INTERVIEW Advice for PA School

Online Resources

1. Big Interview Resource, available in Handshake. Find it by logging into Handshake, clicking on the Career Center Tab and then on “Resources.” This online interview preparation software has a video example of a medical school interview.

2. Free online Interviewing Workshop available in the University of Minnesota Pre-Health Student Resource Center as well as their short online module about the MMI.

3. Physician Assistant Video on Demand: www.paflix.com
   - Watch Interview-related videos

4. ThePALife: www.thepalife.com
   - Lots of free resources (also offers additional services for fee)
   - Has compiled a list of “50 most common” interview questions and other interview resources

Questions to Get You Started

Why & What?
- What specifically attracts you to physician assistant over all the other careers out there? What are the similarities/differences between PA, NP and MD?
- What personal characteristics make you certain you are cut out to be a PA?
- What are your specific strengths as a candidate? What will make you memorable?
- Be fluent in the PA training, certification, licensure and recertification process for PAs
General Interview Preparation:

- Prepare in advance, choose professional dress, arrive early
- **Stay current by READING** (listening, viewing). Health professions schools are looking for lifelong learners who are intensely curious about their field of interest and who have made a point to learn about people from a variety of backgrounds and experiences—your future patients. Candidates may be asked questions pertaining to current health care issues and specific issues relating to the PA profession.
  - Visit professional associations’ websites for current news and follow them on Twitter:
    - American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA):
      - [www.aapa.org](http://www.aapa.org)
      - @AAPAorg
    - Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA)
      - [www.paeaonline.org](http://www.paeaonline.org) and explore the Emerging Advocacy Issues
      - @PAEAonline
  - Follow the science and medicine sections of local and national newspapers and/or national magazines
  - Search for TED Talks by PAs or other medical professionals
  - Check out Diagnosis series by Dr. Lisa Sanders in New York Times to get a taste of the detective work required in medicine and view the NYT’s Patient Voices series.
  - Go to the Dana Library and find articles of interest in Journal of the American Academy of Physician Assistant Association (JAAPA); or Journal of Physician Assistant Education (JPAE) or other medical journals that catch your attention.
  - Read books written by PAs, MDs or patients that provide insight into the lived experiences of a broad range of people. (Visit the Pre-Health Website for a list of possible books (Click on “Medicine’ tab and “Recommended Reading…”)
  - Download the Document “Pre-Health Recommendations & Resources” and see other suggestions under #4 on the Pre-Health home page.

- **Be Yourself.** Sounds kind of silly and obvious, but a lot of candidates worry that their "true" self is not good enough, and try to act smarter or more experienced than they really are. Your interviewer/s will quickly see through this. They want to know who you genuinely are.

- **Back It Up.** Come prepared to give examples to support your statements. If the question is, “What do you have to offer our school?” Don't just recite a list of your qualities. Rather, highlight a few that you think make you unique, and provide some evidence that demonstrates you have them.

- **Become an Expert on Yourself.** You need to walk into that interview having done some introspection and reflection. What various life experiences have shaped you? How do you interact with people in a variety of circumstances? Be prepared to explain how your challenges and triumphs helped you learn and grow. What are your unique strengths as a candidate? What will make you memorable?
Don’t Know the Answer? You might get a question in your interview about an unfamiliar topic. That’s okay; you are not a healthcare provider yet. Don’t fake it. Be honest, show interest and learn, or if appropriate, use it as a lead toward a related topic with which you are familiar.

Know what type of interview format to expect prior to your school visit/s. Be prepared to think on your feet: You may be asked situation-based questions for which you would have to provide potential ideas or solutions on the spot. Or, you may be asked behavior-based questions for which you would have to recall examples of relevant past behavior. Some schools use a Multiple Mini-Interview (MMI) format, so you should familiarize yourself with this format and with potential ethics-based questions:
- MMI: What to expect article from Medical School Admissions Doctor blog
- What’s it like to participate in MMIs by AAMC
- Here is an article that talks about preparing for ethics-related scenarios that may be raised during interviews
- Columbia has MMI/bioethics preparation material: http://sps.columbia.edu/bioethics/premed

Possible Interview Questions (non-MMI format)

1. Personal Questions
   Tell me about yourself? Describe your personality
   What do you see as your particular strengths as a candidate? What are your weak points?
   What have you read lately?
   What do you like to do in your spare time?
   How do you deal with stress or adversity?
   What is the biggest obstacle you have overcome in your life?
   Who has been the most influential person in your life?
   Have you ever stepped out of your comfort zone? Describe this.
   What is your preferred way of learning, and how do you learn best?

2. Motivation/Commitment to the PA Profession
   Why do you want to become PA?
   When did you first think seriously about going to PA school?
   What have you done so far to test and affirm your career interest?
   What do you most look forward to about practicing as a PA?
   What are the less appealing aspects of your chosen profession?
   What are your thoughts about improving access to healthcare for disadvantaged populations?
   What will you do if you don’t get admitted?
3. Education/Experience
   What have been your favorite classes and why?
   What classes did you struggle with in college?
   To what extent have you challenged yourself as a student?
   Have you pursued any independent study or research? What did you learn?
   What types of volunteer work have you done and what has been most meaningful?
   What experiences have you had working with people?
   What have you learned in the process?

4. Knowledge of Program
   Why do you want to attend our program? What questions do you have for us?
   What do you know about our school? Would you be a good fit here? Explain.

5. Realistic Outlook
   How will you deal with the stress of school and this profession?
   What do you think will challenge you most in PA school, or as a professional?
   What will you like least about practicing as a PA?
   Why would you be a PA? What are the most important qualities?

6. Why you?
   Pretend you are an admissions officer: What would you look for in an applicant?
   There are 1,000 applicants as qualified as you are. Why should our PA school choose you?