

## REGULAR

# ANAESTHETISTS IN TRAINING

## TIPS FOR JOB INTERVIEWS

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'tis the season: CV writing and preparing for job interviews are two important components of a skill set addressed by this article. Hope is not a strategy. It is always prudent to be prepared for unexpected or planned opportunities. It's always the season...

### FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The cold, hard, objective facts on your CV are important, but they are not everything. There are the studies which claim that non-verbal impressions contribute a great deal to charisma, credibility and intelligence ratings. I make no comment as to the degree to which those studies survive serious scientific scrutiny, but they're out there. Whatever be the case, there is no denying that hand gestures, voice-modulation/ range and the amount that you smile (or frown), all make a difference. A first impression occurs in nanoseconds. You only have one chance to make it.

### LOGISTICS AND INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Make sure that you are totally on top of:

- the details of the job advertisement
- the hospital and departmental website
- the membership of the interview panel and their individual interests
- other applicants/ vacating applicants and
- how your past experience relates to this position.

Be polite and nice to the gatekeeper. Never mess with the staff. You have probably already learned this as a life lesson. If you want to succeed at anything, start by choosing your enemies carefully. It's a small world. While the person who answers the phone may not be the final decision-maker, s/he may very effectively and persuasively have the ear of the person who is.

- Dress for success. It is simplest to wear a professional, classic suit. That sends a signal about the effort you are prepared to make in order to succeed.
- Aim to be punctual or early.
- Bring a well composed, well-presented, current curriculum vitae.
- Consider preparing several copies of a short resume that you can leave with the interview panel. This resume should set out how your CV dovetails with this particular role.

### BEHAVIOUR-BASED SKILLS QUESTIONS

There are a number of high-quality web-based resources on medical behaviour based interviews.

There is a sandwich construct for the interview: the "putting you at your ease question", the actual questions and concluding with the close.

Just as you practised scripts for the vivas to prepare responses to questions, so you can anticipate some questions and rehearse the answers to make the job interview easier and less intimidating. This will assist to portray your qualities and skills more persuasively and accurately.

### "Tell us about yourself"

This is not about your golf handicap, volunteer work or book club. Unless you are specifically asked for your star sign, this question is about the job. It calls for you to talk about the skills, experience and qualities that you bring to the fit for that position. The Anthony Stagg video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OW-yxxPMtro&t=104s>) uses the mnemonic EES: Education, Employment and Skills.

His short video describes what to avoid, namely a general answer such as you might give at a party. You should be specific and link how your education, previous employment and experience in training are related to the specific skills required for the particular job at hand and not your personal life. Doing so allows you, at the same time, to showcase your communication skills and ability to anticipate: a real performance winner!

So: what are the contents of a good response for an anaesthetic job?

All the candidates for a Provisional Fellow or consultant position have a FANZCA or equivalent so, how was your training distinguished? A prize or prizes? Relevant volunteer work? A particular departmental contribution? Relevant Subspecialty work? Special interests, non-technical skill development/ research/ teaching opportunities? What particular skills did

you hone during training?

Concluding with the frequently asked "My biggest strengths are":

1. (Your choice of) academic/ leadership/ teaching/ niche (informatics/IT/ subspecialty etc) and how they apply to this job to improve the value of it (when you get it) to the organisation.

If you have already achieved or mastered something outstanding in the spheres of education, employment or skills, say so! Show that you are proud of it by saying that you are proud of it. Develop this by explaining how that achievement can improve your contribution to the job/ team/ organisation.

2. Something relevant to the particular academic/community service/teaching/ departmental/global interests of the particular job description or something you intend to do in the future i.e. demonstrating the strength of your vision.

Having anticipated the strengths question, the segue to the "weakness" question is the next obvious place to go. Yes, you have to have some weaknesses. It is too cheesy and can come across as arrogant, to reply that you are a perfectionist or similar.

### What are your weaknesses?

This is not about your personality. Avoid the temptation to present a strength in disguise. This should be an issue that has occurred (often in a specific context) and which you have corrected. This question is an opportunity to show that you have powers of insight, have taken corrective initiative and have the discipline to implement a remedy.

In its disassembly, this is a Hollywood movie: Likeable hero (you) encounters an obstacle (Weakness), takes Action and emerges transformed (Result).

Be brutally honest with yourself about this one. Spend time reflecting

on and composing a response.

Again, there is useful material from Stagg at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u\\_VdMHGQnZU&t=255s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u_VdMHGQnZU&t=255s) using the mnemonic WAR: detailing what the Weakness is or was, Action taken to overcome it to achieve the Results that ameliorated that Weakness. This can be illustrated with an example of the weakness being difficulty in accepting criticism which produces the result that you challenge your colleagues and consultants, thereby impairing communication and losing opportunities to improve skills and knowledge at many levels. You strive to achieve the best possible outcomes for your patients but find it very challenging to be criticised by your supervisor of training. The remedial action might be to seek the advice of your senior mentors and peers, attending a "taking criticism without crying" course where you learned to deal with acute situations as well as maintenance skills that you refresh every six months online. Result? Plusses all round:

- You have improved relationships in your workplace (remember, the question is about the job).
- You have realised many more opportunities to learn from all levels of medical and non-medical staff.
- You are vigilant about not falling into old habits.
- You have taken on mentoring of your peers and juniors in this sphere.
- Recognising this fault early in your training allowed you to take full advantage of your basic and advanced training and to spread that particular joy to others.

Accepting or receiving criticism is a significant issue for many registrars. This analysis allows a job candidate to demonstrate insight and an ability to recognise and implement solutions. The results provide an opportunity for self-improvement as well as contribution to the

greater good by way of patient care and improved relationships with colleagues.

The realisation that there are other areas where you can improve may well have enabled you to develop in those as well. If there is a follow-up question about another area, be ready for that one e.g. fear of public speaking.

### Why do you want to work here?

Honesty and homework is required here. Know the institution, its past work, research interests, culture, reputation and people. Prepare something which addresses how the opportunities for you might be mutually beneficial or serve a higher purpose. Use specific examples which demonstrate the excellence of the match of you for the job.

### Why should we hire you?

You should be answering this question from the moment you started to research the job description, the institution, panel members and outgoing job holders as well as your polite and respectful dealings with the staff. Having done all that work, tell the panel that you have made yourself aware on those fronts. The fact that you arrived early, the way you walked into the room, the way you presented yourself, your CV and your confident greeting to the interview panel, should all be persuasive.

Your specified and special skills which you have matched to the particular needs of the job and the added value that you would contribute, should make the panel beg you to stay.

### Do you have any questions?

Prepare some questions. This signals your preparedness and motivation. Your questions should be credible and not just Dorothy Dixers or questions to which you already know the answers. Some resources:

- Mayo clinic preparing for an interview: <http://www.mayoclinic.org/jobs/how-to-apply/preparing-for-interview>

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- aagbi.org <http://www.aagbi.org/professionals/career-information>
- The secret to acing Behavioural interviews: <http://www.physemp.com/blog/the-secret-to-acing-behavioral-interviews-for-physician-jobs-be-a-great-storyteller/>
- The SHARE model: Situation, Hindrances, Actions, Results, Evaluation
- Interview questions from FRCA.uk <http://www.frca.co.uk/Page.aspx?id=44> and <http://www.frca.co.uk/page.aspx?id=30>

## THE INTERVIEWERS

It is interesting to reflect on the interview process, its structure and to spare a thought for the interviewers, particularly at the AAGBI site <http://www.aagbi.org/professionals/career-information>.

Interviewers are trained, not born! Be prepared for an interviewer who:

- Has not read your CV;
- Gets aggressive to see how you react under stress;
- Is constantly disturbed;
- Makes remarks about your previous bosses;
- Asks questions but doesn't listen to the answers.

The AAGBI site also warns about interviewers who might be nervous, aggressive, unprepared, disorganised or ask inappropriate questions.

It is always better to be prepared for, rather than outraged by, "forbidden" questions about family plans, religious beliefs or ethnicity. They may be simply deflected by a statement such as "My (religious beliefs/ sexual orientation) will not interfere with my ability to fulfil my job obligations." If the situation shows signs of developing into an unpleasant one, you can choose to use it as an opportunity to display a well-mannered composure.

Make a decision at a later time regarding whether you want to work in a place

where inappropriate questions are asked. Remember that there is never any point in alienating anyone in this (or any) process. You never know where or when members of this interview panel might turn up on the yellow brick road of your professional life.

## CV WRITING

This article in the BMJ remains relevant: <http://www.bmj.com/content/313/7066/S2-7066>.

## NON BEHAVIOUR-BASED SKILLS QUESTIONS

You should anticipate questions relating to anaesthetic career choice, why the panel should hire you and where would you like to be in five years' time. <https://www.monster.com/career-advice/article/toughest-health-care-interview-questions>

Be prepared for a clinical question. Rely on your exam preparation for this: identify the issues and how your choices address those. Refer to relevant evidence for your response. Where evidence does not exist, your response should be based in sensible, defensible judgement with an emphasis on the best interests of the patient and their safety. Where the clinical question raises competing physiological interests or personal conflict, there is often no "right" answer. Acknowledge this and explain your answer appropriately.

## THE ODD QUESTIONS

Sometimes panels ask uncategorisable questions. Some examples are: If you were a hamburger, would you prefer to be the hamburger or the bun?; Which superhero would you be?; What would you take to a desert island?

Don't be thrown by these, but take a deep breath and give an answer. Such questions test your flexibility and response to novelty. Use humour cautiously. However, if you are confident about the way things are going, your answer to such a question might provide a good opportunity to display something of your personality.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

Clean it up.

Review your presence on:

- LinkedIn
- Facebook
- Instagram
- Tumblr

Decide what face you wish to make public.

The most dangerous component in a motor car is the 'nut behind the steering wheel'. In the online world, the most dangerous vulnerability just might be the careless individual behind a keyboard.

## QUESTIONS THAT YOU SHOULD ASK

This marks the closing of the interview – but not quite. Fight the urge to get out of the room having survived the experience. Take the opportunity to distinguish yourself as a candidate to the panel and to learn more about the job and demonstrate your interest for it.

Again, there are many references on the web suggesting questions that you might ask or should not ask: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jacquelynsmith/2013/07/05/30-questions-you-should-andshouldnt-ask-in-a-job-interview/2/#49e0cc2d7fb4>

Questions such as the following might work:

- Of the research interests of the department, given my background in 'x' how can I best contribute?... or phrase this as stating that you have spoken to 'y' (vacating the position) who completed project 'z' and ask/state how you can build on this work.
- Pick an 'omission' in the job description and ask if you can undertake that task: rostering/mentoring/teaching.
- How do you evaluate success in this position? Is there a formal process?
- Asking when you can expect to know the decision of the panel is a nice way to close.

Having your questions written down might help you remember them as well as signal your degree of preparation for the interview to the panel.

### **CONTACT/ FOLLOW-UP**

Have a card, leave a 'gift' (e.g. a proposal for a research project or specific suggestions for plans that you have for the particular job or create a webpage to which you refer the panel as you sign off.

Not all candidates accept the positions that they are offered. Even if you are not successful in the first round, consider sending a 'thank you' email. That might move you up the list for the second round.

### **RESOURCES**

AMA career advice hub [ama.com.au](http://ama.com.au)

Best wishes for a successful interview for the job you want.