



Virtual Interview Handbook for the Applicant

**This content has been adapted from the AAMC Virtual Interviews: Application Preparation Guide (May 7, 2020) and from the Successful Virtual Interviews: Perspectives from Recent Surgical Fellowship Applicants and Advice for Both Applicants and Programs (McKinley SK, Fong SV, Udelsman B, Rickert CG, Annals of Surgery).*

1. BACKGROUND AND PREAMBLE

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unique challenges for all stakeholders involved in the 2021 R1 match and a decision has been made to transition to virtual interviews.

This document focuses on tips for preparing for and completing virtual interviews. Although the format may seem more informal, a virtual interview is an official interview, and we encourage you to approach it as you would any formal interview. Prepare, present yourself professionally, and focus.

*All other resources to prepare for interviews also applies to virtual interviews.
See General Tips to Prepare for All Types of Interviews.*

2. PREPARING FOR A VIRTUAL INTERVIEW – BEFORE INTERVIEW SEASON STARTS

In addition to usual preparation advice for interviews, we recommend preparation for virtual interviews in four domains: 1) gathering information before the interview, 2) optimizing the physical environment, 3) practicing with technology (trial run), and 4) cultivating habits for effective virtual interviewing.

The purpose of these preparations is threefold: 1) to help remain physically comfortable throughout the interview and optimize interview performance, 2) to minimize distractions or technological blunders that will detract the interviewer’s attention, and 3) to take full advantage of all interview activities and gain the information necessary to optimally inform career decisions.

See **Table 1. Checklist and Reminders for Virtual Interviews.**

a) Gathering Information Before the Interview

If possible, get as much information about the virtual interview from the residency program with whom you’re interviewing. Aspects of the interview that would be helpful to know in advance include:

- Video interview platform
- Number of interviewers
- Interview length
- Types of interview questions
- Competencies or skills assessed during the interview
- **A list of phone contacts in case technology fails; ensure that you provide your phone number to the program and request a phone number to reach the interviewer**

Confirm if the program intends to record the interview and ensure that you are informed regarding institutional privacy policies and relevant provincial privacy regulations related to recording of interviews.

b) Optimizing the Physical Environment

To complete virtual interviews, you will need the following:

- A stable internet connection.
- A computer or tablet with a good webcam and microphone. Although a mobile phone may be used, we recommend using a computer or tablet to improve stability. We also recommend using a device that will not accept phone calls during interviews because a phone call will interfere with your ability to complete your response.
- A private, quiet, and well-lit space that is free of distractions where you can be alone and speak freely. Consider pets if they have the potential to disrupt the interview (i.e. barking dog, cat jumping

on the desk). Make sure you have control over the background noise, so avoid open spaces in libraries and places where you could be interrupted such as coffee shops and other communal spaces. If you are unable to set up an adequate interviewing environment in your home, you may want to secure access at your school or other workspace (i.e. local library).

- A neutral, non-distracting background - interviewers may inquire about any artwork, photographs or books that are visible.
- A comfortable chair - virtual interviews can require long days of sitting with upright posture, and an uncomfortable chair will quickly lead to backache and physical fatigue that could diminish interview performance.
- Appropriate lighting to be tested at different times of day. To prevent unattractive facial shadowing, ensure that the majority of the lighting is provided by a source behind the camera or computer. Avoid having sources of bright light behind you, especially bright sunlight, that can result in significant shadowing of the face. If you are doing an interview at night, make sure there is a lamp available that can light up your face. Slight changes in lighting, camera angle, and chair height can result in dramatic changes to candidate appearance.
- Adequate electrical plugs, outlets and chargers so that devices do not run out of battery power during the interview.

c) Practice with Technology (Trial Run)

- Practice responding with the device you'll be using during the interview.
- Practice with a colleague or mentor who will provide candid feedback about the interview environment, audiovisual quality, appearance and mock interview performance including behavioral tics and eye contact.
- When possible, trial the specific interviewing software in advance to view how the physical environment will appear to interviewers.
- Consider creating free accounts on virtual interviewing platforms to ensure your devices support interviewing software. Here is a list of some of the current platforms being used:
 - Zoom: <https://zoom.us/>
 - WebEx: <https://www.webex.com/>
 - SIMIQ from EMS: <https://www.simulationiq.com/>
 - Admit Video: <https://admitvideo.com/>
 - VidCruiter: <https://vidcruiter.com/>
 - Microsoft Teams: <https://www.microsoft.com/en-ca/microsoft-365/microsoft-teams>
- Be sure to test your appearance on camera.
- Use the technology trial run to practice taking notes and check where you would place your pen and paper.
- Check your microphone and camera to make sure they're working well and the picture and sound are not poor quality.
- Check your internet speed, you can do this at SpeedTest.net. Sometimes switching from Wi-Fi to a wired ethernet connection improves your internet speed. If your home's internet connection is too slow, consider who else will be using internet at the same time as your interview and consider going to a local library or find space at your school where you can do the interview in a private room with stable Wi-Fi.
- Make a note of how the camera and microphone are positioned so you can recreate a setup that works when you log in to the system to complete your actual interview. Ensure your camera is at eye level, this may require placing a laptop on a stand or books.
- Record yourself so you can get a sense of your eye contact, sound quality.

d) Cultivating habits of effective virtual interviewing

- Position the camera at eye level so it looks like you are looking directly at the interviewer. Having the camera at eye level is more physically comfortable to maintain “eye contact” and also prevents distracting camera angles. Restlessness or multiple adjustments of the camera or computer because of discomfort throughout the interview can be noticeable distractions during an interview.
- Consider shrinking and dragging the interview software window to just below the laptop camera or web camera in order to facilitate making “eye contact” by looking into the camera rather than watching oneself speak.
- Look at the device’s camera, not at the screen, and keep your head and shoulders centered in the camera’s view.
- Mute cell phone, pager and landline phones.
- Plan a snack, meal, and other breaks in advance based on the provided interview schedule.
- Between sessions and during breaks, take time to stretch.
- Minimize distracting behaviors such as gesticulation, touching face/hair/glasses/jewelry, etc.
- Try to avoid any suspensions of video but if required, suspend video before engaging in visually distracting behaviors such as getting up from your chair, answering a phone call or speaking to another person in the background.
- Use of virtual backgrounds should be limited or avoided. They often present an overly informal environment and can have distracting technological glitches that render the participant partially unseen.
- Be wary of the private chat function, as it is easy to inadvertently send a message intended for a single individual to the entire group.

3. SETTING UP IMMEDIATELY BEFORE INTERVIEW BEGINS

a) Presentation

- Dress professionally, as you would for an in-person interview.
- Have all relevant interview materials (e.g., specific interview questions, questions you wish to ask of the interviewers, paper for notes) in front of you for easy reference.
- Try to be rested and focused. As with any formal interview, you want to be able to focus on understanding the questions, crafting coherent responses, and presenting your best self.

b) Environment

- Briefly scan your interview space to ensure:
 - It will be quiet and free of distractions.
 - There are no sources of bright light directly behind you.
 - Your backdrop is still neat and free of distractions.
 - An outlet is nearby in case you need to plug in your device.

c) Technology

- Allow time before the interview starts to conduct a technology check:
 - Double-check your microphone and camera to make sure they’re working well.
 - Position your camera and microphone as you did when you practiced.
 - Shut down all programs on your device so that no alerts, notifications, or other electronic interruptions distract you.
 - Make sure your device is fully charged. Carry a charger with you and make sure you can plug into an outlet in case there is a problem with your battery.
- Have a backup plan in case the technology fails including a list of phone contacts and re-confirm phone numbers with the interviewer at the start of the interview.

4. BEYOND THE INTERVIEW: NAVIGATING THE VIRTUAL TOUR

Participation in virtual social events is strongly recommended:

- To gain insight into a program's culture and camaraderie
- To ask questions to current trainees in a less formal virtual setting
- To watch how current trainees/faculty interact with each other outside the context of a formal interview
- To learn about informal program elements.

Any and all interactions that are conducted as part of the interview/recruitment process may be formally or informally included in admissions deliberations. Applicants should adhere to professional standards of interaction regardless of how 'informal' the event may be.

Preparing for Virtual Social Experiences

- In large group settings, use the "mute" function to limit feedback and background noise that detracts from the speaker. Learn how to temporarily unmute using keyboard shortcuts to facilitate asking questions or interacting during the large group sessions.
- Check in advance regarding social event attire, purpose and attendance (faculty, current trainees or trainees only).
- Check the schedule and if there will be any informational presentations.
- If the social event occurs during a meal or in the evening, check if there will be adult beverages, food and if significant others and children are welcome to the event.
- Ask if there are questions to be completed in advance, so that faculty or current trainees have time to prepare answers or address topics of concern during the social event. Also, check if questions will be permitted using the real-time chat function of digital platforms.
- Check in advance, how to obtain technical assistance if needed.
- Feel free to exit social events if you wish, unless there is a specified hard end time.

5. OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION

- [AFMC National Web Calendar of Events \(until CANPREPP is available\)](#)
- [CANPREPP \(link to be added when available\)](#)
- [CaRMS Match Violations Policy \(May 2020\)](#)
- [Best Practices in Application and Selection \(BPAS\)](#)

6. GENERAL TIPS TO PREPARE FOR INTERVIEWS

a) Typical Interview Questions

Although there are many types of interview questions, most fall into one of three categories.

- **Behavioral questions** will ask you to describe previous experiences to demonstrate your level of knowledge and skills and the extent of your experiences. For example, *"Please describe a time when you observed a member of the medical team you were working with behave in a manner that was inconsistent with an established protocol. Explain what the situation was, what actions you took, and the outcome."*
- **General questions** will ask you to describe yourself broadly. For example, *"Tell me why you are interested in this program."*

- **Situational questions** will ask you to demonstrate your level of knowledge and skill by describing what you should or would do in different hypothetical situations. For example, *“Imagine you are on your morning rounds. The chief resident describes a difficult case you and a colleague worked on earlier in the week and compliments your handling of the situation. She gives you sole credit and fails to mention that your colleague played a major role. What would you do?”*

b) Responding to Questions

- Try to focus on providing detailed examples of behavior that you engaged in from your experiences when responding to questions.
- Use clinical and nonclinical experiences in your responses, as appropriate.
- Provide detailed responses and try to avoid speaking in generalities. Typically, one strong example is better than several weak or tangential examples.
 - Do not provide patient information that could be used separately or in combination to identify a patient, such as names, locations, diagnoses, or other distinguishing characteristics. Refer to a patient as “the patient.”
 - If your response may portray a colleague in a negative light, do not provide information that could be used separately or in combination to identify that colleague, such as a name, title, location, or other distinguishing characteristic.
- Provide a complete response to each question. In general, when responding to:
 - Behavioral questions, share past experiences and be sure to discuss the situation or task you encountered, the actions you took, and the outcome of your actions.
 - Situational questions, discuss the actions you should take, why you should take those actions, and what you would expect the result of your actions to be.

c) Identify Sample Experiences

- If the program has provided a list of competencies or skills to be assessed during the interview, reflect on your experiences related to them.
- Review your CV and reflect on your experiences and learning before you conduct the interview. Try to identify some situations you think best exemplify your skills.
- Discuss your experiences with your advisors. Which are the best examples of your knowledge and skills? Your examples should demonstrate your highest level of proficiency.
- Consider creating a brief list of experiences that demonstrate your skills and could be used in response to different questions. It may be helpful to have these experiences readily available as you prepare your response to each interview question.

d) Practice Describing Your Experiences

- Conduct mock interviews to practice developing responses using specific examples from your life and experiences with your peers and advisors. These mock interviews can be done in person or over a web-based application.

For additional resources to help prepare for interviews, feel free to contact your school.

Table 1. Checklist and Reminders for Virtual Interviews

Before interview season starts

- Select a reliably available and quiet physical space
- Invest in a comfortable chair
- Consider purchasing additional lighting
- Perform a technology trial run

Before start of interview

- Plan snacks and meals throughout the day
- Check items in view of background
- Check that electronic (laptop, phone) chargers are plugged in
- Check camera and microphone for good quality picture and sound
- Mute electronics (phone, pager) and browser tabs
- Ensure camera is at eye level
- Shrink and drag the interview software window to just below the laptop camera or web camera
- Have your back-up plan at hand (list of phone contacts)

Reminders throughout interview

- Maintain an upright posture and keep your head and shoulders centered
- Look at the camera, not at the screen
- Mute mics when not speaking
- Suspend video when engaging in visually distracting behavior
- Double check the intended recipient for any message you're sending ("Everyone" vs private messages to intended individuals)