



ADVISING STUDENTS COMMITTEE in EM

Advising Students Committee in EM (ASC-EM)

How to Navigate Virtual Interviews



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Intro: The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic (COVID-19) has greatly impacted the world of residency interviews. In early 2020 when COVID began to spread there was concern about leaving your home, no less going out on the residency interview trail. The first wave of virtual interviews took place in the 2020-21 application cycle, and was a learning experience for all, including Emergency Medicine (EM) mentors, faculty and applicants. At the time of writing this, we were hopeful that in person interviews could happen for the 2021-2022 National Resident Matching Program (NRMP) match, yet another wave of COVID-19 began and there is uncertainty about what the fall and winter months will bring. The Coalition of Physician Accountability (CoPA) issued a statement in regards to the issues faced by medical students because of the ongoing pandemic. After hearing these recommendations, a consensus statement of all large Emergency Medicine (EM) organizations was released stating that “All EM residency interviews should be conducted virtually in the 2021-22 application year”¹. They also recommended that no interview be offered in person, even if you are considered a local resident¹. Now that the official decision by CoPA has been made and that virtual interviews are here to stay for the foreseeable future, it will be important to focus on keys to a successful virtual interview! In addition to other resources such as this guide from the [AAMC](#) we hope that this guide will have you navigate the world of virtual EM interviews.

What we learned throughout the past year of virtual interviews:

Interviewees from the application cycle of 2020-2021 were surveyed. They expressed stress due to the difficulty when attempting to show their true personality². Students had a harder time assessing the program and the city the program was located in². We also found that students with lower Step 1 scores preferred in-person interviews. This sub-group of students in particular found that virtual interviews caused an increased amount of stress². EM mentors/faculty had never gone through a virtual interview season so it was a learning experience for everyone full of logistical challenges.

Residency programs also struggled on how to showcase the highlights of their program and allow applicants to get the “feel” of their program. Previous to the COVID-19 pandemic, the in-person interview was a way to see and experience a program and a city. In interacting with faculty and residents, an applicant could see if they “fit in” with the residency “family.” Programs now had to depend on social media, other technology platforms to enhance websites and webinars, as well as send recruitment boxes³. All programs had different experiences with social media and technology, but Instagram and Twitter quickly became the leading platforms used for recruitment³. In a study surveying emergency medicine residents, website accessibility and ease of navigation played a role in 78% of applicants in applying to a program⁴. Each program had to develop their own unique way to virtually recruit applicants.

It is difficult to say if it was more difficult for applicants to match in different geographical locations without doing an away rotation in that location. It is also uncertain if more programs interviewed more applicants from their own geographical locations. If you need to be in a certain location, it never hurts to email that program and let them know why (i.e. my significant other lives there and I would like to be in the same area, etc).

What do you need for a virtual interview?

First and foremost, make sure you have technology that works! There are oftentimes resources available through the medical school that can be utilized if needed.

- You will need a computer, microphone or headphones that can support the latest version of zoom and other video conferencing systems. This may mean that you need to purchase some new equipment.

- You should also have a personal zoom account. This will likely be provided by your school. You will want to be sure that your name is correct and appears the way you want others to address you. Some students are also including preferred pronouns next to their name and can be done if desired. You can also add a picture of yourself when you are not “on screen.” If the program is not using zoom, they will provide a link/instructions to the virtual modality they are using.
- You can have all the perfect hardware, but you have to ensure that you have a good wi-fi connection as well! This is key because you don’t want any lag time when on your interview as it can make for some awkward pauses. If you don’t have great wifi, find a place that does.
- You also will need a quiet location. Silence your doorbells/phones, make sure your emails/text messages don’t ding on your computer screen. Find a place for your pets to go, and tell your friends/family that you need to be left alone during the time period of your interview.
- Once you find your room/spot, evaluate the lighting. You may need lamps or possibly a ring light to either clip onto your computer or set up behind your computer. The bottom line is, you need some sort of lighting in front of you. If you wear glasses, the light may cause a glare on your glasses so if this happens, try using contacts. Try not to sit behind a window as you will look like a shadow. Sitting in front of a window can provide nice natural lighting but you have to be prepared in case of weather changes (i.e a cloud covering your natural light). Also, take a look at what is behind you. Ideally, you want an aesthetically pleasing background. This can be as simple as a plain wall or you can spruce up your wall with pictures/plants whatever you feel like looks nice. Be ready to talk about what is in your background, could be a good way to showcase some of your personality. You can also consider a simple virtual background or blurred background.

Make sure to test it all out! It may be a good idea to do a mock zoom call with an advisor or a friend. Make sure you look the way you want to and that everything is working accordingly. Last but not least, be sure to read your emails carefully! Sometimes the schedule can be complex!

Make yourself look professional:

Wear business casual or clothing that will make you feel confident and comfortable. You will be sitting for 3-4 hours so don’t wear anything that will be uncomfortable or make you readjust your seating frequently. Although sweatpants sound comfy, it is always a good idea to have attire on the bottom that matches your top half. You never know when and if you will stand up and be accidentally caught on camera. (And yes it has happened!).

After you are dressed to impress, make sure your interview area is ready. If you have one, get your ring light out and adjusted. Have water/coffee ready and out of sight, but in a sealable container so you do not spill it on yourself. You can also have a snack if needed. If you like to take notes, a pen and paper is fine. Have your cell phone by you, but on silent. If computer technology goes array, the rest of your interview may be on facetime or phone.

Virtual Hang outs/Happy hour:

Instead of dinners, programs are doing virtual hang outs. This can be overwhelming because when one person talks it is hard to hear someone else talking at the same time. This will likely happen, so be prepared and try not to get frustrated. Take advantage of the chat box and use the emoji’s the zoom has to offer such as “raising your hand.”

This is your time to really ask the residents any question you would like. This is also the time residents get to know you, so try to speak up if you can. Have a list of questions you can ask and be aware of allowing others to ask questions as well, read your audience. Don't be that person that asks 10 questions in a row and doesn't let others speak.

Most importantly, act interested! Don't just have this up in the background as you watch TV etc.

While Interviewing:

Take a deep breath and be yourself. Make sure that the screen you are looking at is in the center of the computer. If you want to directly look at their eyes and not your zoom screen, you can look into your camera.

You may get prompts on the top of your screen from the moderator. Make sure you quickly read them as they could indicate when an interview is over. Depending on how the institution does it, you may be put into break out rooms by the moderator or you may need to "leave your room" after your time is done. Make sure you know what you are supposed to do. If you have a "break" one round and get sent back to the main room, it is okay to turn your camera off. If there is a resident in the room, this is your time to ask questions or make small talk if you would like.

Second Looks:

During the time of this publication, in person second looks are highly discouraged for the 2021-2022 NRMP Match for EM. Some universities may have travel restrictions for students, and residency programs may be restricted from allowing visiting students on campus for a second look. If offered an in person second look, we encourage you to politely decline. Residency programs should not misinterpret an absence of a second look as a student's lack of interest.

Final Thoughts:

Although this is the second year of virtual interviews at the time of this publication, remember that we are all learning, applicants and programs alike. Changes can be made in the blink of an eye. Keep up with CORD, EMRA, SAEM and other EM organizations for updates or seminars to help with the interview season. When in doubt, ask your advisor or someone that you trust to help you through the process.

Websites/Videos that can help with Virtual Interviews and Application:

[AAMC Virtual Interview tips](#)

[AAMC Tips for Program Directors in Virtual Interviews](#)

[Savvy Pre-Med: 7 tips for Virtual Interviews](#)

[Holistic Principles in Resident Selection](#)

COPA guidelines on virtual interviews:

<https://www.aamc.org/what-we-do/mission-areas/medical-education/conducting-interviews-during-coronavirus-pandemic>

References:

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