



Best Practices to Successfully Navigate a Virtual Interview: a Five-Step Guide for Hematology/Oncology Fellowship Applicants

Laura A. Huppert¹ • Jennifer M. Babik²

Published online: 18 August 2020

© American Association for Cancer Education 2020

Dear Editor,

For residents applying to hematology/oncology fellowship in this upcoming match cycle, they will be faced with a new challenge: navigating the virtual interview. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Alliance for Academic Internal Medicine (AAIM) strongly encourages all fellowship programs to conduct remote interviews using virtual platforms, rather than in-person interviews, in order to support the nation's public health efforts [1]. Therefore, hematology/oncology fellowship applicants will need to prepare for this new virtual interview format. However, there is little published guidance on this topic for trainees. Here, we address this knowledge gap by consolidating existing medical education literature on virtual interviewing [2, 3] with guidance from other industries [4]. We summarize best practices in a five-step guide for hematology/oncology fellowship applicants (Table 1).

Step 1: Test your technology and virtual platform

- Ensure you have a reliable laptop with functioning video and audio with a strong internet connection [3]. Borrow a laptop or device from your home institution if needed.
- Download the proper virtual platform, complete your profile with a professional name and photograph, and perform an audiovisual test.

Step 2: Choose an optimal physical space

- Choose a space at home or on your home institution's campus to conduct the interview. Tidy your surroundings and ensure you know what is visible in your video background. Optimize lighting and close windows to reduce noise.
- Position the camera at face level so the angle is most natural [3].

Step 3: Prepare for interview questions (theirs and yours)

- Standardized interview questions may become more common with virtual interviews [5]. Review practice questions [6] and be prepared to answer behavioral interview questions.
- Do your homework on the program and your interviewers (if known beforehand). Brainstorm questions for each program, using sample questions if needed [7].
- Perform a mock virtual interview with a peer or mentor using your device and video platform. Get feedback on the content of your answers and your eye contact/body language.

Step 4: Ace the virtual interview

- On your interview day, ensure your device is fully charged and recheck your technology. Close programs that may prompt alert messages or provide a distraction. Dress professionally, as you would for an in-person interview.
- Make eye contact with the camera, rather than the computer screen [8]. Keep your head centered on the screen and avoid fidgeting or swiveling in your chair.

Step 5: Gather information about the program/city from the "interview day"

- Applicants report that interacting with current trainees is a key part of determining their final rank order [9], so make an effort to talk to current fellows at virtual social events or

✉ Laura A. Huppert
laura.huppert@ucsf.edu

¹ Division of Hematology/Oncology, Department of Medicine, University of California San Francisco, 505 Parnassus Avenue, Room 1286, San Francisco, CA 94117, USA

² Division of Infectious Diseases, Department of Medicine, University of California San Francisco, San Francisco, CA, USA

Table 1 Five evidence-based steps for hematology/oncology fellowship applicants to prepare for virtual interviews

Step	Key guidance
1 Test your technology and virtual platform	- Ensure that you have a functioning computer/tablet and stable internet connection - Download the virtual interview platform and test the video/audio in the program
2 Choose an optimal physical space	- Choose a quiet, private physical space with a simple background - Optimize lighting and camera position
3 Prepare for interview questions (theirs and yours)	- Practice answering typical interview questions - Read about the program and faculty and brainstorm questions for each program in advance - Practice doing a mock virtual interview with a peer or mentor
4 Ace the virtual interview	- Perform a sound and video check - Dress professionally and speak into the camera
5 Gather information about the program/city from the “interview day”	- Talk to current trainees about the program and city - Network with colleagues who are also applying - Note reflections at the end of each “interview day”

contact them afterwards if the program provides a contact list. In addition, leverage your current institution’s alumni network to connect with alumni who work or train at that institution now.

- Recreate the network of other applicants on the “interview trail” by contacting colleagues at other programs to exchange perspectives about your respective home institutions and programs at which you mutually interview.
- After each interview day, reflect and take notes. Since virtual interviews will likely be conducted in the same location, it may be more challenging to recall differences between programs without environmental cues.

These five steps provide best practices and practical advice for hematology/oncology fellowship applicants to successfully complete virtual interviews. Although this is an unprecedented interview season, we believe that with preparation and guidance, hematology/oncology fellowship applicants can thrive in this new virtual interview environment.

Authors’ Contributions Both authors conceived, researched, wrote, and edited this piece.

Data availability Not applicable

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Code Availability Not applicable

References

1. Alliance for Academic Internal Medicine. 2020. Fellowship application season 2020–2021. <https://www.im.org/resources/ume-gme-program-resources/resources-fellowship-application2021>. Accessed June 24, 2020
2. Jones RE, Abdelfattah KR. 2020. Virtual interviews in the era of COVID-19: a primer for applicants. *Journal of Surgical Education*. Published online April 9, 2020
3. Association of American Medical Colleges. 2020. Virtual interviews: applicant preparation guide. Accessed May 20, 2020. https://www.aamc.org/system/files/2020-05/Virtual_Interview_Tips_for_Applicants_05072020_1.pdf
4. Northeastern University Graduate Programs. 2020. 8 tips for acing your next virtual interview. <https://www.northeastern.edu/graduate/blog/virtual-interview-tips/>. Accessed June 9, 2020
5. Black C, Budner H, Motta AL (2018) Enhancing the residency interview process with the inclusion of standardised questions. *Postgrad Med J* 94(1110):244–246
6. Association of American Medical Colleges. 2020. Interviewing for residency: frequently asked interview questions. https://aamc-orange.global.ssl.fastly.net/production/media/filer_public/09/bf/09bf383c-3ff6-41bd-95c5-19e0f1f3dc55/frequent_interview_questions.pdf. Accessed June 9, 2020
7. Association of American Medical Colleges. 2020. Don’t forget to ask: advice from residents on what to ask during the residency interview. https://aamc-orange.global.ssl.fastly.net/production/media/filer_public/18/54/1854e71c-2818-4a4f-86e1-188648fde1f1/residencyquestions.pdf. Accessed June 9, 2020
8. Fullwood C, Doherty-Sneddon G (2006) Effect of gazing at the camera during a video link on recall. *Appl Ergon* 37(2): 167–175
9. Healy WL, Bedair H (2017) Videoconference interviews for an adult reconstruction fellowship: lessons learned. *JBJS*. 99(21):e114

Publisher’s Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.