going.

Last, to quote Socrates “gnothi se auton” (know thyself) and Shakespeare “to thine own self be true” ---always good advice.

EMERGENCY MEDICINE

3 most commonly asked questions:

- What good qualities do you bring to this residency program? Why will you be a great resident? What is your biggest fault and how do you address it?
- If you didn't get into medical school what would you be doing right now?
- What do you think Emergency Medicine is? What makes it different from other specialties?

List top 3 applicant Do's and Don'ts:

- Act & look professional. Dress appropriately & be well groomed. Be polite to everyone. Make eye contact.
- Be confident, but not cocky. Be able to present yourself in a positive manner without seeming like you are bragging.
- Be able to discuss anything you put on your C.V. or personal statement. I will always ask questions about research, hobbies, and other experiences to see if the applicant has really done what s/he said s/he did. Do not add things just to buff your application. Someone may call you on it.

Any other advice you wish to share:

- You are being evaluated by everyone, including the office staff and residents. So be polite and mannerly to everyone you meet.
- Be prepared to discuss gaps in the timeline of your C.V. If you did not pass an exam or course the first time, you should have a reasonable explanation of why, how you addressed the situation, and what you have

learned from that failure. If you took a year off from schooling - why? What did you do?

FAMILY MEDICINE

List the 3 most commonly asked residency interview questions by a Program Director:

- Difficult to answer as it varies depending on the application packet for each candidate. I tend to always ask about the experiences they list and which one meant something in particular. I ask about their extracurricular activities. I'll also typically ask about their interest in the specialty, although sometimes that is already in their personal statement. I'm less traditional when it comes to the interview and try to ask questions to get at who they are as a person. The grades are already there.

3 Do's: and Don'ts

- Do read up on the program ahead of time (website).
- Do be courteous and polite to everyone (mistreating coordinators is a death sentence).
- Do be confident and talk proudly about what you can offer a program.

3 Don'ts:

- Don't be late.
- Don't be cocky (no matter how good you think you are, cockiness is not match-friendly).
- Don't take any position/program for granted.

Any other advice you wish to share:

If they have any discrepancy, academic issue, boards issue, etc – don't try to dance around the issue. Meet it head on. Taking responsibility for what happens to you and being honest go a long way. I tend to look less favorably on applicants who blame other circumstances for their issues.

Also, programs are looking at what you can offer them as well as what they can offer you. Second looks are great. The interview day is somewhat artificial from both sides and a second look, spending more time in the office/on the floors, can tell you a lot. And lastly – be wary of programs that don't let you interact with residents – they may be trying to hide something.

NEUROLOGY

Most commonly asked questions:

- What are the reasons that you are interested in that particular field?

- How do you see yourself in the long term? Academics versus private practice. Do you have any research interests?
- Why do you want to come here? (i.e. what is it about our program that you like?)
- Where else are you applying? (not sure if this is a legal question, but I ask it anyway)
- Are you interested in clinical practice or research or both?

Do's:

- Dress professionally. Arrive on time.
- Focus on your strengths and communicate to the interviewer well, as to why you are interested in that particular specialty and the program.
- Ask important relevant questions, which communicates to the interviewer, that you are interested in the program.
- Look your interviewer in the eye.
- Know something about the program before you get there. Make it look like you actually want to be there.
- Give the impression that you are a hard worker and people get along with you and you want to be part of the team.

Don'ts:

- Don't lie. Be honest.
- Eat garlic or foods with strong odor prior to the interview.
- Forget to write a thank you email saying that you are interested in the program.
- Don't ignore secretaries and support staff
- Don't talk to your shoes.
- Don't give a mushy handshake.

General Advice:

The candidates should interact with the current residents to find the strengths and weaknesses of the program. They should do some research about the program, prior to the interview to assess the strengths of the faculty and department. That allows them to ask important questions related to their interest in the field and the program.

OB/GYN

3 Most commonly asked questions:

- What was your best & worst experience in medical school?
- Who was your favorite professor and why?
- What was the most recent movie you saw, book you read, concert you went to and what was your impression?

Do's and Don'ts:

- Don't forget to send thank you notes.
- Be confident and attentive, interact with everyone.
- Be on time.

Any other advice you wish to share:

- Do some research about the program, the program director, and the area?
- Emphasize the strengths of your application.

OPHTHALMOLOGY

Top 3 Questions:

- Tell me about yourself
- What experience, i.e. research or other extra-curricular activities, do you have in this field.
- Where do you see yourself in 3-4 years, private practice, academics?

List top 3 applicant Do's and Don'ts:

- For Ophtho-Do apply to as many programs as possible-then be selective with where you go for interviews.
- If you have great Step I scores, wait until after the interviews to take Step II
- Do an away elective at a program that you really like.

Any other advice you wish to share:

- Be realistic about how competitive you are for the various programs and have a back-up if you think it is necessary.

ORTHOPAEDICS

Top 3 questions:

- If you were not going into medicine, what would you most likely be doing or planning to do?
- What are the strengths of this program compared to others?
- How did you become interested in this medical specialty?

3 Do's:

- Project a positive attitude, smile, address people directly.
- Avoid rehearsed statements, and answer questions as asked without changing the subject.
- Be yourself and be courteous to everyone with whom you come into contact. There are no "little people" present.

3 Don'ts:

- Wear strong scents

- Tell lies or half truths
- Overstate the degree of your personal contribution to research projects

PATHOLOGY

Top 3 questions:

- Tell me how you decided which programs to apply to.
- What are the characteristics of an excellent Pathology residency program? And then what are the characteristics of an excellent applicant for a Pathology residency program?
- What questions do you have for me?

3 Applicant Do's:

- Do read over your application and be sure you can explain everything in it in detail, if asked.
- Do maintain eye contact and appear interested in what we are discussing
- Do realize that everyone you encounter on interview day (and in the lead up to that day), including our interview coordinator, has input into the evaluation process. Show respect to everyone you meet – whether they are the program director or a secretary or lab tech.

3 Applicant Don'ts:

- Don't be late – this may require making a dry run before the interview or checking the location of the office that you need to find ahead of time. Hospitals can be very spread out and confusing and a lot of the corridors and floors look alike.
- Don't answer questions that I haven't asked – you might pique my curiosity about something you didn't prepare to discuss.
- Don't belittle, speak badly of, or otherwise show disdain for anyone or anything – fellow students/applicants, teachers, course or clerkship directors, institutions or programs.

SURGERY

Top questions:

- How do you see yourself "x" years from now? [can be phrased a lot of ways!] For myself, I am looking ideals rather than specific foci of interest...e.g. I'd much rather have the applicant say "I want to be the best...I am interested in a lot of things but don't know what I want to do specifically as yet...I want to really contribute to something..." than "I want to be vascular surgeon"!
- How has your visit been thus far? Looking for positive and insightful answers

- Any burning questions about our program? [actually, more common just to ask "Do you have any questions?" But I like to see what if anything is really going on in their brains.]
- Where do you see yourself in 10 years?
- What made you decide to do surgery?
- What are you looking for in a surgery training program?
- What did you like most about medical school?
- What did you like least about medical school?
- What outside interests do you have?
- If they did research I expect them to be able to discuss their project in general and understandable terms.

I expect the answers to be spontaneous and appropriate. Students should not launch into a prepared speech which was obviously rehearsed. If research is discussed they should be able to explain the project and their involvement clearly and not launch into a presentation of the work.

I am concerned about the student who announces with absolute certainty what specialty he or she is going into after residency. I am also concerned about the student who states with absolute certainty that he or she does not want to do research but just wants to get through the program and get into practice.

Students should be able to discuss the content of their personal statement as I try to read these before the interview and break the ice with questions on topics they wrote about.

I am always concerned about the student who comes in and immediately announces that we are his/her first choice and he would be honored to work with us – this often comes across as disingenuous on the part of the student. Likewise I don't need to sit and hear a list of that student's accomplishments implying that we would be lucky to recruit him or her.

I look for someone who has enough personality to carry on a conversation with me during the interview. If I have to keep the interview going and keep looking at the clock to see when we can end I tend to downgrade the individual.

Appearance is very important – the student should dress in an appropriate manner – neat and with good grooming in a professional style – they are hoping to be future surgeons and want to convey an attitude of neatness and appropriateness in dress and style as this is what we expect of a surgeon.

The interview begins as soon as the applicants come in contact with anyone in the institution – secretaries, residents, etc. Students are being evaluated at receptions held before the interview day and should be aware of that.

3 *Do's*:

- Look like you're striving for excellence.
- Be relaxed, confident, humble but still capable of expressing neat strengths.
- Be ready with good answers and don't talk tangentially or too much.

3 *Don'ts*:

- Appear bad - e.g. not show up to all events such as dinner, luncheon, etc; look sloppy; be discourteous in any way; b) project negativity - either about yourself, the program, the city, prior interviewers, etc; c) look aimless - e.g. the spoken or unspoken things: give impression of lack of clear-cut goals, don't know when the interview is over, etc
- Most interviewers want to see a bright, humble, highly motivated person who is fun to be around. Be your confident self...don't worry too much...it's just an interview...relax and enjoy it...