



Foothills Area Health Education Center (AHEC)
supports the recruitment, training and retention of a
diverse health professions workforce
throughout Northeast Georgia

Foothills Area Health Education Center, Inc.
www.foothillsahec.org



A Guide to the POLISHED INTERVIEW

Health Professional Programs and Beyond



by: Foothills Area Health Education Center, Inc.
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Notes

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Health Professional Programs and Beyond
by Foothills Area Health Education Center

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Introduction

The Importance of the Interview

Grades, test scores, essays, research, work experience. Your application will show potential interviewers your accomplishments and skills. These will be compared to concrete criteria that distinguish who will move onto the next step: the interview. Considering the time, energy, and money expended to administer face-to-face interviews, to even be considered you must certainly submit a strong application. Still, competition is fierce, and interviewers know the application is not the entire measure of a candidate.

Interviews can push a borderline application over the edge one way or the other. While your credentials merit an interview, this encounter is the moment to set yourself apart; yet, you do not want to be remembered for your clanging bangle bracelets, your shiny suit, or your cell phone ringing. Instead you want the focus to be on your thoughtful responses, outstanding intelligence, and engaging personality.

This guide is meant to help you present yourself as the “total package.” Each section provides tips on what to do before, during, and after your pivotal interview. Each small tip adds up to a polished overall appearance and demeanor. Although there is no doubt that this advice will contribute to your success, you should also keep in mind these three points from Dr. Jeremiah Fleenor¹:

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

As Dr. Fleenor emphasizes, you cannot dress or fake your way to success, but being taken out of the running for reasons like ill-fitting clothes or bad table manners would be sorely disappointing. This guide is meant to diminish trivial distractions so interviewers can realize why you are right for their institution.

¹Jeremiah Fleenor, MD, MBA is the author of *The Medical School Interview: Secrets and System for Success* (2006).

Chapter 1

Before the Interview: Preparing a Professional Image

Your first impression does not begin on the day of the interview. You are making an impression from the moment you submit an application, sometimes even before. Interview committees spend much of their time vetting applications by asking screening questions, researching candidates' Web presence, or conducting preliminary long-distance interviews. Even practical communication regarding the receipt of your application or confirmation of an appointment can influence the interviewers' impression of you. Make sure that you are always conducting yourself with the goal of cultivating a professional image.

Step 1: Communicating

The moment you first communicate with your interviewing organization is the moment you begin preparing a professional image. Interviewers do not need to meet you in order to gauge whether you are carrying yourself appropriately. There are multiple outlets for communication, both purposeful and incidental, that will show them who you are.

Social Networking Etiquette

Many interviewers check to see if their candidates are on social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. These tools can both help and hurt your pursuits. On one hand, you may showcase your knowledge, accomplishments, and abilities before you have even received an invitation to interview. Alternatively, interviewers may see unprofessional content that may diminish or completely destroy your chances at an interview. Be sure to manage the privacy settings on your accounts and to avoid posting anything on these websites that you would not want the interview committee, potential employers, or colleagues to see.

Tips:

- Do not post vulgar or unprofessional pictures.
- Do not post obscene, profane, inflammatory, or provocative comments or links.

- Stay positive online.
- Make sure you have arranged your privacy settings such that your personal life stays private.
- Do not make contact via social networking sites with your potential interviewers. Let them connect with you.

Email Etiquette

Very often preliminary screening and communication involves email instead of postal mail. While business letter writing is always very official, email is often considered a more casual form of communication; however, professional email has its own formality. For this reason, staying current with email etiquette is important. Sloppy or lazy email habits risk undermining your credibility.

Tips:

- Reference the main topic of the email in the subject line.
- Always make sure the email content is appropriate.
- When replying to a question, restate the question in your email and then provide your thorough, concise response.
- When replying to emailed questions, do not send a bare message that only reads “yes,” “no,” or other one-word responses.
- Address and sign your emails; you should say “Dear _____” or “Hello _____” and always sign off with a salutation and your name (ex. “Sincerely, Jane”).
- Include contact information under your name.
- Use proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Have someone proofread your email if you are unsure about anything. Running spell check is not enough!

[illegible]

You may receive an unexpected or planned phone call from interviewers before you meet them. Although they cannot see you, you are still making an impression on them. Do not take this form of communication lightly.

- If you receive an unexpected call on your cell phone, do not answer it unless you are in a quiet place where you can talk for any length of time.
- Create a formal atmosphere for a planned phone call. Dressing nicely and sitting at a desk will help you sound more professional.
- Do not multi-task. Give your undivided attention.
- Make sure you have any potentially relevant materials easily accessible during the phone call. You do not want to be searching while trying to focus on the call.

- Be prepared to leave a voicemail. Be sure to leave all pertinent information in a logical order: greeting, name, affiliation, date and time of call, reason for calling, phone number (repeat).

Step 2: Creating a Professional Wardrobe

Building a professional wardrobe is essential to a professional image. You do not want to find yourself without appropriate attire the night before an interview or some other important professional occasion. While this attire is often more expensive than other types of clothing, it can be worn more frequently with slight accent changes and, if a classic style is chosen, will likely last you many years. Consider this wardrobe an investment in yourself and your professional image.

Most students and young people do not already have these pieces in their wardrobe, as these are very intentional and thoughtful acquisitions. Invite a mentor, family member, or friend who has already successfully interviewed for a position to shop with you. Purchasing these fundamental pieces as soon as you are able will ensure you are ready for any situation, and planning ahead for this purchase will enable you to take advantage of bargains and to focus on other preparations for interviews or similar situations.

Professional attire

Also known as business attire, professional attire is a formal way of dressing and is called for at interviews, high profile meetings, or in other especially important circumstances. If you would wear an item of clothing to school, to a party, on a date, or even to church, you should not consider it a part of your professional wardrobe.

Tips:

- Avoid bright colors or showy fabrics.
- Wool, wool blends, or other high-quality natural and synthetic fibers are preferable for suits. Avoid acetate or rayon blends.

- Most suits will not fit well right off-the-rack. Be sure to have your suit tailored to fit you comfortably immediately after you purchase it.
- Cut tacking stitches if your tailor does not.

ORGANIZE YOUR BELONGINGS



Document portfolio

Purchase a portfolio (pictured left) and a small brief case or satchel (pictured right) to store important documents and carry personal items (keys, cell phone, note pad, pens, etc.).



Briefcase/satchel

For men:

A high-quality, tailored suit:

- Choose a dark gray, charcoal, or navy two-piece matched suit. As you build your wardrobe, you might also consider other dark colored suits or pinstripes.
- Sleeves on a suit should break just below your wrist.
- Pants should be pleated and cuffed.
- Always have your suit pressed and ready to wear.

A few high-quality long-sleeved dress shirts:

- Cotton is the best and most comfortable fabric for shirts. Avoid polyester and blends.
- Collars should be stiff but comfortable.
- Always have your shirts clean, ironed, and ready to wear.

A few fitted, short-sleeved undershirts:

- Light cotton is a good, inexpensive fabric. Avoid polyester, as it will increase sweating.

- Crew necks are the best cut to wear under professional attire.
- Stick with white undershirts, as they are the most versatile.

A couple of silk neck ties:

- Necktie colors should work well with your suit or shirt.
- Gently unknot and hang neckties to avoid wrinkling.

A pair of dress shoes:

- Choose basic black, cordovan, or dark brown shoes.
- Make sure shoes are polished and well-maintained.

A belt or suspenders:

- If you wear suspenders, do not wear a belt.
- Make sure your belt matches your shoes.
- Avoid large or flashy belt buckles.
- Make sure your suspenders match your suit, shirt, or tie color.

A few pairs of dress socks:

- A solid color, such as black or navy, is best.
- Socks can also be matched to your suit, shirt, or tie color.
- Socks should be mid-calf length so that while seated no skin is visible.

For women:

A high-quality, tailored suit:

- Choose a conservative style jacket in a solid, dark color: black, gray, charcoal, or navy. As you build your wardrobe, you might also consider other colors or trendier styles.

- Choose the solid-colored knee-length skirt or tailored pants that match the jacket.
- If possible, choose another printed skirt that coordinates with the jacket as well.

A few high-quality, comfortable shells:

- Look for coordinating tailored blouses or knit shells to wear under suits.
- Limit pastels to springtime.
- Do not choose sleeveless, sheer, or low-cut blouses or shells.

A pair of dress shoes:

- No open-toed shoes or sandals.
- Stick with flat shoes or shoes with a medium heel (2–3”).
- Make certain you can walk comfortably in them.
- Choose black, gray, navy, brown, or tan shoes.

Several pairs of pantyhose:

- Pantyhose should be solid and neutral-colored.
- Pantyhose should never be darker than your hemline or lighter than your skin.
- Make sure you always have at least two pair without snags.

Accessories:

- Limit jewelry to two small pieces at most.
- Most suits do not require a belt.
- If you carry a purse, make sure it is small and coordinates with your shoes.

Professional casual attire

Also known as business casual, professional casual attire is called for in contexts where you may meet potential interviewers or colleagues, such as conferences, meetings, or lectures. Make sure that you understand the definition of “business casual” in the environment you will be entering. In

some places, it may be slacks and a tailored shirt or blouse and in others it may require a jacket or blazer as well. Typically in professional situations, it is better to be overdressed than underdressed.

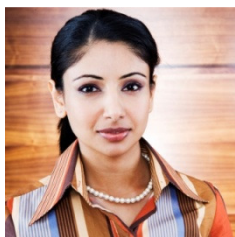
For men:

- Wear a blazer with dress pants, dress shirt, and a tie.
- Wear shirts with collars (golf shirts, etc.) or dress shirts designed to be collarless with slacks.
- Wear closed-toe shoes.
- Make sure you are cleanly shaven and groomed.
- Always tuck in shirts.
- Always wear an undershirt. V-necks are acceptable as you may unbutton your top buttons in a more casual setting.

For women:

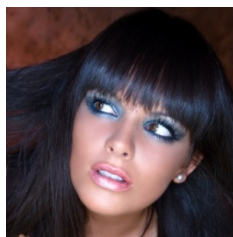
- Wear a jacket and slacks or a conservative dress.
- You may wear bright colors, but keep them tasteful and classically tailored.
- Avoid sleeveless shirts unless a blazer, cardigan, or over-shirt is worn as well.
- Avoid shoes with high heels or that are too trendy.
- Limit the amount of jewelry that you wear to just a few pieces; trendy earrings and accessories are okay in moderation.
- Avoid noisy jewelry.
- Dresses and skirts should never be shorter than two inches above the knee.

MINIMAL MAKEUP IS BEST

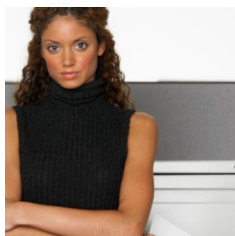


MINIMAL

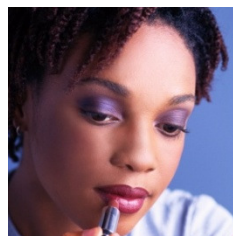
Wearing some makeup is better than none at all; however, do not wear dramatic eye-shadows, blush, and lipstick colors in professional situations.



DRAMATIC



Save your flare for a party or a date!



Unacceptable attire

- Gym wear(spandex, fleece, sweats, gym shorts, or windbreakers)
- T-shirts with advertising, slogans, or pictures
- Denim
- Midriffs (no flesh should ever show between shirt and bottoms)
- Low-cut shirts (cleavage should never be visible)
- Tank or halter tops
- Visible undergarments (seen through or around clothing)
- Tattered, worn clothing (with holes, fraying, etc.)
- Head coverings (hats, visors, caps, bandanas, etc.) except those worn for religious or health reasons
- Clothing which advertises alcohol or has profanity
- Open-toed shoes in clinical settings
- Tennis shoes
- Overly fitted or loose clothing
- Backpacks

Chapter 2

During the Interview: Presenting a Professional Image

A face-to-face interview is your time to shine, and the tone is usually set the minute you walk in the door. At this point, you have presented yourself and your credentials well enough to have been invited. Now you must continue presenting a professional image with your chosen attire, your manners, and your confidence. Of course you will have prepared to discuss your academic background and professional experiences and to respond to likely interview questions, but an interview is just as much about your demonstrated interest and interpersonal skills. You can show your maturity and consideration by following the advice below.

Step 1: Dressing for Interviews

Your choice of attire will send an immediate message to people you are meeting for the first time. You want interviewers to envision you as a member of their program or institution who will represent them well. You do not want your appearance to distract from your knowledge, talent, and qualifications. For these reasons, err on the conservative side when considering your appearance and choosing your outfit for an interview.

Tips:

- Always insure your clothing is clean and neatly pressed. Dry clean your clothing well before your interview date.
- Inspect clothing for dangling tags or threads.
- Cover tattoos and remove visible body piercings.
- Fingernails should be short to moderate in length and well-maintained.
- Hair should be clean and well-groomed in a simple style that keeps hair out of your face. Bring a comb or brush for touch-ups.
- Shoes should be polished and well-maintained ,but be sure to break them in before the day of the interview.

- Wear an understated watch with a leather or metal band to help with punctuality. Make sure it is set to the proper time zone.

For men:

- Wear the full professional attire described previously.
- Wear a dark suit but not black.
- Wear a pressed, long-sleeved shirt.
- Avoid flashy ties in loud colors; a subtle design is more suitable.
- Your necktie should just barely touch your belt buckle.
- Make sure you know how to tie your necktie before the day of the interview.
- Keep jewelry to a minimum.
- Black or cordovan shoes with color-coordinated socks are recommended.
- Shave or be sure facial hair is clean and neatly groomed.
- Avoid strongly scented aftershaves or colognes; they can be overpowering in a small interview room.

For women:

- Wear the full professional attire described previously.
- Wear black, charcoal, gray or navy.
- Pantsuits are acceptable if the style is professional and conservative.
- Sheer hose are best; take an extra pair for emergencies.
- Keep accessories small and to a minimum and stick with light, natural-toned makeup.
- One pierced earring per ear is acceptable; remove all other body piercings.
- Avoid strongly scented perfumes and hairsprays; they can be overpowering in a small interview room.
- Wear clear, American/French manicure, or a single neutral color nail polish. Do not wear fancy nail art or long fingernails.

Step 2: Meeting & Greeting

Making a good first impression is key. Your well-chosen attire makes you look professional, and the meet and greet is your first opportunity to act professionally. Good social skills include having a firm handshake for greetings and goodbyes, smiling, and making eye contact.



TURN YOUR CELL PHONE OFF

Even vibrate or silent settings may be distracting.
Only turn it back on after the interview is completely finished or in an emergency.

Tips:

- Put any pertinent documents in a slim portfolio, and store this along with any personal items in a small briefcase or satchel. You do not want to keep these items in your pockets as they may make noise or appear bulky, and you want at least one hand free to shake hands.
- Chew a breath mint or brush your teeth just before you enter the room, but do not chew gum or suck on candy.
- Arrive on time. Better to be a few minutes early than a few minutes late!
- Always rise when introducing or being introduced to someone.
- Provide information when making introductions. For example: “Jane, meet Dan Miller. Mr. Miller is the CEO of Health Regional System.”
- Always address someone by his or her title and last name.
- If interviewing with other candidates, be equally as attentive to them.
- Always make eye contact while shaking hands.

Step 3: Dining

Interviews are often preceded or followed by a group meal, often at an upscale restaurant. Manners are of the utmost importance as they show your politeness and your respect for others. There are many rules of dining etiquette, making them difficult to remember. Try to practice them as often as possible at daily meals so that they will feel like second nature when it really counts.

Table Etiquette:

- Arrive on time.
- Wait to sit until the host indicates the seating arrangement.
- Place napkin in your lap before eating or drinking anything.
- Do not hold up the order because you cannot make a decision.
- Wait to eat until everyone has been served.
- Keep your hands in your lap unless you are using them to eat.
- Keep your elbows off of the table.
- Practice proper posture; sit up straight with your arms close to your body.
- Bring food to your mouth, not your head to the plate.
- Try to eat at the same pace as everyone else.
- Place your napkin on your seat if excusing yourself for any reason.
- Push your chair under the table when excusing yourself.

Eating & Drinking Etiquette:

- Start eating with the utensil that is farthest away from your plate and work from the outside in.
 - You may have two spoons and two forks. The spoon farthest from you is a soup spoon. The fork farthest from you is a salad fork.
 - The dessert spoon/fork is usually above the plate.



PRACTICE USING A FORMAL TABLE SETTING

Try setting the table formally at home and serving bread, soup or salad, an entrée, and dessert in separate courses.

If you do not have the same size plates and utensils, no problem. The rules are the same!

- Dip soup away from you; sip from the side of the spoon.
- Pass the salt and pepper together, even if only asked for one.
- Season food only after you have tasted it.
- Pass all items to the right.
 - If the item has a handle, such as a pitcher, pass with the handle towards the next person.
 - For bowls with spoons, pass with the spoon ready for the next person.
 - If you are the one to reach to the center of the table for an item, pass it around before serving yourself.
- While you are speaking during a meal, utensils should be resting on your plate, not on the table.
- Do not chew with your mouth open or blow on your food.
- If your host does not take care of the bill, be prepared to take care of your part (including a 15-20% tip).
- Never make an issue of the bill.
- Bring along breath mints as the interview may follow the meal, but do not suck candy or chew gum.

Chapter 3

After the Interview: Maintaining a Professional Image

You have shown how conscientious and enthusiastic you are at the interview but do not stop there. Maintain that level of professionalism even after you have returned home. Assure your interviewers that your good conduct and dedication will continue should they choose you.

Step 1: Following-Up

Just as you are thinking carefully about your options so are those who interviewed you. Following-up with people you met during your interview will reinforce the professional image you established. Your interviewers will be considering the many candidates they have met over an extended period of time, and you should tactfully remind them of your individual meeting.

Tips:

- Immediately after you leave the interview site, jot down the names and titles of those you met and perhaps some conversation topics that stand out in your mind.
- Within a few days of the interview, send a simple, handwritten thank-you note(not an email) to each individual, if possible, or to the interview committee at large. Do not inquire about your application status.

THANK YOUNOTE EXAMPLE

Simple, pre-printed front of card

Thank You

Handwritten inside of card

June 24th, 2012

Dear Mr. Interviewer:

I appreciate the time that you took to talk with me last Thursday, and I truly enjoyed our conversation about the university's current research projects. Thank you again for the opportunity to interview with you.

Sincerely,

- Be patient. The interviewers may take a week or months to notify you of their decision. Do not flood them with calls or email about your application.

Step 2: Meeting Expectations

The interviewers seek certain highly desirable characteristics in candidates. If you are selected, be sure that you meet their expectations by exhibiting these professional qualities even after you have attained a position or have been accepted to a program.

Tips:

- Be a self-directed, resourceful problem solver.
- Be enthusiastic and diligent.
- Concentrate on the task at hand.
- Stay positive.
- Be consistent. Perform as well in the morning as you do in the afternoon.
- Show respect and loyalty.
- Be respectful of the position your superiors hold. They are allowed extra courtesy. Speak well of them to others.
- Be frank and fair. Communicate criticisms and suggestions while being fair about your expectations of others.
- Maintain your sense of humor.

Conclusion

Moving Forward

Whether interviewing for admission to a health professional school or applying for employment in health care, professionalism is a vital element. Most interviewers evaluate whether they would want a candidate to treat a member of their own family or to collaborate with them on research. By following this guide, you will make sure that the answer is a resounding “yes.” These tips will help you interview and approach all of your professional endeavors with top-notch manners, an elegant appearance, and evident self-confidence. Implementing this advice now will lay a solid foundation for the future career you desire.