

# Seniors, Grad Students, and Alumni Steps to Success

## Step Eight: Interview



## Graduate School Pre-interview Guide and Worksheet

Soon, you will be conducting a graduate school interview, for one of many, many diverse and eclectic subject specific programs. Read this document, and then complete the Worksheet. If you have any questions, contact the Career and Internship Center. In addition to general individualized counseling, we offer specialized services, guidance and coaching, including role-play interviews, for students focusing on health care careers and graduate study. Interviewing is a critical step for graduate school applicants. **Below is a list of potential questions.** Attempting to memorize answers can do more harm than good, so, please use the list to stimulate thoughts and inspire you to share ideas effectively during interviews.

- | Why are you interested in INSERT FIELD AND PROGRAM NAME?
- | What academic achievements are you most proud of?
- | When did you decide you wanted to be a doctor/dentist?
- | Why did you choose your major and how does it relate to your goals?
- | What classes did you find most stimulating, and did they nurture your interest in medicine as a profession?
- | What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- | If you do not get in to INSERT FIELD AND PROGRAM NAME, what will you do?
- | How would you describe yourself and how would others describe you?
- | What are your three most significant employment or co-curricular achievements?
- | What directly related research experience have you had?
- | What are your long-term career/academic/research goals?
- | Where do you see yourself in ten years?
- | Where else have you applied? Why do you want to go here?
- | Do you have any specific research areas of interest in mind and how did you choose these?
- | How have your academic experiences prepared you for a career, and what are your future academic goals?
- | What would you do differently with regards to academic, co-curricular, and practical experiences?
- | What was your most difficult decision to date, and how did you go about making it?
- | What research projects have you found most rewarding, and why?
- | What do you think it takes to succeed in INSERT FIELD AND PROGRAM NAME?
- | What lessons have you learned from your “failures” or “mistakes”?
- | Are your grades fair reflections of your academic abilities and intellectual potential?
- | What concerns do you have with regard to a career in medicine?

To maximize use of this list, after you review all general queries, identify a “top five” that relate to the specific internship or job (field, function and firm) you will be interviewing for. Then, conduct a practice session, having a friend or family member ask the five questions. Remember, there are no “right” answers to particular questions. Responses during an interview must seem well conceived, yet conversational, not memorized. Think of this interaction as a conversation, not an inquisition. Thus, it is best to complete this exercise aloud, even if you are doing so alone. Never “practice” via actual interviews with firms you have no interest in. It’s better to conduct role-play interviews to generate advice about your performance. Identify key concerns and build confidence. Don’t over-analyze each role-play or real interview.

Each interviewer has a personal “style,” but there are some identifiable “techniques.” The “**Behavioral Interview**” allows interviewers to “quantify” and “objectify” a traditionally subjective process. It is based upon principles: that past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior; more recent behavior is the best predictor of future behavior; and trends in behavior are better predictors than isolated incidents. Therefore, the interviewer will present “what did you do when” scenarios or ask you to identify past incidents when you used certain behaviors to achieve a task or reach a goal. Prior, interviewers have determined desired behaviors so they will use a pre-established “checklist” to determine if you have qualities associated with those required to succeed in graduate school.



### Gwen M. Greene Career and Internship Center

*oUR goal is for you to articulate and attain yoUR goals!*

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Be prepared for and don't become "rattled" by open-ended question. Additionally, be prepared to answer general questions about the particular field your studies will focus on and issues in the field. Resumes are tools for you to use during the interview. Interviewers review these documents during your "conversation with a purpose," so you should do so too. **Bring the resume with you to the interview and offer it to the interviewer.** If he/she declines, don't be concerned. Some graduate school interviewers prefer not to use documents during so-called "blind interviews." Don't memorize answers to questions, but be prepared to expand upon anecdotes you identified as illustrating related behavioral qualifications.

#### **Behavioral Questions include:**

- ! Describe when you faced problems that tested your coping skills. What did you do?
- ! Give an example of a time when you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.
- ! Tell me about when you used communication skills in order to get an important point across.
- ! Give me an example of when you felt you were able to motivate others.
- ! Give me an example of a time when you were able to communicate successfully with another person, even when the individual may not have personally liked you.

The questions you might ask potential employers during a medical or health professions graduate program interview or during a pre-interview information conversation, include:

- ! What type of person would most likely succeed at this school?
- ! What should I expect of myself over the first few days, weeks and months as a first-year student?
- ! How will my performance be judged, and by whom?
- ! What obstacles should I avoid my first weeks or months and how can I enhance my potential to succeed?
- ! What advice would you give a student just starting the program?
- ! What quality or asset of this program is most likely "hidden," but should be more evident?

Verification is a key to pre-interview preparation. Email or call a few days before any interview to confirm your meeting and, whenever possible to arrange an "informal conversation" with someone who attended the specific graduate school. Identify logistics of the day. Know how many people you will be seeing and what to expect of your visit. Don't fear "stupid questions," including directions, for the more information you have, the "smarter" you will appear on the day of the interview. Pre-interview research does not have to be completed covertly, so specifically ask "Is there information I should be reading? You might also ask "Are there particular questions I should be thinking about prior to my interviews?" and "Will this be a blind interview, or will the interviewer have access to my application file and personal statement?" Verify and ask questions before, so you can be effective during an interview. Also, doctoral program applicants should have been communicating, most likely by email, with potential mentors and advisors well in advance of interviews.

To build interview skills, practice with a friend, family member or, most importantly, a Career Center counselor. Don't memorize. Be yourself. Take a copy of your resume with you to the interview, with key points and achievement anecdotes clearly noted or highlighted. Cite by example and refer to your resume, stating "as noted on the resume" when appropriate. Don't be shy! **Cite achievements with pride.** Interviewers have limited time to get to know "you." Don't think there are "right" answers. When asked a "technical question," if you don't know the exact answer, talk the interviewer through how you would go about finding out the correct procedure. Ask questions when invited. Also, you should ask one or two questions early in the interview to gain clarification regarding job responsibilities. This will help throughout the conversation.

Each interview will be somewhat different, but you can use one technique to prepare for all discussions. **Before each interview complete the Pre-Interview Exercise.** This will organize your thoughts and clearly identify what to highlight during the exchange. Using these notes, you will be focusing interview power specifically on the graduate school target associated with the specific conversation. Review your notes prior to and use them during the interview. Don't be distracted by this "interview worksheet," but do refer to it during your discussions.

When an interviewer refers to your resume or your past history as a point of reference to inspire questions, do the same by stating **"as you can see on my resume or as noted in my personal statement and documented in my application"** Never interview without a copy of your resume to use as a reminder of your qualifications. Bring extra copies with you to offer interviewers or others you might meet. In response to questions, do state or allow your internal voice to focus your thoughts on the phrase **"thinking about this program."** These four words verbally or internally preceding your response do inspire you to "connect" past achievements and general qualities to "specific requirements."

# Graduate School Pre-interview Worksheet

## 3 PROGRAM QUALITIES

**Note 3 qualities of the particular program you will be interviewing for.**

Review program's website in detail, and then briefly summarize "general" as well as "unique qualities" of the academic, practical, cultural, or geographic offerings. What traits you possess would be required to excel in this setting and needed to succeed in any special program offerings? The more clearly and concisely you can describe the programs key characteristics as well as unique offerings, the better.

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## 3 QUALIFICATION CONNECTIONS

**Focusing on the program, cite 3 key points that make you qualified for admissions.**

Review your resume, as well as essays/statements and responses to questions posed in the application process. Then identify three key points to focus on during your conversation. Identify courses, projects or volunteer experiences, and reveal academic, intellectual, practical and "motivational" qualifications to excel as a student and, ultimately, a health care professional. "Connections" are qualities you possess and expressed, or achievements matching program qualifications. Simply, you are completing the statement "*Thinking about what it would take to succeed as a student here, my three key assets are . . .*"

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## 3 STAR (Situation, Tasks, Actions and Results) EXAMPLES

**Note 3 anecdotes that illustrate your capabilities to STAR as a medical student.**

Stories should support the three Qualifications Connections, linking skills used to take goal directed actions and, ultimately to achieve results or finish a project. First, broadly describe the situation. Then, identify specific task, actions, and results associated with your accomplishments. Be prepared to cite by example, tell anecdotes and describe past behaviors that predict future performance potential.

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## 3 INTERVIEWER QUESTIONS

**List 3 questions you would like to ask the interviewer.**

Ask one question in the first 5 minutes of the interview in order to use response as the discussion progresses. Prepare a list of additional questions to ask during and at the end of the interview session.

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