

4 tips on video interviews for 2021 residency applicants

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Interviews are the most personal aspect of the residency selection process. As they go digital due to changes brought on for the 2021 application cycle aimed at reducing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the fundamentals of that key aspect of matching to a residency program have changed significantly.

Liz Southworth is a first-year ob-gyn resident at Michigan Medicine and former co-chair of the Committee on Medical Education for the AMA Medical Student Section. Having worked with medical students to prepare them for the transition to video interviews, she offers these tips.

Practice

You may have some idea what the line of questioning will be, but you still need to prepare for interviews. Ideally, that means finding colleagues and faculty members who can put you through mock interviews.

“The biggest thing is that people need to practice,” Dr. Southworth said. “One of the pitfalls that medical students may fall into now, especially with the transition to online learning and doing Zoom calls for months, is to assume a video-based interview is not going to be that much different. It is different, and it is important to prepare. You want to give yourself the best chance for an interview to be a positive experience.”

Remember that this is also your chance to ask questions about the program, so practice those too. Be mindful of how the virtual setting might impact your interviewer’s interpretation of your questions. Consider what opportunities you have for interactions beyond the formal interview and plot your questions across various encounters.

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Go to the tape

Athletes study film to see what they did right and wrong. As students prepare for video interviews, they should do the same by recording their mock interviews and analyzing their performances.

“It’s a good idea to find a mentor at your school, ideally within the specialty [to which you are applying], and have them conduct some mock interviews with you,” Dr. Southworth said. “Record yourself then watch and listen to that interview. It might be uncomfortable to watch, but if you prepare in that way, you’ll have more success. You can reflect on the content of your answers and hone your message to improve your communication during interviews.”

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Treat it like an in-person interview

Your interview may be taking place at your kitchen table, but that doesn’t mean you can punt on professionalism.

“You need to maintain those same professional boundaries that would if you were there in person,” Dr. Southworth said. “It helps ensure you are in the right mindset. For residency program directors, their only frame of reference is how they did interviews prior to COVID-19. So on your end, it’s best to try to maintain normalcy. Make sure you are in your full interview outfit and find a quiet space that minimizes distractions.”

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Be cognizant of body language

It may be difficult to maintain eye contact in a digital setting, but there are some do’s and don’ts when it comes to body language.

“Where you look and your gestures—those are things people are able to focus on more acutely on a screen than they are in person,” Dr. Southworth said. “Optimal lighting on your face and an appropriate background are important considerations to give your interviewer a stronger sense of your ‘presence’ in the conversation. Position the interviewer’s image on your computer screen directly under your camera to enhance eye contact.”

“This is where watching a recording of yourself can be key,” she noted. “If you are sitting straight up and never move once, that can be equally as awkward as if you are using too many hand gestures and wiggle around in your seat.”

The AMA has curated a selection of resources to assist residents, medical students and faculty during the COVID-19 pandemic to help manage the shifting timelines, cancellations and adjustments to testing, rotations and other events at this time.