

Tips for Interviews

Made possible by the class of 2007 ☺

1. Schedule your interviews on the first day they offer them to you. The good slots fill up fast.
2. Try to take some time off. The December month is probably the best time to take a month off. If you can't do this, schedule a light elective that won't mind if you reduce the number of credits or do something else to make up a few days away. Try not to take neurology in Dec if you are doing very many interviews. They get quite bitter if you leave.
3. Plan on spending a big load of money that you don't have. But do everything you can to save so it doesn't bite you in the rear later. Stay with friends/family, in hostels or with folks from the program instead of spending 100 bucks a night on a hotel. Think about transportation other than planes...trains, buses, renting a car in the midwest...all these might be cheaper than flying.
4. Regarding the interview itself, generally there are not too many technical questions. The most difficult ones I got were to give examples of certain situations, ie (what was a time that you had a conflict with a superior resident/attending and how did you handle it? Did you ever make a mistake and what did you do? Tell me about a patient that you felt you had a good interaction with...) It's good if you have a few example cases in the front of your head that show how you thought and reasoned through a difficult situation.
5. One suit is probably enough. Just have enough shirts that you can put a clean one on each day. It seems the interviews always provoke more than the average amount of pit sweat. If you take the coat off during lunch, that lessens the probability of spilling lunch on it. Shirts that are decent without the coat are good.
6. You can live for one month out of one suitcase.
7. Wash your clothes in the hotel sink.
8. Take a travel steamer.
9. Don't check anything.
10. Put your suit in your suitcase not a garment bag because they are a pain.
11. Take earplugs for the plane and loud hotels.
12. If going to NYC there is a b&B in Harlem that charges \$60 a night.
13. Try to link as many interviews together as possible to make one long trip back east to save on airfare.

14. Think of it as a vacation with a few free meals thrown in. www.kayak.com.
15. Have fun.
16. Relax.
17. Do your Christmas shopping on the road and just mail them back home. It's more fun and gives you something to do in between interviews.
18. Take a month off for interviews, either Dec or Jan depending on the speciality. For anesthesia, take December off.
19. Sometimes it's cheaper to rent a car than it is to ride cabs (airport to hotel to interview, etc.).
20. Some hotels are cheaper near the airport than closer ones to interview, but you might end up paying more or about the same due to cab fees to get to interviews. Unless renting a car, find hotels near the interviews.
21. If you're in the east coast near NY, Boston, Philadelphia, there are cheap buses that you can use for transportation. Boston to NYC is \$15 on bus for example, but takes 4hrs (flight is about 1hr but with check in time, it almost takes about same time).
22. Just be honest with interviews. Be yourself.
23. Always dress neatly and be polite wherever you are on the interview trail. You do not know who you may meet. - I was chatting with a nice woman while waiting to board a Southwest Airlines flight. I found out she was friends with residency program director and was on the board of a local group that did fundraising for research at the hospital.

1. Pre-ERAS

A. Letters

Most IM programs require 1 letter of recommendation from the chair of medicine or his/her designee (at OHSU, it's Dr. Magarian), plus 2 other letters from internal medicine faculty. 2 schools required 3 additional letters. To be on the safe side, if you're applying in IM it's a good idea to get 3 letters plus Magarian's summary. Ask for them early, and try to get them all in by the end of September. It helps to print out your CV, the cover letter from ERAS waiving your right to view the letter (<http://www.aamc.org/students/eras/resources/downloads/lorcoverus.pdf>), and your PS if you have it done at that point. Most of my letter writers didn't sign the form and I was able to view the letters at Marcia's desk. I think it's a good idea to either read the letters or ask someone else to read them to correct spelling errors (especially if you have an unusual last name).

B. Away electives

IMO, away electives helped a lot. You can ask for a letter, which can strengthen your application for that program, and can help with other programs as well if they are not as familiar with OHSU. In IM, it seems to be good to do an inpatient elective, such as cardiology or nephrology, because you will interact with residents and faculty in the IM department either on the wards or conferences, but you don't need to be as savvy with the system to get your work done. A significant part of the learning curve on wards is how to find what you need in the computer, tracking down the right forms, knowing how transportation is arranged, etc, and that's out of your control if you've never worked at that institution before. Most students I interviewed with did one or 2 away electives in July, August, or September in medicine subspecialties. When you go for an away elective, remember to arrange in advance to get a computer log-in for records and radiology and a pager if you need it.

2. ERAS application

Try to finish this close to September 1st. Just like med school admissions, an early application seems to be to your advantage. If you procrastinate and September 1 rolls around but you still don't like your personal statement, then you can still send your eras application first, adding the PS later. This again might help you because many programs will review your app and invite you for interviews without first reading your PS.

After soliciting a lot of opinions, I went with "resume language" on my CV instead of full sentences... for example "Designed and constructed prototypes for a..." instead of "I designed and constructed..." For the "reason for leaving" section, I only added text if it wasn't immediately apparent why I left-- so when describing a job after college I added something like "left to accept new position at XYZ", but didn't put anything under an activity describing Cover the Uninsured Week. I didn't include things I did in college except for publications. For each activity, I wrote 2-5 sentences to describe what it was and my role. Of course, proofread it multiple times before you send.

For the personal statement, I'm sure everyone knows about the 1 page limit. The way it prints in ERAS is single spaced with 10-point courier font and less than 1/2" margins (the ERAS web site has the details). I picked 4 programs and personalized my PS by adding a short paragraph about why I'd like to go there-- I doubt I said anything original but at one place an interviewer mentioned that they appreciate it when students go out of their way to express some interest in the PS.

3. Step 2

Duke was the only program I applied to where they required you to sit for step 2 CK and CS before the end of January 2007. A good plan if you like your step 1 score is to set aside a couple of weeks to study, and take CK early, but indicate on your ERAS form that you'll be taking it after the match and select the option to manually release your scores. That way, if something comes up and you either delay the test for some reason or do poorly, you don't have to explain anything. On the other hand, if you do well you can release your scores and it can only help your application.

4. Interviews- I don't think it matters if you do these in December or January although many people debate it. There are good lists on the internet of possible interview questions which are helpful to go through. I gave a list of questions to my brother and we did a mock interview-- I think it helped to practice articulating answers in a non-stressful situation before the real thing. No one asked me anything unusual and in general I never felt "on the spot". No one asked any technical questions. I prepared a case to present but no one asked me to do that either. I did bring copies of papers, and gave one away.

Most men and women wore black suits with pants. A few women wore other colors or skirts-- navy and dark brown were probably the most common other colors. (Personally, know I'm not a fashion guru and didn't want to look vastly different so I went with a black pant suit, but I wore earrings I liked with a nice blouse under the jacket so I didn't feel like a nondescript robot.) Make sure you have comfortable shoes because there is a lot of walking between going to interviews and tours. Bring a steam iron or something to get rid of wrinkles, or many dry cleaning places will press things in one day for less than \$5.

I wrote short thank-you notes to the PD and the people who interviewed me... I'd say most people on the interview trail did this.

You can learn a lot by going to the resident social events before or after the interview day. Some of these residents are on the selection committee. I think it's also important to try to get a feel for how you fit in with the residents and the overall culture of the place.

In general I thought the programs were more similar than different, but here are a few ways they differed:

1. Where do residents go then they graduate -- fellowship, academics, teaching? What are their career paths?
2. "front-loaded" vs "back-loaded" -- Do you want to get a lot of experience early on that might free up time for other activities in the jr and sr years, or would you like to have the work be more spread out?
3. Intern autonomy -- where does the program fall on the balance between good supervision and teaching vs. thinking through decisions on your own?

24. Prioritize where you want to interview (i.e. accept only places you really want to go check out).

25. It's okay to cancel interviews because you're tired and you've been at it for 3 straight weeks, but give them plenty of heads up.

26. Be cheap---buy flights that connect. Stay with friends, family, residents, OHSU grads, etc...Wherever you can.

27. Send thank you note right away.

28. Take notes right after you interview--they'll all blend together by week two or three.

29. Buy an interview suit that looks good on you---the old one you used four years ago that is too tight is not recommended.
30. Comfortable shoes!!! (yes, Danskos are available in acceptable styles). Noisy heels are obnoxious. I took a lot of stairs on the hospital tours.
31. Be honest in your interviews.
32. Have QUESTIONS to ask everyone. They want to know what you want to know.
33. Think about the common interview questions and have an idea how you'll react to them. (i.e. prepare).
34. Think of 3 things you want each person who interviews you to come away with from their conversation with you. Bring things up that you need to if you feel you're not quite getting your message/ideas/strengths across.
35. DON'T- I have an interview don't: Don't schedule more than 2 or 3 interviews back to back, because the process is very tiring and it is hard to seem interested by the last interview. Also, they all start to run together and it's hard to remember which program was which.
36. Don't panic if, due to some mix-up or last-minute change of plans, you end up being interviewed by someone who hasn't read your packet. Assume that this will happen at some point during your interviews (it happened to me 3 times).
37. Hand write all of your thank-you notes.
38. Keep the residents email address and communicate with them - what you tell them will get back to the attendings.
39. Attend as many pre-interview dinners as possible - good chance to mingle and get free food.
40. Make friends on the trail and try to share rooms with them at other interviews.
41. Don't check luggage just carry on.
42. Bring Melatonin if you are traveling to the east coast and have to wake up early for those interviews.
43. Don't talk too much about other programs to anybody at the interview
44. Make sure you have a good reason for applying to their program.
45. Keep a list of the reasons you liked and didn't like a particular program.

46. Avoid flying Jet Blue to New York if you have a connecting flight in JFK - they are always late.
47. Priceline you hotels - they will be cheaper.
48. Priceline you cars the day before because the companies will be looking to get rid of cars and let them go for cheaper.
49. Buy a new suit.
50. Carry-on at least one suit..don't trust that your luggage will get there.
51. Always have a bunch of questions ready for the dreaded.."So, do you have any questions for us about the program?"
52. Try to make the pre-interview resident social. It's the only chance for you to really get the down and dirty thoughts about the program.
53. Don't be afraid to cancel interview but do so early.
54. Be flexible. It's the worst time of year to be travelling due to the weather.
55. Remember that you are interviewing their program just as much as they are interviewing you.
56. Handwritten thank you notes are good. And don't forget to send one to the program coordinator too. I found that buying blank cards with envelopes, a thank you stamp, and an ink pad were a cheap way to make a lot of nice looking cards.
57. Write your thank you notes early after the visit because you will forget who you talked to about what topic.
58. Remember that you can always turn down interviews - apply to places you want to live and aim high while including "safer" programs, too - you might be surprised with how many "out of your league" places invite you to interview
59. When interviewers have your USMLE packet, they love asking about things that make you an interesting person, not just an interesting doctor - include activities/hobbies/experiences that make you stand out or you're excited to talk about, even if not medically related.