

Mastering Interviews: Your Guide to Success

Wise advice from the Student Doctor Network



Forward

Emil Chuck, Ph.D., Director of Advising Services, HPSA

When starting out on my journey as a prehealth advisor, I leaned on my background knowledge as a former prehealth student and as an instructor for a test prep company. One of the resources I used to help get me up to speed was the articles posted by the Student Doctor Network.

At that time, professional societies did not have robust websites for prospective applicants to understand the challenging process of applying to medical school. Student Doctor Network published excellent advice from admissions counselors and current students who were willing to share their advice.

As I look at these articles in this compilation, I am struck by how many voices we had who wrote articles and were gaining credibility as admissions experts. Many professionals we profiled have gone on to impact the health professions, and I feel humbled and honored to know that so many were helped by their advice and their support of the outreach and impact the Health Professional Student Association had made.

Please enjoy the collected wisdom of the authors of these articles, and best of luck with your journey!





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Three Tools to Help You Prepare for Interviews

August 25, 2014, by Deborah Gutman, MD, MPH

Preparing for an interview always feels like an awkward exercise. How exactly do you prepare? Do you write out answers to the most commonly asked questions? Do you participate in mock interviews? These are common and valuable approaches, but you run the risk of sounding rehearsed in an interview setting which may come off as disingenuous. Other applicants might be inclined not to practice at all because they feel confident and believe their application and personality should speak for themselves. However, this may not be an entirely reliable approach, because you may find that you have trouble remembering or clearly stating important information about yourself when you are put on the spot and you have limited time to represent yourself. You may end up having that moment after the interview when you think, “I wish I said that more clearly” or worse, “I can’t believe I said that”. Another option is not to PRACTICE, but rather, to PREPARE for your interviews. Instead of practicing rote answers, preparation allows you to spend time giving meaningful and in-depth thought to what character traits and skills you bring to the table and why you might be a good fit for a particular medical (or dental, or veterinary) school, or why the school might be a good fit for you. Here are a few tools and exercises you may want to try in preparation for interview season. (They also come in handy for finishing those personal statements and secondary essays).

Mind Mapping

Mind mapping is a visual way to think about a topic or a concept. Mind maps allow you to “map” out ideas and organize them using keywords, colors and images that radiate out from a central main concept. This tool could be used to create a visual image of what makes up YOU. The center circle should be your name or image. From there you would work on adding different spheres of your past development and current life. You could add education, activities, personality traits, passions, family, etc. The idea is to create a visual representation that you can reference when you answer questions about yourself. Here are some examples of mind mapping exercises done for CV planning. You could also use a mind map that is divided into competencies you want to demonstrate in an interview setting. At the completion of the exercise you should have a visual reference tool to help you identify many topics that you can and want to talk about on your interview day. There are many mind mapping apps and tools available. ... You can use a software program or just use a blank piece of paper and get started.

SWOT (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats) Analysis

SWOT is a tool to help you identify your strengths and weaknesses in order to identify opportunities and threats. To do a SWOT analysis you need paper and time. You can download a SWOT analysis worksheet to help get you organized. This is a technique in which you outline your strengths by asking yourself what skills or advantages you have that others may not have and/or thinking about your accomplishments. Then you spend time identifying your weaknesses by asking yourself questions such as: What tasks do you avoid because of lack of confidence? What would people around you say are your weaknesses? Do you have negative work habits or personality traits that hold you back? Next you spend some time identifying opportunities to that might take advantage of your strengths or bolster your weaknesses. Are there courses you can take to learn a new skill? Are there projects you can embark on that would specifically highlight your strengths? Lastly, you identify the obstacles or threats that you face in your future job or educational setting. The goal of this exercise is to help you match your strengths to opportunities and to think about ways you can overcome your weaknesses. This will help both with interview questions and when you critically evaluate schools. Spending time identifying your personal SWOT analysis should help you determine if a school will be a good fit for your particular strengths and weaknesses. Will the educational mission and curriculum provide you with more opportunities or more threats? It is not uncommon to be asked, “Why are you interested in our school?” or “Why do you think you would be a good fit for our school?” This exercise should help you know the answer.

STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result)

STAR is an organizational tool used to help you focus in on specific situations that demonstrate your competencies in preparation for behavior-based interview questions. Behavior-based interviews rely on the premise that past behavior is a predictor of future behavior. Interviewers typically have in mind core competencies they are looking for and then develop questions that may highlight those competencies. The AAMC has developed 15 core competencies for entering medical students. Examples of behavior-based questions you might be asked at a medical school interview include: Describe a stressful situation, how did you handle it? Give an example of how you work well on a team. Tell me about a time when you failed. Describe how you deal with someone in crisis. This tool helps you prepare a cohesive and informative story about your experiences. Start by identifying at least 6-8 meaningful experiences from your past that you can use to demonstrate the medical school competencies. Most should be positive experiences, but some should be situations that were negative but you made the best of them. Examples can be pulled from any area of your life – this is a good time to reference your mind map if you completed one. For each experience clearly identify the situation and set the context, identify the task you needed or wanted to accomplish, describe the action(s) you took (were there other options? why did you choose the one you did?) and lastly, describe the outcome and what you learned. It is important to be concise yet include enough specific details for the story to be memorable.

As the proverb states “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”. There is no Act II when it comes to interviews. The time invested in adequately preparing for interviews will prevent the agony and time of trying to recover from a poor first and last impression at your dream school. Thinking about a STAR approach to your experiences can be the difference between answering “I demonstrated initiative by working in one of the most successful labs on campus and being asked to do a research presentation” versus “When I worked at X lab I was invited to present my research. I quickly realized how difficult it was to clearly explain scientific concepts just using words to non-science audiences. I took the initiative of developing an animation of our central research concept. This was extremely well received and I have since discovered additional opportunities to integrate my passion for animation with my passion for science”.

<https://www.studentdoctor.net/2014/08/25/3-tools-to-help-you-prepare-for-interviews-2/>



How to Maximize Your Pre-Interview Research

December 14, 2017, by AAMC Staff

One of the most exciting and nerve-wracking stages of the application process can be your medical school interview. On the one hand, receiving an invitation for an interview can be a huge confidence booster because it proves that you've impressed the admissions committee enough that they want to meet you. On the other hand, because medical schools invite significantly more students to interview than they have room for in the class, going to an interview can make the competition feel even more fierce.

Now is the time to set yourself apart! We've shared some ways you can prepare for an interview here, and you've probably heard it's important to ask questions. But one thing that can make a big impression is the type of questions you ask.

Before your interview, do your research!

Reading about a medical school's policies on their learning environment, research opportunities, and campus life will help you gain a deeper understanding of what being a medical student in that program is like. This alone can give you ideas for original and genuine questions to ask.

For example, if you know that you prefer to wear comfortable casual clothes to class and are wondering about the dress code policy, instead of asking “Do you have a dress code policy?” consider saying, “I read that students are required to wear appropriate, professional attire in clinical areas, but is there a dress code that students are expected to wear to class?” Instead of asking when students will begin patient interaction, you could say, “I understand that in this program, patient interaction begins in the first year of medical school, but I was wondering if that means the first month of classes or later in the semester. Could you tell me more about that?” Or, “I saw that instruction includes both weekly small-group sessions and large group lectures. Does that vary depending on the class, or do most courses include both?” Or, “I saw that peer-to-peer tutoring is available. Can you tell me more about how that works?”

A great place to start your research is with the Medical School Admission Requirements(TM) (MSAR®) website, which is updated each year by the medical schools themselves. Here are examples of topics included:

- Instruction Style
- Availability of Office Hours and Tutoring
- Clinical Rotations
- Dress Code
- Student Ranking
- Grading System
- Student Housing
- Student Organizations
- Diversity Programs

Asking for more information about any of these topics will ideally show the school that you have done your homework and that you are genuinely interested in what they have to offer. Write down your questions and bring them with you to the interview so you don't forget! You can use this worksheet to get started. And remember, you're interviewing the medical school as much as they are interviewing you—so make sure to stay engaged and listen throughout the interview.

<https://www.studentdoctor.net/2017/12/14/maximize-pre-interview-research/>

Interview Preparation: Practice Makes Perfect

November 14, 2007, by Jeremiah Fleenor

That which we persist in doing becomes easier, not that the task itself has become easier, but that our ability to perform it has improved.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 – 1882)

An interview is without doubt a pressure-cooker setting. You may know exactly what you want to say before the interview, but in that high stress environment, it is not surprising to suffer brain-freeze and respond in a completely unanticipated way. One of the few remedies to counter this awkward effect is preparation – lots of it. Interviewing is a skill; like riding a bike or throwing a baseball, so it naturally takes practice and effort. Let's look at some of the ways in which you can give your interviewing muscles a good work out.



Mirror, Mirror on the Wall...

One simple but good exercise is to spend some quality time in front of a mirror. Ideally you can find a mirror to sit in front of, to mimic how you will appear across the table from your interviewer, but a smaller mirror will do for some of these exercises as well. The purpose is to see yourself from your interviewer's perspective. Focus on your facial expressions, body language and delivery. To start with, practice some of the fundamental mechanics that are vital to a great interview: smiling, eye contact, hand position and body language.

Begin simply by sitting in front of a mirror and smiling.

In particular, get comfortable smiling for extended periods of time. It's not about perfect teeth or minty fresh breath. The purpose is to be able to maintain a natural and unstrained smile for a longer period of time than you would normally.

Spend some time making good eye contact with your reflection.

You're not trying to win a staring contest. Rather, the goal is to become comfortable with long periods of maintaining eye contact in a relaxed and natural way.

Find a few comfortable sitting positions.

This is important because interviews aren't conducted standing up. And the seating that you're offered can range from hard-back chairs to soft couches that are easy to get lost in. You'd be surprised how much sitting in an unaccustomed position can make you feel uncomfortable and effect how you portray yourself. Do you feel more comfortable with your legs crossed or side by side? Do you like to lean back or sit forward? The key is to assess how you look and feel in different sitting positions and how that enables you to best deliver your message.

Practice delivering the "gold nuggets."

The following exercises require a larger mirror. Once you are seated before the mirror, practice delivering the "gold nuggets" you have gathered about yourself, demonstrating your potential for becoming a highly effective medical student and future physician. This is best accomplished through questions and answers. Pose hypothetical interview questions to yourself and answer them as you would during a real interview.

While you practice answering questions, pay special attention to your hands.

Try to find a balanced way of using them to communicate, and find a comfortable position of rest. You may choose to fold them in your lap or rest them on your legs.

Assess yourself.

Be sure that you continue to smile, make good eye contact and be engaging. Pretend that this is the real deal. While going through these drills carefully watch yourself and ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I believe what I'm saying?
- Do my facial expressions and body language communicate the same message as my words?
- Do I look comfortable?
- Do I appear to be having fun?
- Do I look and sound like a prospective medical student and future physician?

- **Suit up.**

Take these mirror sessions as far as you'd like. You may even want to dress up in interview attire if you feel uncomfortable or unused to wearing a suit. By practicing for interviews in a suit you will become more accustomed to wearing one, and will look less uncomfortable or awkward. Alternatively, you could practice in sweats or pajamas. Just find whatever works best for the skills you need to develop.

While you might feel silly sitting in front of a mirror, in a suit, while talking to yourself, this is nevertheless a cheap, easy and practical way to work through some of the basics of interviewing. Once you master these fundamentals, you will get a lot more mileage out of the next activity.

Mock Interviews

Most universities have career counseling centers that provide free interview preparation services. Sometimes they are geared more towards general job interviews. Often, however, there are staff members trained in conducting mock graduate school interviews, even medical school interviews specifically if your school has a pre-health advising office. Given that you're almost certainly paying for this service in the form of school fees, feel free to take advantage of this excellent opportunity.

Mock interviews are usually set in a formal environment and are intended to be as real as possible. Most ask "candidates" to come dressed as they would for real interviews. The interviewer asks you questions, ideally relevant to medical school admissions. This is your opportunity to deliver the responses you have prepared. Afterward, the interviewer will evaluate your performance and provide constructive feedback.

If your career center has the ability to videotape the interview, ask to have it taped. This is a highly useful technique despite how painful it may be to watch yourself on video. You will be able to see the nervous tics, count the “umms,” listen to your overall delivery and evaluate your credibility.

Furthermore, you will be able to see how you responded to tough questions. Pay special attention to these. Make a note of any “bad habits” that came out under this stress, and then focus on eliminating them during future preparation. Also make a note of which questions gave you the most trouble, and spend more time practicing your responses to those questions in particular.

Practically speaking, mock interviews accomplish the same ends as the mirror sessions, but they offer certain advantages:

- They are more realistic.
- They offer a level of uncertainty for you, as the ‘candidate.’
 - Candidates cannot anticipate the questions.
 - Candidates do not know in advance how the room and seating will be arranged.
 - Candidates cannot predict the temperament or pace of the interview.
- They provide direct feedback from a skilled observer (e.g. the interviewer).
- They illustrate the areas in which you were or were not prepared.
- A videotape displays how you respond in frightening detail, which allows for tremendous improvement.

Conclusion

The amount of time and effort that you dedicate to your interview preparation will directly impact the ease and professionalism of your delivery. If you have mastered these skills, you will be able to more efficiently and effectively use the limited time during an interview to show who you are, and to drive home why you would be an excellent addition to their medical school.

Although good interview skills come more naturally to some than others, the basic skills and exercises described above can open the door to interview success for people who are not naturally gifted in this area. Nevertheless, regardless of your current level of interviewing skill, I hope that some of the exercises and suggestions in this article will improve your delivery and help you sail through interviews.

What to Wear, What to Wear?

September 26, 2010,, by Jeremiah Fleenor



I base most of my fashion sense on what doesn't itch.

Gilda Radner (1946 – 1989)

Let's face it, we live in a much less formal era than those preceding. The anomaly of casual Friday has become the norm in American culture. Many people work from home, conquering the world through a computer while wearing a comfy pair of sweatpants. This new trend can lead one astray when it comes to the medical school interview. The increase in informality is compounded by the fact that many of those being interviewed may never have had the opportunity to wear a suit for a formal event.

Often times, an applicant is left with an awful feeling shortly before an interview when they realize they may not be in compliance with the "dress code." It can be distressing when you discover there are rules to the game but no one gave you a copy. Not to worry.

This article is designed to lay out the basics of what to wear to the interview so you can devote your time to more significant issues. I hope to present a safe, minimum standard that you can feel comfortable basing your wardrobe choice on. The information should alleviate any stress associated with a small yet important part of the medical school interview, which leads us to a key concept:

When it comes to attire and the medical school interview, there is a certain minimum threshold that you need to achieve and once you reach that threshold any more focus in this area becomes a detriment.

Meaning, obtain the basic items for an appropriate outfit and then forget about it. Turn your focus towards the other, more important, components of the interview.

Here are a few more things to keep in mind as we address this topic:

1. The centerpiece of any well-dressed applicant is, in fact, the applicant, not the other way around.
2. The perfect outfit will never compensate for under preparation or a poor interview.
3. What you wear and your overall personal presentation is necessary but not sufficient for gaining acceptance into medical school.

What You Are and What You're Not

A clear understanding of what you are versus what you're not is imperative to success. You are not a corporate executive or a Wall Street stock broker. You also are not a rock star. You are a graduate school applicant vying for acceptance into a profession that is highly respected and equally demanding. Appropriately dressing the part goes a long way in communicating to the admissions committee your understanding of this concept. Therefore, you do not need to dress like you make a seven-figure income and know the recent share price of the hottest IPO. Further, you don't need to distinguish yourself with pink, spiked hair and leather studded accessories. However, you do need to dress professionally and appropriately conservative.

What does all this mean? It means that you don't have to spend a fortune on an outfit in an attempt to look like a million bucks. It does mean that you will have to spend some money and time preparing a thoughtful outfit suitable for the encounter.

Basic Terms

Like any new area of study, vocabulary is the first step towards understanding. The area of fashion is expansive. From flannel to foulard and pin stripes to paisley, one can be left overwhelmed. The good news is that we don't need to know all of that. We're only interested in achieving the minimum necessary standard so we can forget about all of this stuff and focus on the important business at hand: a successful interview. Accordingly, the following is a concentrated list of key terms necessary for our discussion:

- Cuffs: the band of material at the end of the sleeve of a shirt
- Barrel cuffs: shirt cuffs that are held together by buttons sewn to the shirt
- French cuffs: shirt cuffs that are held together by detachable cuff links
- Lapel: the part of a suit coat that folds back on itself, is contiguous with the collar and overlies the chest (the material that makes the "V" of a suit coat).

- Single-breasted suit (coat): a style of suit coat that has narrower lapels and a single row of buttons for bringing the two sides of the coat together. When fully buttoned, the lapels do not overlap.
- Double-breasted suit (coat): a style of suit coat that has broader lapels that project wider on the coat, especially closer to the collar. This style of coat has two rows of buttons and upon being fully buttoned the coat's lapels will overlap.
- Pumps: a style of women's shoes that have closed backs (heel cups), sides and low-cut fronts that are closer to the toes than the top of the foot. They can have open or closed toes and varying heights of heels.

This is a long article so the remaining information will be divided into men's and women's clothing. Each section will cover the basic requirements from head to toe. The minimum standards will be presented, as well as additional points for those who want to take it up a notch. Feel free to skip to the appropriate section. There is a summation for both genders at the end of the piece.

Ladies First

I would like to especially acknowledge the female physicians and administrators, (admission committee members, residency program staff, support staff, etc.) who contributed to this section. Their input and guidance was invaluable.

Women certainly have a more challenging time when it comes to appropriate attire in formal settings. This is due in no small part to the wider degree of variability in what can appropriately be worn by women. Not to worry. Here is the essential information you need to dress the part of a successful medical school applicant.

Suits

Quite simply, the safest thing for a female applicant to wear is a suit. This can either be a pant suit or a skirt suit of an appropriate length. For women, pant suits are regarded as slightly more casual when compared to skirt suits. Nevertheless, it is completely appropriate to wear a pant suit, and many applicants choose to do so as they can be more practical.

If opting for the skirt suit, it's important to keep a few things in mind. The conservative, appropriate length should be to the knees. A short skirt can be distracting to both you and the interviewer. Also, remember that skirts hike up a bit when you sit down so what may look borderline when standing can become inappropriate when seated.

For skirt suits, the cut of the skirt should be narrow and not flared. This provides clean, professional lines. However, the cut should not inhibit your ability to walk. Many schools finish the interview day with walking tours of the campus.

Color

There are four completely safe colors for women's suits. They are: navy blue, black, grey and beige. All these colors are worn and there really aren't any prescribed norms or taboo's when it comes to choosing between them. This is not always the case with men's suits. You can feel confident in choosing any of these colors for your suit.

Blouse

This is the other central feature of a woman's suit. There is some variability here, which you can use to cater to your style. For starters, the blouse should be a solid color, be long sleeved and have a collar. A button-up blouse is more traditional but is not a requisite. Blouses should be sufficiently opaque. Some blouses are designed to be tucked into the pants or skirt, while others are not. If you choose a blouse that is not to be tucked in, then keep in mind that it must not be too long to peek out below your suit coat, nor should it be so short as to reveal any skin.

Color

As a general rule, the color of your blouse should always be lighter than the color of the suit. You could choose white, cream, or light blue as appropriate options with any of the aforementioned suits colors.

Hosiery

If wearing a skirt suit, it is best to avoid bare legs. This is not only more formal but can also be nice in the cold months of the interview season. The simplest choice is a pair of flesh colored hose. This will obviously differ depending on your skin tone. Fish-net style hosiery are not appropriate for the interview.

Shoes

Although not mandatory, closed toed shoes are preferred over open toed shoes, as they are more professional. My recommendation is a pair of closed toe pumps that match the color of your suit or are darker. If you choose pumps with heels, don't go any taller than 1.5 inches. As you consider what shoes to wear don't forget to factor in comfort. Interview days can be long and some applicants are forced to travel in their suits. There's nothing worse than trying to look and feel comfortable during an interview when your feet hurt from a day of wearing uncomfortable shoes.

Accessories

Basically, less is more. It is acceptable to wear earrings or a necklace. However, avoid flashy or chunky jewelry. Stud earrings tend to be most appropriate. Some women feel comfortable wearing a thin chain necklace or a simple pearl (fake or real) necklace. This is fine. It is okay to wear finger nail polish if you would like. It's preferred that the color not draw undue attention to your nails.

Wearing makeup is absolutely appropriate for an interview. It is difficult to offer specific advice in this area but keep in mind that excess is to be avoided. Makeup should accentuate the real you, not define it. It is best to choose colors and applications that compliment your skin tones and convey a professional appearance.

Bottom Line for Women

Here is an example of a basic, safe bet for your interview attire:

- Navy blue skirt or pants suit (knee length)
- White or cream colored button down blouse (solid colored)
- Flesh toned stockings
- Black, closed toe pumps with heels less than 1.5 inches
- Make up and accessories that are simple and display professionalism

Quick Tips

- Carry an extra pair of hose in your bag. It is easy to develop a run and the peace of mind provided by the back up pair is worth any hassle carrying them.
- All undergarments (straps included) should never be visible even when moving. Interview activities many seem basic but clothing shifts during the day and this can leave you exposed.
- When in doubt, play it safe. If you're unsure whether something is appropriate or not err on the side of conservative. You never know who will be interviewing you and it is best not to offend.

In the end, the point is not to look like a clone or an FBI agent. There is room for personal expression. However, following the above guidelines will provide you with a sufficient base to prepare your interview ensemble and avoid the risk of inappropriate attire.

The Men's Floor

For guys the rules of engagement are much simpler and well-established. Men's professional fashion is an area with a long standing history and prescribed norms. Sadly, despite these advantages, many male applicants still drop the ball and dress inappropriately for their interviews.

The Suit

Male applicants struggle when it comes to the decision of wearing a single or double breasted suit. This need not be the case. Traditionally, a double breasted suit is regarded as being more formal and often perceived as more intimidating. Single breasted suits are simple, elegant and considered to be the staple of any business motif. Both are equally sharp and either can be worn to the interview. I prefer a single breasted suit because of its greater versatility and its lack of being thought of as more intimidating. As an applicant, my goal was never to intimidate anyone; I simply wanted to impress them. Having said that, you would not be wrong to wear a double breasted suit, especially if it's all you have and finances are tight.

Color

This tends to be an area that applicants veer into trouble. During residency interviews, I recall one of my co-applicants wearing an off-white suit with a maroon shirt and black tie. Simply put, it was inappropriate and caused this applicant to stand out for all of the wrong reasons.

For the purposes of a medical school interview and residency interviews as well, the appropriate suit colors are black, navy blue and grey. It's that simple. As will be shown later, these basic colors in conjunction with shirt and tie combinations provide limitless options for individual expression. You don't have to be a replica of the guy next to you even though there are only three suit colors to choose from.

Of the three, navy blue is the safest way to go. It is always appropriate and this choice can never be questioned, even by the most formal and stodgy. Also, navy blue has the greatest utility. This color of suit can be worn to most formal/professional occasions and should serve you well once the medical school interview is complete.

In times past, black suits were reserved for more formal settings, like evening events and funerals. It was not seen in the day-to-day corporate environment. However, black has experienced an expansion of its former limited role and is now seen in offices, and in applicant waiting rooms, across the nation. Black holds a degree of urban hipness that can be of benefit in certain settings.

The flannel grey suit was the uniform of choice for post World War II corporate America. It has been epitomized in print and on film as the drab, sadly safe bet. Thus, as time passed, it was shunned by many and made few board room appearances. This is why a grey suit, with its formal heritage yet relative rareness, is an excellent option to stand out during an interview without the slightest hint of rebellion.

Shirt

Your dress shirt should be long sleeved and, preferably, a solid color. The collar should be the same color as the shirt. Some may choose a striped pattern but be aware of the possible interactions with a patterned or striped tie. It is acceptable to wear barrel or French cuffs depending on your style. French cuffs are perceived as a bit more formal but are totally appropriate. Of note, French cuffs tend to get dirtier quicker than barrel cuffs.

Color

The safest choices for color are similar to those mentioned for women: white, cream or light blue. These should go with any of the suit colors mentioned earlier. It is not advisable to have a flashy or bold shirt color. Many believe that the shirt should complement the suit color and be a nice backdrop for your tie.

Ties

Some guys have gotten away from wearing a tie with their suits. I recommend against this practice and feel you should always wear a tie to the interview. There are many, many variables when it comes to ties but it's worth commenting on a few.

Color and Pattern

It's important to choose a color that is complimentary to your suit and shirt. Conservative colors like lighter blue, yellow or grey are a safe bet with any of the suit colors. Some choose to go bold with their tie colors, which isn't inappropriate but should be approached with caution. If you're worried about a bold color mishap, then consider expressing some style via different patterns. Stripes or simple patterns can be a nice way to combine different shirt and suit colors or just add a little splash to your outfit.

Length

This may seem like a small thing but a tie at the correct length shows a level of refinement and style. There is variability here and length often depends on age and even culture. However, it's a safe bet to have the tip of the tie at the belt line. Avoid going below the belt line or much above it.

Knot

There are many ways to tie a tie. This can also be an area to express some personal style. The most common knots are the four-in-hand, Half-Windsor and the Windsor. It is beyond the scope of this article to go into the ways the above knots are tied or the many others that are available. Please reference the internet or any gentleman's book to experiment with and practice your preferred knot. I would recommend not waiting until the night before your interview to figure out how to tie a tie. Spend a little time during a study break practicing the way you'd like to tie your tie so that when the pressure of the interview morning is upon you, you'll be comfortable and ready to go.

Socks

This might seem like an area that doesn't need mentioning but it is often where guys go astray. Socks should either match the color of your suit or the color of your shoes. It is inappropriate to wear white gym socks with your suit (yes, I've seen this done by more than one applicant). They should also be of an appropriate length, e.g. at least to the mid calf. There's nothing quite like a male applicant that crosses his leg during the interview only to reveal glowing white gym socks or a hairy leg sticking out below his pant hem. These problems are easy to avoid by following the above suggestions.

Shoes

You do not have to go the expensive route with shoes. However, the adage "you get what you pay for" tends to be clearly demonstrated when it comes to this area of your outfit. The best bet is to have a good quality pair of shoes that are darker in color than your suit. Black would be appropriate for any of the suit colors previously mentioned. When it comes to the style of your shoes, there is not an appreciable difference between slip on loafers and lace up shoes. Loafers are technically more formal, however, it's easy for snow and slush to spill over the edge of loafers and leave you with the unpleasant feeling of wet socks. Keep this in mind if you are interviewing in regions where snow may be an issue.

Bottom Line for Men

Here is an example of a sharp, safe choice for your interview attire:

- navy blue single-breasted suit
- white shirt with barrel cuffs
- blue silk tie that is a lighter shade than the suit
- black leather belt
- black, mid-calf dress socks
- black, lace-up shoes

Quick Tips

- Your belt should match the color of the shoes.
- Leave the bottom button of the suit coat unbuttoned.
- If you wear a pocket square it should compliment and be similar to the tie but never match it exactly.
- Cologne should be kept to a minimum if worn at all. An interviewer should never meet your fragrance before they meet you.
- Wear a tee-shirt under your dress shirt. This is especially true if you're wearing a white dress shirt and you have dark body hair.

A clean rendition of the above is appropriate for any medical school interview and will serve you well. You can rest assured that you will look suitable for this important event, yet not trip the wire of anyone looking for an inappropriate stand-out.

In the End

I hope this information helps. Please keep in mind that unless the medical school stipulates a specific dress code for the interview, then there are no "rules" necessarily. There are, however, accepted norms. This topic like so much of the interview advice you receive is opinion laden. This is not absolute truth. Therefore, I recommend you take this information into consideration, critically evaluate it and make the best choice for your situation. You may be able to veer from the norms I've presented and still be appropriate. However, these basics will keep you on the right side of a fashion misstep and on the road to a successful interview.

References

This information comes from extensive reading, countless conversations with program directors, admission committee members, and medical professionals, as well as personal experience (with plenty of mistakes). Below is a list of books I've read over the years and have used to draw a general sense of what I've presented in this piece:

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