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# Virtual Interviews: Applicant Preparation Guide

Association of  
American Medical Colleges

# Virtual Interviews: Applicant Preparation Guide

Last Updated: May 7, 2020

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### Overview

This document focuses on tips for preparing for and completing virtual interviews. Although the format may seem more informal, a virtual interview is an official interview, and we encourage you to approach it as you would any formal interview. Prepare, present yourself professionally, and focus. The [AAMC Careers in Medicine®](#) site is a great resource for general information on interviewing, including strategies you would use to prepare for in-person and telephone interviews.

### Typical Format

There are two types of virtual video interviews.

- **Live Virtual Interviews** use video conference technology to connect you with an interviewer in real time. You will be asked to sit face-to-face with the interviewer(s) and answer their questions. You may be given an opportunity to ask questions.
- **Asynchronous Virtual Interviews** (or on-demand interviews) will *not* have an interviewer present. You will be asked to respond to questions presented via text or prerecorded video. Your responses will be recorded by your device's webcam and shared with reviewers at a later time.

### Typical Questions

Although there are many types of interview questions, most fall into one of three categories.

- **Behavioral questions** will ask you to describe previous experiences to demonstrate your level of knowledge and skills and the extent of your experiences. For example, *“Please describe a time when you observed a member of the medical team you were working with behave in a manner that was inconsistent with an established protocol. Explain what the situation was, what actions you took, and the outcome.”*
- **General questions** will ask you to describe yourself broadly. For example, *“Tell me why you are interested in this program.”*
- **Situational questions** will ask you to demonstrate your level of knowledge and skill by describing what you should or would do in different hypothetical situations. For example, *“Imagine you are on your morning rounds. The chief resident describes a difficult case you and a colleague worked on earlier in the week and compliments your handling of the situation. She gives you sole credit and fails to mention that your colleague played a major role. What would you do?”*

### Preparing for a Virtual Interview

#### Gather Information About the Interview

If possible, get as much information about the virtual interview from the residency program with whom you're interviewing. Aspects of the interview that would be helpful to know in advance include:

- Live or asynchronous
- Video interview platform
- Number of interviewers
- Interview length
- Types of interview questions
- Competencies or skills assessed during the interview

#### Identify Sample Experiences

- If the program has provided a list of competencies or skills to be assessed during the interview, reflect on your experiences related to them.
- Review your CV and reflect on your experiences and learning before you conduct the interview. Try to identify some situations you think best exemplify your skills.
- Discuss your experiences with your advisors. Which are the best examples of your knowledge and skills? Your examples should demonstrate your highest level of proficiency.
- Consider creating a brief list of experiences that demonstrate your skills and could be used in response to different questions. It may be helpful to have these experiences readily available as you prepare your response to each interview question.

#### Identify a Suitable Environment and Technology

To complete virtual interviews, you will need the following:

- A stable internet connection.
- A computer or tablet with a good webcam and microphone. Although a mobile phone may be used, we recommend using a computer or tablet to improve stability. We also recommend using a device that will not accept phone calls during interviews because a phone call will interfere with your ability to complete your response.
- A private, quiet, and well-lit space that is free of distractions where you can be alone.

#### Practice Describing Your Experiences

Conduct mock interviews to practice developing responses using specific examples from your life and experiences with your peers and advisors. These mock interviews can be done in person or over a web-based application.

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### Practice With Technology

- Practice responding with the device you'll be using during the interview.
  - For a live video interview, practice with peers or advisors.
  - For an asynchronous interview, practice on your own so you can get used to responding without an interviewer present.
- Check your microphone and camera to make sure they're working well and the picture and sound are not poor quality.
- Check your internet speed. You can do this at [SpeedTest.net](https://www.speedtest.net). Sometimes switching from Wi-Fi to a wired ethernet connection improves your internet speed. If your home's internet connection is too slow, consider going to a local library or find space at your school where you can do the interview in a private room with stable Wi-Fi.
- Make a note of how the camera and microphone are positioned so you can recreate a setup that works when you log in to the system to complete your actual interview.
- Look at the device's camera, not at the screen, and keep your head and shoulders centered in the camera's view.
- If possible, record yourself so you can get a sense of your eye contact, sound quality, and whether you're fidgeting, swiveling in your chair, or making distracting gestures, such as covering parts of your face. Try to present a calm, engaged demeanor during the interview.

## Setting Up

### Technology

- We recommend using a computer or tablet with a good webcam and microphone. Although a mobile phone may be used, a laptop or tablet improves stability.
- Allow time before the interview starts to conduct a technology check:
  - Double-check your microphone and camera to make sure they're working well.
  - Position your camera and microphone as you did when you practiced.
  - Shut down all programs on your device so that no alerts, notifications, or other electronic interruptions distract you.
  - Make sure your device is fully charged. Carry a charger with you and make sure you can plug into an outlet in case there is a problem with your battery.
- Have a backup plan in case the technology fails — this may be as simple as providing your phone number to the interviewer in advance.

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### Environment

- Identify a private, quiet, well-lit space where you can complete the interview by yourself, free of potential distractions, and where you can speak freely. Make sure you have control over the background noise, so avoid open spaces in libraries and places where you could be interrupted such as coffee shops and other communal spaces. Consider completing the interview at home or find a space offered by your school.
- Avoid having sources of bright light such as sunlight and lamps directly behind you because they will cast a shadow on you. Instead, make sure a light source is in front of you so the interviewer can see you clearly. If you're doing the interview at night, make sure there's a lamp available that can light up your face.
- Consider the backdrop you will use during your interview and try to keep it clean and neat and free of distractions.
- Try to have an outlet nearby in case you need to plug in your device.

### Presentation

- Dress professionally, as you would for an in-person interview.
- Position the camera at eye level so it looks like you are looking directly at the interviewer.
- Try to be rested and focused. As with any formal interview, you want to be able to focus on understanding the questions, crafting coherent responses, and presenting your best self.

## Completing the Interview

### Responding to Questions

- Try to focus on providing detailed examples of behavior that you engaged in from your experiences when responding to questions.
- Use clinical and nonclinical experiences in your responses, as appropriate.
- Provide detailed responses and try to avoid speaking in generalities. Typically, one strong example is better than several weak or tangential examples.
  - *Do not* provide patient information that could be used separately or in combination to identify a patient, such as names, locations, diagnoses, or other distinguishing characteristics. Refer to a patient as “the patient.”
  - If your response may portray a colleague in a negative light, *do not* provide information that could be used separately or in combination to identify that colleague, such as a name, title, location, or other distinguishing characteristic.
- Provide a complete response to each question. In general, when responding to:
  - **Behavioral questions**, share past experiences and be sure to discuss the situation or task you encountered, the actions you took, and the outcome of your actions.

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- **Situational questions**, discuss the actions you should take, why you should take those actions, and what you would expect the result of your actions to be.

### Peer-Reviewed Articles Published in Medical Journals About Virtual Interviewing

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