By the time prospective medical students reach the interview stage of the medical school admissions process, the institution knows them on paper. The ability to bring a resume to life is what helps determine if one is granted admission.

Students and faculty involved in the process offered their perspectives on what makes for a successful medical school admissions interview.

**The entire day is an audition**

Beth M. Piraino, MD, associate dean of admissions and financial aid at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine (Pitt), one of 37 member schools of the AMA’s Accelerating Change in Medical Education Consortium.

Interviewees at Pitt go through a daylong process. It includes formal activities such as problem solving in teams and interviews with students and faculty members. It also includes more lower-pressure activities such as meals with medical students and a campus tour.

Some students are very successful in their one-on-one interview, but then flounder on the team exercise, according to Dr. Piraino.

Occasionally applicants “are too aggressive—or they say nothing,” she said. Another no-no is behavior that verges on unprofessional, such as keeping your eyes glued to your smartphone during the tour portion of the day.

Dr. Piraino added that “being polite to everybody in the environment is extremely important. If we find out that they were not polite to the front-office staff that would be a big ‘No.’”
Think on your feet

Avani Patel, a fourth-year medical student at the University of Mississippi School of Medicine in Jackson, faced the multiple mini interview (MMI) format when applying to her school. This is typically held in simulation centers with multiple stations that can include faculty and simulated patients or interprofessional situations. The MMI format is designed to learn more about an applicant, showing how they approach a variety of situations.

The MMI format “gives a sense of how you react in medical and ethical situations,” said Patel. “I’d have to read a prompt for two minutes, then talk for eight minutes.”

“As a future physician, you need to be confident in yourself, your ability and your training,” she added. “I believe they were looking for someone who holds strong and understands what you would do for yourself is what you would do for somebody else.”

Your questions reveal interest

Every interviewer is going to leave time for a few questions. These questions offer another chance to make an impression.

“I like to see that they know something about the school,” Dr. Piraino said. “Some questions give you an idea that they thought about the school and are taking it seriously. At the end of the interview we tell interviewers to leave time for questions. It’s one way to assess true interest.”

Be professional and authentic

There’s a danger in coming off too rehearsed. Preparing for an interview doesn’t mean you stick to a script; it means you know why you are interested in a program and a career in medicine. When your nerves get frayed, keep in mind that if you’ve made it to the interview stage you are among a select few. Medical schools typically interview between 10% and 20% of applicants.

“A successful med school interview is more like a conversation but in that conversation, you are able to feel each other out,” said Damani McIntosh-Clarke, a fourth-year medical student at George Washington School of Medicine & Health Sciences in Washington, D.C. “You get to see if you’re a fit for them and they see if they’re a fit for you. It’s a two-way process. The student is also doing an interview.”