

Interview Day: How to Stand Out from the Crowd

Yasha Parikh Gupta, MD

One look at the calendar will tell you that it's not just autumn. It's ERAS® season and time to prepare for your all-important *Interview Day*.

Most Interview Days are still virtual, at least for the time being. This makes them a slightly different beast than traditional, in-person Interview Days. Not only that, but the number of applications per program has skyrocketed. All of which makes the need to stand out from the crowd of other applicants more important than ever.

So how do you do that? How can you be sure to ace Interview Day? It starts with acing the basics, from beginning to end. This means responding to the program director's emails in a timely manner, making sure your internet service is fast and reliable enough to handle Zoom calls without glitches (and having a backup plan just in case), double-checking the interview schedule, verifying the links 24-48 hours in advance, being polite to your interviewer(s), and studying the program in advance.

These truly are the basics and following them will go a long way toward ensuring you have a successful day. Unfortunately, although the first few interviews might feel exciting, "interview fatigue" sets in more quickly than you might expect. The following "best practices," if you will, can help you make the best of the season.

Get the 4-1-1

One of the most important things you can do on Interview Day is to attend the information sessions and social events for the residency programs you are most interested in entering. You may come to realize that residency programs are more similar to each other than they are different; nevertheless, I cannot overstate how important it is to attend these sessions.

They will give you insights that you may not find on the program's website. This may include details such as call schedule or daily work hours, as well as insights into the personality of the program director or other speakers. You may find yourself thinking, "I'd love to work with this person!" Your attendance also signals that your interest in the program goes above and beyond the act of perfunctorily completing and sending in your application.

Finally, these sessions can provide you with valuable insight into the culture of the program, especially during the question-and-answer period. Indeed, it is often the program's culture, and not necessarily its "brand," that can make or break your experience.

But don't stop there. I also recommend that you look for additional information about the program on its social media pages and by talking to current

Dr Gupta is a breast and oncologic imaging fellow/PGY-6 at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York, New York. She is also a member of the editorial advisory board of *Applied Radiology*.



residents from the program. Gathering as much information as possible will demonstrate your genuine interest in the program to your interviewer.

Rehearse, Rehearse, Rehearse

Another exercise I recommend is rehearsing your answers to help you communicate clear, concise, and goal-oriented responses to common interview questions. These include, “Why did you decide to specialize in radiology?” and “Why are you interested in joining this program?” The purpose of the interview is to give your interviewer insight into you and why you would be a good fit for the program. It goes without saying—but I’ll say it, anyway—that you should come to your interview well prepared for anything your interviewer might ask about your ERAS application—so be sure to review it thoroughly prior to interviewing.

Spend time reviewing what attracts you to the program and why. For example, if the program has a strong culture of research, draw attention to your publications. Also, call out any past leadership positions to help demonstrate your goal of achieving greater leadership opportunities. Be

as specific as possible rather than quoting general information anyone can get from the website; this will help you stand out from the crowd.

Attitude Is Everything

Finally, demonstrate an enthusiastic attitude throughout the day. Interview fatigue is a very real risk to guard against; staying “on” as much as possible is crucial to making a good impression. I have found that talking with my hands, even on a Zoom call, helps me feel as though I am speaking with the person in the same room. It’s also a good idea to keep your camera on during group sessions to demonstrate your full engagement with the activities.

Remember: every minute of Interview Day is important. Look and speak the part from the very beginning to the very end. Good luck!

Reference

1. Radiology-Diagnostic – AAMC. www.aamc.org/media/39801/download. Accessed October 1, 2023.