

# Medical Job Interview Preparation Guide



Reading time:  
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You have been successful at getting a job interview for a role in which are highly interested. How do you give yourself the best chance of success? Most of the work that you do for an interview will be before the interview. We have assembled some tips which we think may assist you in your quest to land your desired role.

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## Learning outcomes

- Review generic interview skills and more specific medical interview skills.
- Evaluate what skills are required to excel in any style of interview whether it be in-person or remote.
- Implement these strategies to further develop a plan and progress in your career.

## What are interviewers looking for?

- A safe clinician. Someone who is competent and maximises patient safety.
- Enthusiastic about the role.
- Well-developed communication, teamwork, and leadership skills.
- Someone who performs well under pressure.

## The most direct path to a successful job interview.

### 1. Know yourself.

- Is this the right job for you?
- How would you describe yourself?
- How would others describe you?
- Know your CV in detail. You should be able to back up and discuss anything you have written there.
- Make a list of your personal achievements - If you find it difficult talking about your strengths it can help in some situations to frame it as positive feedback you received.
- What strengths are demonstrated in each achievement?
  - Strength or weakness questions can be asked in a variety of formats i.e. talk about a time you received constructive feedback, or tell us about a mistake you have made, or what are you working on improving currently? What matters the most in any style of weakness/mistake/feedback question is what you learnt from the situation and what you have built into your practice to ensure that it will not reoccur.
- Which strengths are important for this role?
  - This might indicate the types of questions likely to come up at the interview.
  - Prepare a set of examples for the following to which you can refer to demonstrate experience.
    - How am I going to show that I have empathy for patients?
    - How am I going to show that I work well with others within teams?
    - A learning experience.

### 2. Know the job.

- Thoroughly research the organisation and the job. Read about the position several times.

- Understand the position and be ready to answer questions specific to the role. eg. if they are looking for a future leader, they may ask “tell us what makes you a good leader”.
- Consider current issues affecting the medical community, the hospital or the college, as they may tailor an interview question around that issue. For example, bullying, or working during a pandemic.
- Show you can consider different perspectives and the impact on other parties, i.e., the patient, the junior doctor, the senior doctor/supervisor, the department director, the hospital, the college, the community.
  - This shows you can think about the systems impacting the scenario. Quality improvement is always important for all organisations.

### 3. Rehearse.

- Prepare some answers.
  - A good approach to answering potential interview questions during preparation is to write the answer down rather than trying to keep it in your head. Once your answer is in front of you, it is easier to analyse, refine, and seek feedback from others. This way you can check you have structure to your answers as well.
- Practice.
  - Practicing interviews by speaking out loud allows you to get used to talking about yourself in positive terms. Communicating clearly and confidently in interview is an essential skill.
  - Gaining some feedback from others (colleagues, family, friends, and tutors) in mock interviews can help you to start finding some effective phrases. It is better to get it wrong now rather than during the interview!

### 4. Be prepared for the day of the interview.

- This will depend on the interview structure - see below.
- A handy tip to be more relaxed about your interview is to take care about the “interview logistic matters” early on, so you do not stress about them and can focus on your actual interview preparation. This includes things like:
  - what you will wear. If unsure, opt for the more conservative and professional option.
  - how to get to the interview (public transport, parking options)
  - what paperwork you need to take with you
  - learning the names of panel members
- Practice, practice, practice. Lack or the absence of practice and preparation generally leads to underperformance and is the number one reason for job candidates being unhappy with the result of their interview.

### 5. Perform.

Now is the time to demonstrate the above!

## Types of medical interviews.

- May depend on the level and competition
  - Most junior doctors will either have a 1:1 or 2:1 interview in an office for hospital level jobs
- The ‘fireside chat’
- The cross table panel grilling
- The multi station OSCE
  - Network posts are more likely to be this style
- Modern professional interview techniques

## Interview Structure.

1. Formal stations
  - Traditional questions
  - CV questions
2. Practical stations
  - Testing your clinical skills
  - Behavioural questions
  - Situational questions

## CV based questions.

Know **your** story! How did you get here? What did you learn along the way? How does that make you a better healthcare practitioner? CV based questions are often open questions:

- Why are you interested in this position?
- What will you bring to this position?
- What non-medical experience has prepared you for this position?

Before you can convince a stranger that you are the top pick for this position, you first need to convince yourself!

“There are many reasons why I am suited to this role.....”

- What are your strengths? Eg. academic, clinical, team/leader, personality traits, community involvement
  - List your strengths in order, with a strong start and summarise to finish
- What makes you unique?
- What do you have that they want?

## Clinical questions.

- Listen to the key points of the question.
- Make notes if necessary
- Take time to think.
- Think of it like a mini exam.
- Be Structured, Safe and Sensible.

When answering a clinical scenario question, it can be useful to ensure you cover:

- Triage scenario with other tasks
- Call for help/escalation
- Assessment
- History and examination
- Investigations
- Management
- Differentials
- Follow up/handover

## Behavioural questions.

Involves relating knowledge to a real-life experience:

- Describe a time you went above and beyond for a patient
- Provide an example of a time you made a mistake.
- What did you learn from this episode?
- Stick to the truth; don't be tempted to embellish!
- Engage your interviewers by 'telling a story'
- Be succinct:
  - Carefully select your scenario
  - Write out your answer and practise
  - Answers should be 3-4 minutes

## Situational questions.

- Designed to get you to think on your feet.
- Evaluate your assessment and priority of management.

## Useful frameworks to answer questions:

SPIES framework:

- Seek information: Outline key issues in priority order
- Patient safety: What do you need to do to protect the patients?
- Initiative: What can you do to resolve the problem?
- Escalate: How do you engage seniors or colleagues, heads of hospitals if the situation is serious?

- Support: Support for your team/individual causing the situation.

#### STARR technique:

Use this approach for or each of your identified characteristics. If you have pre-prepared scenarios, you'll frequently be able to tailor your response to fit the questions at the interview. This format helps the interviewers to follow your scenario in a logical flow to best understand it, rather than getting lost in the story.

- Situation: One brief line outlining the example
- Task: What was involved/required?
- Action: How you approached and performed the task
- Result: What was the outcome/achievement?
- Reflection: What did you learn good and bad and how will you apply it in the future?

Either the SPIES or STARR acronyms can be used as 'mental signposts' when answering a question. Just try to vary the language to avoid repetition.

## Tricky questions.

Examples of tricky questions:

- Tell me about a time you made a clinical mistake and had to tell someone about it
- Tell me about a time you had to work with someone you didn't like
- What is your weakest clinical skill?

You should not be asked anything that is in the anti-discrimination Act and that relates to your personal situation. Examples:

- Date of Birth
- Religion
- Marital status
- Gender biased questions
- Racially biased questions
- Sexual orientation
- Pregnancy intentions
- Family commitments
- Political party alliance

It's OK to be asked valid questions that relate to your ability to perform the duties of the role as described. e.g. Are you available to work full time, shift work or after hours.

What do you do if you are asked one of these inappropriate questions?

- Clarify with the interview panel if they could re-phrase the question and clarify how its relevant to the role.

## During the interview.

- Listen carefully to the questions; seek clarification if necessary
- Take a breath before you respond
- Your answers should include a statement, evidence or example and a summary to come back to the question
- Know when to stop talking
- Think about the type of person the interviewers are seeking; try to be that person!

At the end of the interview, you may be asked if you have any questions. If you do ask a question, ensure it is not something that is covered in the job description or could have been easily researched online.

## Phone and video interviews

These types of interviews have become increasingly common in recent times. If you have the option to attend an interview in person, always do so. Most people will perform better at in in person interview.

Considerations and tips:

- Choose a quiet place without distractions
- Remove visual clutter
- Dress as if the interview was in person

Technical tips - do you have:

- A strong, reliable internet connection?
- Good lighting?

- Practice speaking to the camera (put a coloured dot near the camera to remind you where to look!)
- Headphones if necessary
- Do a trial run and record the result so you can check all of the above points

## After the interview

Review and reflect to improve your performance at future interviews.

Jot down as many questions as you can recall and also the answers you gave. Writing them down immediately will improve your recall of the details, but also of your thought processes and emotions at the time. Try to write an honest appraisal of yourself in this interview and ask yourself:

- You will have prepared for some of these questions before the interview, but how did you do under pressure?
- Did you feel that each answer was well received or did they seem to be looking for something additional?
- Did the interview have a relaxed happy feel to it or did you sense tension or hostility?
- Did you do or say anything that you would try to repeat or avoid in future interviews?
- How did the interview begin and end? Was each satisfactory?

Reviewing these questions will make sure you do not fall into the same traps and build on things that you did well.

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