

Med School Admissions Interview Guide

*If you are prepared, the interview lets you shine
and tell people what you are passionate about.*



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CRACKING MED SCHOOL ADMISSIONS INTERVIEW GUIDE

Our team has done a multitude of interviews. We experienced tough interview questions, and we have had several interview formats (group, multiple mini interviews, one-on-one).

We helped hundreds of applicants with their interviews. Last year, our team even acted out scenarios to help our students prepare for multiple mini interviews.

What is our biggest piece of advice? Have fun! This is your chance to shine and tell people what you are passionate about. It is also exciting to hear about your interviewers' experiences working with and teaching students at the school you are interviewing at.

This chapter will give you the inside scoop on how we prepare for interviews and what the interview trail is really like. Enjoy!

*If you have additional questions or need help with interviews, feel free to contact The Cracking Med School Admissions team at **info@crackingmedadmissions.com**.*

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Rachel Rizal grew up in Cerritos, California. She has always had a strong interest in healthcare and education. Since high school, Rachel has advised hundreds of individuals for college, graduate school, scholarship, and fellowship applications. In high school, she was inducted to *USA Today's* All-USA High School Academic First Team for her international education work and recognized as a Coca-Cola Scholar. She attended Princeton for undergrad, and graduated cum laude from the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. There, she founded an organization called Health Matters, which creatively taught health education and brought medical resources to low-income families. After college, she pursued a Fulbright Fellowship where she led research and public health projects related to vaccinations and infectious diseases. Rachel received her M.D. at Stanford. She started a health education program in Stanford's Emergency Department and continued her vaccination work by leading Flu Crew, an organization that distributes free flu immunizations. She also worked for Stanford Health Care, learning hospital administration and business operations under the tutelage of the CEO, COO, and Vice Presidents of the hospital. Rachel did her residency in Emergency Medicine at Harvard. She advises non-profits and companies that focus on improving access to care, care coordination, and health education. She has a passion for interdisciplinary work, and wants to pursue a career that integrates medicine, public health, public policy, and business.

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Rishi P. Mediratta grew up in Portage, Michigan and has lived and worked in London, Geneva, and Ethiopia, focusing on a wide-range of public health issues. He graduated Phi Beta Kappa with a degree in Public Health from the Johns Hopkins University where he developed medical and public health programs focused on preventing child mortality. Rishi's passion is designing and implementing sustainable programs. While living in Ethiopia, he founded the Ethiopian Orphan Health Foundation, a non-profit that provides community-based health care and education to vulnerable children. As a Marshall Scholar, he further examined the implications of delivering primary care services to children from an anthropological and a public health lens. Rishi integrates his field experience and interdisciplinary background to create child health programs and policies; he has worked with policymakers at the World Bank, the World Health Organization, and the Michigan Department of Community Health. Rishi received his M.D. at Stanford Medical School where he continued to spearhead initiatives to improve population health, primary care opportunities, and global health. He completed his Pediatrics residency at Stanford and is a faculty member at Stanford University School of Medicine. He continues to do research and global health work. He advises medical school and fellowship applicants and is a member of Stanford's Rhodes-Marshall Selection Committee.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Devin Nambiar was born and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area, and has lived around the world since finishing high school. He has been advising students at the high school and college levels for over a decade. While doing his undergrad at Columbia University, majoring in Math, he taught high school students from the Bronx the principles of entrepreneurship as the co-founder of Columbia Students in Free Enterprise. After graduating, he founded a college admissions consultancy in his hometown and spent a year helping local high school students gain entry to their top choice schools. He then worked in test prep and mobile learning technologies for two years in Seoul, South Korea before coming back to California to work in tech. He is an evangelist for healthcare technology, and recognizes that potential doctors have to affect change not just at the operating table, but in the business world as well. In his day job, he is currently Head of Product Management for Asia-Pacific at Electronic Arts, and travels the world working with game development teams from across the company. Devin is a member of the Forbes Technology Council, PocketGamer's Mobile Mavens, and is both an active voice in the industry and an author on technology and business. He currently resides in Shanghai. He continues to consult for college and graduate school admissions, and he is active in the Columbia Shanghai Alumni Council and an interviewer for prospective Columbia applicants.

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PREPARATION

HOW DO I CHANGE OR CANCEL MY INTERVIEW DATES?

So you got an interview invitation – CONGRATULATIONS! But the problem is, you can't make the interview dates they gave you as options. So, what should you do?

While interview dates are planned well in advance, it is possible to switch or to choose interview dates. Most medical schools give you a list of options for interview days anyway. Remember, medical schools granted you an interview for a reason – they are interested in admitting you.

TIP: Interview Early

From our experience, interviewing earlier is better.

The admissions office also consists of human beings who want to help you get into medical school. From our experience, it is definitely do-able to work with admissions offices to get an appropriate interview date nailed down.

HOW DO I SCHEDULE INTERVIEWS IF I AM ABROAD?

If you are abroad, try to cluster your interviews together around the same time frame. Most of our friends usually made two interview trail trips that fell within certain times: early fall (especially applicants for MD/PhD's); December / early January (many applicants come back for the winter holiday season); and late winter. Let's say you get an interview in Boston in December: you should tell all the schools in the Northeast that you will be visiting for interviews.

Here is a sample email you can write to the Admissions office regarding interview date availabilities:

Dear X Admissions Committee:

X School is one of my top choices for medical school because of its strong interdisciplinary programs, support for student initiatives, and location in New York City.

I would like to inform the admissions committee that I will be in the New York area the first week of December.

*Thanks,
[Insert name here]*

In general, the flexibility of a medical school in granting you interviews depends on how strong of an applicant you are and what school you are applying to. If you get a chance on your application, tell the admissions office that you are abroad. It can only make your life easier!

HOW DO YOU PREPARE FOR INTERVIEWS?

Rachel: First, I brainstorm my answers to practice interview questions. Second, I do a practice interview once or twice with my friends using the list of questions presented later in this chapter. I usually use different friends so I can receive different types of feedback. Finally, in order to answer, “Why do you want to go to School X,” I chat with current medical school students to learn more about what it’s like to go to that medical school. For example, I learned that Mount Sinai has take-home exams during the pre-clinical years. This schedule gave the students flexibility with personal obligations. I also learned that my friends at Columbia joined an organization in which they are allowed to be on a transplant team.

Rishi: Read as much information as you can on the school’s website. You will want to know about the curriculum, student opportunities, mentorship opportunities by faculty members, student groups, research opportunities, leadership opportunities, financial aid, and the culture of being a student. Before each interview, I identified aspects of the school that fit well with my application. During my interview, I worked in examples of opportunities at the school that fit my background.

Talk to current medical students before, during, and after the interview. If you don’t have any friends at the medical school you are interviewing at, call the admissions office and ask to be put in touch with current medical students. Talking with medical students will help you understand more about the culture of being a medical student at that school and what students like and dislike about the school.

Be prepared with the logistics of interview day. I like to look at a campus map to familiarize myself with the campus and where I have to be during the day. Make sure you have all the details about your interview and a point of contact at the admissions office in case something happens the day of your interview.

On the day of the interview, I try to learn as much information as I can about my interviewers (especially if their names were not released to me prior to the interview day). It helps to have a smart phone so you can do a quick search or text the names of your interviewers to a friend who can look them up for you during your interview. The point of researching your interviewers is to know more about them so you can create a personal connection.

During an interview, you should be asking the question, “Do I fit in here?” Talk to a lot of students and faculty about what it’s really like to study there. I prefer staying with a medical student host so you have the opportunity to have in-depth conversations with current students about the school. When I stayed with a student host, I was able to ask many detailed questions about the school that I was not able to ask during the interview.

THE ACTUAL INTERVIEW

WHAT ARE COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS?

We have compiled some common medical school interview questions and have sorted them out into categories. We hope this will help you prepare!

Common General Questions:

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why medicine?
- What do you see yourself doing in the future?
- Talk to us about your research.
- What have you been doing since graduation?
- Is there anything else I should know about you/tell the admissions committee?
- What will you bring to the med school class?
- When did you know that you wanted to go into medicine?
- Why [Insert medical school here]?

Personal Background & Qualities:

- What did you spend your time doing in high school?
- Tell me about a time when you failed.
- What is your family like?
- What is the hardest thing you have had to deal with?
- What do you like to do in your spare time? What do you like to do for fun?
- What is a typical weekend like for you?
- What do your parents do?
- Where are you from?
- Where were you born?
- What would your friends say is your best quality? What would they say is your weakness?

College / Post Grad:

- Did you like [insert your undergraduate school here]?
- Why did you choose your major?
- What activities were you involved with in college?
- What was your most memorable moment at [insert undergraduate here]?
- Best science/non-science class during your undergrad?
- What would you do differently if you repeated your undergrad?
- What did you write your thesis on?

- What aspect of undergrad did you enjoy most?
- What did you enjoy least or wish you could have changed during your undergraduate years?
- What did you do with your time between college and medical school? Why did you want to spend your time doing this?
- Why did you decide to pursue a Masters degree?

Activities:

- Have there ever been instances when you saw a doctor approach an issue with a patient and you thought you would handle it differently?
- What medical experiences made you decide to go into medicine?
- What did you do during the summers? Why did you decide to choose that summer experience?
- What experiences have you had during your internships that let you know you wanted to be a doctor?
- Tell me about your experiences abroad.
- Do you have clinical experience? What did you gain from it? Insights?
- What experience or activity do you think has prepared you for medical school/medicine the best and how?
- What was your most important leadership position?
- Tell me about a time when you worked on a team.

Medical School Thoughts:

- What do you think will be the hardest thing for you in medical school?
- What are you looking for in a medical school?
- What do you want to improve about yourself in medical school?
- What are things you look for in a medical school?
- What do you want to know about [insert medical school here]?
- What will be the biggest change in medicine 10 years from now?
- Where do you see yourself in 5/10/15/20 years?
- Do you think you will do research while you are in medical school?
- What kind of practice do you see yourself in?

Randoms:

- Do you have any questions for me?
- How do you handle stress?
- What does being a leader mean to you?
- Tell me about your current job.
- Tell me about a difficult moral dilemma you have dealt with.
- Tell me about a time when you've done something you regretted.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF INTERVIEWS?

THE “GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER” INTERVIEW

These interviews involve you meeting a faculty member or current student one-on-one. They typically last thirty minutes to one hour. Generally, these interviews are not stressful and are focused on your activities.

Do not regurgitate your resume. In order to stand out, WOW your interviewers with stories and what motivates you to go into medicine. Be sure to ask your interviewers about their experiences working or studying at the medical school.

TIP: Interview Preparation

Sometimes you are paired up with a professor who is in your field of study. Be prepared to talk about your field in depth and get grilled on your opinions about related subject areas.

THE “SPEED DATING” INTERVIEW

Multiple Mini Interviews (MMIs) are fairly new in the United States. We think about MMIs as speed dating because you move through 10 different interviewers, and each interview is eight minutes long.

Types of questions: Some of the interviews contain team-based activities in which you complete a task with a co-interviewee partner. Other interviews ask you about your thoughts on bioethics topics and your medically-related experiences. Still, other interviewers will give you a scenario in which you have to role play or describe how you would tackle a situation. We recommend using this academic paper published on multiple-mini interviews as reference:

Sample Multiple Mini Interview Questions

- *Station #1: Dr. Cheung recommends homeopathic medicines to his patients. There is no scientific evidence or widely accepted theory to suggest that homeopathic medicines work, and Dr. Cheung doesn't believe them to. He recommends homeopathic medicine to people with mild and non-specific symptoms such as fatigue, headaches and muscle aches, because he believes that it will do no harm, but will give them reassurance. Consider the ethical problems that Dr. Cheung's behavior might pose. Discuss these issues with the interviewer.*

- *Station #2: A message that recently appeared on the Web warned readers of the dangers of aspartame (artificial sweetener – NutraSweet, Equal) as a cause of an epidemic of multiple sclerosis (a progressive chronic disease of the nervous system) and systemic lupus (a multisystem autoimmune disease). The biological explanation provided was that, at body temperature, aspartame releases wood alcohol (methanol), which turns into formic acid, which is in the same class of drugs as cyanide and arsenic. Formic acid, they argued, causes metabolic acidosis. Clinically, aspartame poisoning was argued to be a cause of joint pain, numbness, cramps, vertigo, headaches, depression, anxiety, slurred speech and blurred vision. The authors claimed that aspartame remains on the market because the food and drug industries have powerful lobbies in Congress. They quoted Dr. Russell Blaylock, who said, “The ingredients stimulate the neurons of the brain to death, causing brain damage of varying degrees.”*

Critique this message, in terms of the strength of the arguments presented and their logical consistency. Your critique might include an indication of the issues that you would like to delve into further before assessing the validity of these claims.

- *Station #3: Your company needs both you and a co-worker (Sara, a colleague from another branch of the company) to attend a critical business meeting in San Diego. You have just arrived to drive Sara to the airport. Sara is in the room.*
- *Station #4: Recently, the Prime Minister of Canada raised the issue of deterrent fees (a small charge, say \$10, which everyone who initiates a visit to a health professional would have to pay at the first contact) as a way to control health care costs. The assumption is that this will deter people from visiting their doctor for unnecessary reasons. Consider the broad implications of this policy for health and health care costs. For example, do you think the approach will save health care costs? At what expense? Discuss this issue with the interviewer.*
- *Station #5: Why do you want to be a physician? Discuss this question with the interviewer.*
- *Station #6: The Canadian Pediatric Association has recommended that circumcisions ‘not be routinely performed.’ They base this recommendation on their determination that ‘the benefits have not been shown to clearly outweigh the risks and costs.’ Doctors have no obligation to refer for, or provide, a circumcision, but many do, even when they are clearly not medically necessary. Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) no longer pays for unnecessary circumcisions.*

Consider the ethical problems that exist in this case. Discuss these issues with the interviewer.

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Scoring: Each interviewer gives you a score, and your overall performance during interview day is based on the average of these scores compared to the other students who interviewed at the same time as you.

THE “GET TO KNOW A LOT OF INTERVIEWEES” INTERVIEW

Some schools have group interviews in which you are put in a room with other applicants and you chat with a few current medical students or faculty members. Our approach to these interviews is to go with the flow of the conversation. Don’t be the person who dominates the conversation. However, speak up when appropriate and don’t be left silent because of other applicants.

THE “MD/PHD” INTERVIEW

MD/PhD interviews are usually two days long. Most MD/PhD interviews question you about your research. Be prepared to talk about your research in depth and where you think your field will progress in the future. We asked our MD/PhD friends for some insights and advice for MD/PhD interviews.

MD/PhD Tips from Daniel Kim

The panel interviews, where you have many interviewers in one room, were actually somewhat fun. You were able to interact with multiple people, and it almost felt more like a group conversation than an interview. During the PhD interviews, they mostly asked about research. They wanted to know if I understood what I was doing and what my contribution was, so that they could gauge whether what I was saying matched with what I had written. If I would give any tips for interviews, I would say to know your research well, know why you want to do an MD/PhD and articulate it well to them, think about your future career, think about role models you can point to who have done the same, and relax!

MD/PhD Tips from Gerald Tiu

You'll find on the interview trail that there are some interviewers that you will click really well with, some you definitely won't click with, and many somewhere in the middle. One of my most memorable interviews was with a professor who just happened to pursue a similar off-beat experience after she graduated to one I did after I graduated. After I graduated, I decided that I wanted to re-explore my cultural heritage in Asia in the context of health disparities and stigma and applied to a fellowship to fund that experience. The professor I talked to just happened to apply to the same fellowship and spent some time working with a marginalized group of individuals in Asia and understanding how that stratified culture functioned. We ended up talking about our unique interests in Asian culture and mythology, which somehow segued into deep scientific research questions. I think this experience showed that if you are yourself and bring up topics that truly interest you, you might occasionally find yourself in an interview situation in which the interviewer unexpectedly has similar interests. Not only does that mitigate stress during an interview, but you may also actually find a role model during your interview process.

Questions that come up a lot during the MD/PhD interview:

1. Tell me about your research followed with questions about your research topic. (Know your research well)
2. What do you see yourself doing in ___ years? (Any answer suffices as long as you think it through and it sounds plausible)
3. Why an MD/PhD and not one or the other? (Any answer suffices as long as you have thought it through and are passionate about it)
4. How do you see yourself splitting your time? (Usually somewhere between 70:30 to 90:10 research to science is the traditional answer, but who really knows. Try to think about what fits best with your medical and research interests and see what your physician-scientist role models have done it. Honestly there's no right answer to this so any justifiable answer is good. You can maybe even say you don't know and will base your decisions off how graduate and medical training goes. However, it is good to have a rough idea of what you want to say during the interviews).
5. If you had your own lab, what research would you pursue? (Any answer you have thought through well).
6. Who are your role models? (Find a physician-scientist role model to shadow/talk to if you can).

WHAT DO I WEAR TO THE INTERVIEW?

We all believe that you should dress to impress during your interviews.

TIP: Do we believe in wearing traditional colors?

Nope. In fact, we like wearing non-traditional colors like baby pink or lavender so we don't look like everyone else!

For guys: Wear slacks and a nicely pressed dress shirt. We also recommend wearing a tie. A suit blazer is optional, but interviewees usually wear one in cold weather.

For girls: There is more leeway to what you can wear to an interview. You can wear a suit and skirt or suit and slacks. The top can also range from a nice tank top, blouse, or dress shirt. Jewelry and accessories are a nice touch, but don't go overboard.

TIP: Comfortable Shoes during Interviews

At some schools, you walk around a lot. So invest in very comfortable shoes!

SHOULD I BRING ANYTHING ELSE TO THE INTERVIEW?

It's always good to bring an interview folder with two pens (in case you lose one) and paper. We have had some friends bring a copy of an article published in a prestigious medical journal, a senior thesis, or pictures from their travels.

INTERVIEW TO-DO LIST:

- Schedule your interview date and accommodations**
- Research the school you are going to interview at**
- Practice interviewing**
- Be sure to have appropriate interview attire**
- Have questions ready about the school**
- Bring pens, a notebook, and materials that you plan to share with your interviewers**
- Be prepared with interview logistics (have your boarding passes, transportation schedule, and housing information ready)**
- Write thank you letters to your interviewers**

If you have additional questions or need help with interviews, feel free to contact The Cracking Med School Admissions team at info@crackingmedadmissions.com.