Interviewing for residency

Like any job interview, 1st impressions are critical during your residency interview. The interview process begins as soon as you make contact with the program. Everyone from the receptionist you speak with on the phone to the program coordinator who greets you in the lobby can potentially affect your acceptance to the program. You should treat everyone you encounter during this time with patience and respect.

Researching residency programs

Thoroughly research each residency program before your interview. Learn about the institution, their residency program and the faculty and staff to identify topics or issues to explore during the interview. Your research should include the specialty for which you are applying. Are there trends or specific qualities the specialty is looking for in new physicians? Knowing this information can help you emphasize experiences that meet their criteria.

Residents currently in the program may be additional sources of information to help you prepare. They will be your best window into the quality of life among residents in the program. Interact with current residents to ask questions that you may not want to ask during an interview. These might include questions about social opportunities, the city where the program is located or practical issues like how the program accommodates time off for emergencies or illness.

Tips for residency interviews

- Formal business attire is appropriate for men and women.
- Remember to smile and maintain eye contact with your interviewer.
- It is natural to be nervous during an interview—calm your nerves with a few deep breaths.
- Be familiar with your application packet, and prepare for questions about your background.
- Practice answering common residency interview questions. Spend some time reflecting on questions you might be asked. “Why do I want to be a doctor?” “Tell me about yourself.” “What is your greatest personal weakness?”
If you are asked what your personal weakness is, consider using this type of question as an opportunity to discuss a shortcoming that could be developed into a strength.

Questions to ask during a residency interview

The interviewers are likely to ask if you have questions for them. This is a perfect opportunity to seek information about the program, so prepare in advance. Be tactful when asking your questions. Instead of asking “How many hours will I have to work?” consider phrasing your question as “What is expected of a 1st-year resident?” or “What is the resident lifestyle like here?” Consider these topics as you prepare questions:

- Types of required rotations
- Amount and type of elective rotations
- Resident responsibilities for patient management
- Amount of turnover in program directors and faculty
- Balance of inpatient and outpatient responsibilities on various rotations, including clinic
- Structure and topics of formal educational curriculum
- Leave policies for vacation, maternity/paternity leave and participation in education conferences
- Moonlighting policy after 1st year of residency
- Topics of particular interest to you

Unacceptable interview questions and topics

Interviewers should not ask about your rank-list priorities, although you are free to share this information. It is important that you convey your interest to the program you most want to match with so that they know you are serious, but you can do this without revealing your rank list. If you choose to share your list, be consistent from program to program. Federal law prohibits prospective employers from asking certain types of questions during an interview. Prepare ahead of time by consulting the prohibited employment policies and practices from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Interviewing and your social media presence

It is important to maintain a professional and appropriate social media presence. Some interviewers review social media sites to learn more about their potential residents. Medical boards are also
increasingly monitoring physician activity online. Set your accounts so they are private, or self-censor your posts to only include information you would not mind a potential employer viewing. Consult the Federation of State Medical Boards’ Model Guidelines for the Appropriate Use of Social Media and Social Networking in Medical Practice for more guidance.