3 medical school interview insights from an M4 who’s seen both sides

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The interview is a key milestone in the medical school admissions process. While admissions officers have plenty to say about how to succeed, medical students who have successfully navigated the experience can offer another valuable perspective.

A fourth-year medical student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW), Joseph Archer remembers his days applying to medical schools—though his experience differed in that it was carried out in person, and this interview cycle will be mostly virtual due to the pandemic. Nevertheless, Archer believes there are some common themes that could aid prospective medical students in their interviews.

Landing an interview already says a lot

In addition to having recently gone through the interview process as a pre-med, Archer also has helped UW conduct interviews with aspiring students. He says an interview invitation is an indication of mutual interest, so you should act with a certain degree of confidence.

“If you’ve received an interview, you know that the admissions office thinks you will be a good fit,” he said. “All you have to do is back up your application with friendliness and an ability to speak to the values you demonstrated in your application. Having served as a medical school interviewer I can say that most institutions want to see that you can get along well with others and you can back up the interests and values you demonstrated on your application by speaking to them with passion and excitement.”

Find out what else pre-meds should know about virtual medical school interviews.
Don’t stumble on the easy answers

You don’t know exactly what questions you will be asked. But in some form or another you are likely to encounter queries such as: Why are you interested in medicine? Why are you interested in this institution? And, tell me about yourself.

Archer recalls stumbling when asked in interviews to discuss a time he had experienced failure.

“I hadn’t taken enough time to really think about the question before interview season started,” Archer said. “That one stumps a lot of people, so make sure that your answer is genuine. Don’t say, ‘I failed when I was too much of a perfectionist’ or try to mask an accomplishment as a failure. What you learned from it is the most important part of that answer.”

Find out how you can ace your medical school admissions interview.

Don’t forget to interview the interviewers

Your interview gives you a valuable window into a medical school’s culture. If you are fortunate enough to earn multiple acceptances, the interview is going to play a key role in your decision process.

“My interviews were a huge part of my final decision entering medical school,” Archer said. “The warmth I felt from the interviewers, and the camaraderie I felt from the students that I spent time with, told me a lot about what the training was going to be like. Don’t be afraid to ask tough questions, especially of students. Find out what the experience is really like before you commit four tough years of your life to a program.”

Medicine can be a career that is both challenging and highly rewarding but figuring out a medical school’s prerequisites and navigating the application process can be a challenge into itself. The AMA pre-med glossary guide has the answers to frequently asked questions about medical school, the application process, the MCAT and more.

Have peace of mind and get everything you need to start med school off strong with the AMA.