

Sample Medical School Interview Questions:

- 1) Why do you want to be a doctor?
- 2) What do you do in your spare time?
- 3) What are your specific goals in medicine?
- 4) What stimulated your interest in medicine?
- 5) What do you think about HMO's and the changes taking place in medicine?
- 6) What schools have you applied to?
- 7) What do you intend to gain from a medical education?
- 8) What do you think about euthanasia?
- 9) Why do you think so many people want to be doctors?
- 10) Do you think a physician should tell a patient he/she has eight months to live?
- 11) There are 1,000 applicants as qualified as you. Why should we pick you?
- 12) What steps have you taken to acquaint yourself with what a physician does?
- 13) How would your plans differ if you knew that all physicians would be working in HMO's in the future?
- 14) What do you think is the most pressing issue in medicine today?
- 15) What will you do if you don't get into medical school?
- 16) What are your positive qualities and what are your shortcomings?
- 17) What is your relationship with your family?
- 18) How do you think your role as a physician fits in with your role as a member of the community?
- 19) Describe your personality.
- 20) What do you have to offer our school?
- 21) What are the best and worst things that have ever happened to you?
- 22) What do you see yourself doing in medicine 10-15 years from now?
- 23) Is medicine a rewarding experience? Why?
- 24) Would you practice in the inner city? What do you think happens to people who practice medicine there (attitude changes, etc.)?
- 25) If there was an accident on the highway, would you stop and help the victims, knowing that doing so might lead to a malpractice claim against you?
- 26) What aspects of your life's experiences do you think make you a good candidate for medical school?
- 27) If your best friends were asked to describe you, what would they say?
- 28) How do you plan to finance your medical education?
- 29) What do you think about (...some current event)?
- 30) Discuss a book that you have recently read for pleasure. Why does this book interest you?

- Why do you want to be a doctor?
- What will you do if you aren't accepted to medical school?
- What makes you special?
- What are your 2 best/weakest points?
- What do you think will be your greatest challenge in medical school or learning how to be a doctor?
- In your view, what is the most pressing problem facing medicine today?
- If you could do anything different in your education, what would you do?
- Tell me about yourself.
- What do you do in your spare time?
- How did you get here?
- Why would you be a good doctor?
- What are your strengths?
- What do you feel are the most important qualities in being a good doctor?
- What are your hobbies?
- Are you a leader or a follower? Why?
- What exposure have you had to the medical profession?
- Discuss your clinical experiences/volunteer work.
- What do you think you will like most/least about medicine?
- Expect questions concerning what you think about ethics and healthcare (e.g., abortion, cloning, euthanasia).
- Be prepared to discuss managed healthcare and changes in the US healthcare system.
- How are you a match for our medical school?
- Would you perform abortions as a doctor? Under what conditions?
- What are three things you want to change about yourself?
- How would you describe the relationship between science and medicine?
- Which family member has influenced your life so far and why?

- Be enthusiastic about the school. Know why you want to go there and be able to provide 4 or 5 reasons when you're asked.
- Have questions to ask. Ask about unclear aspects of their curriculum, research opportunities, and so on, but your questions should show that you are familiar with the school.
- Read the catalog beforehand and use it to create questions. Good questions demonstrate your enthusiasm and intelligence.
- Bring up your strong points, but don't be overly self-confident. Try to strike a balance between self confidence and humility.
- Be prepared for an interviewer to bring up your weak points or ask you for your input on your weak points.
- Listen carefully to the interviewer and often you will get clues or hints as to what they are interested in.
- Understand that some interviewers may not have read your application or may not recall it. Be prepared to fill them in on your qualifications and experience.

For each category introduced, arm yourself with at least three points you would like to communicate about yourself and think of one or two specific details to support each. This will allow you to create a targeted, comprehensive set of answers to most of the questions you will be asked. With practice, you will be able to actively use the interviewer's questions to communicate the points you wish to make.

Open-Ended Questions

- Who are you?
- Why medical school?
- How would a friend describe you?
- Why do you want to be a doctor?
- How are you unique?
- List three things you want me to know about you.
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- Why should we accept you?
- Tell me about yourself.

Open-ended questions are the easiest. First, they are obvious; they are exactly what you should have asked yourself when you first decided to go to medical school. Also, they offer you the chance to openly sell yourself. This is where you should communicate the top three points you would like to make.

Questions about Your Motivation/Sincerity

- Do you feel that you have a realistic view of medical school?
- Do you understand what the life of a doctor entails?
- Why do you want to attend this school?
- Why do you want to work with sick people?
- Is this school your top choice?
- Where do you see yourself in 10/20/30 years?
- What do you want to specialize in?
- How do you plan to pay for medical school?
- What do you hope to get out of medicine?
- Do you have any concerns about this school?
- Do you have any ideas about your residency?
- Have you considered the advantages/disadvantages of living in this area?

These questions probe exactly how much you want to practice medicine. The committee wants to understand the thought you have put into your decision. They also need to know that you understand the difficult journey of studying and practicing medicine, and that your knowledge of a doctor's life is not limited to what you have seen on television. Lastly, they want to know that you are sincere in wanting their specific program. If another school is your top choice, be honest. But also be prepared with the reasons that you applied to their school. One tip here is to review the reasons for your motivation that you gave in your essay.

When answering any one of these questions, start and end with a reiteration of your desire to 1) become a doctor, and 2) attend their school. Emphasize too that you know what your decision entails. Your points should explain why your unique experience makes medical school the right choice. For example: Are you more interested in the science/research side of medicine, or in helping people? If it's the first, you should have a strong research and science background. If it's the latter, back it up with volunteer experience or other kinds of community involvement. Most will stress both sides, which is fine, as long as you can provide solid evidence.

Questions about Your Qualifications and Experience

- What work experience have you had?
- What health-care experience have you had?
- Tell me about your research experience.
- How have you prepared yourself for a career in medicine?
- What clinical/hospital experience have you had?
- What work experience do you wish you had?
- How have you contributed to your community?
- Tell me about a time you have helped someone.
- What volunteer experience have you had?
- What's your toughest subject?

This is pretty straightforward. Just be ready to talk about any experience that you have mentioned in your application. If you feel that you are weak in clinical experience or research, then: 1) say so with regret and explain if there is a good reason, and 2) talk about indirect experience instead (such as the time you set your sister's wrist on a hiking trip or the hours spent tutoring English to adult immigrants). Emphasize your motivation through your experience.

Questions about Your Knowledge of the Medical Field

- What do you see as the biggest challenge facing the field of medicine today?
- Demonstrate your understanding of HMOs, PPOs, and third-party providers.
- Are you aware of the upcoming surplus of doctors? How do you feel about it?
- How do you feel about the debate over the hours residents are forced to work?
- How would you advise patients who are interested in visiting an acupuncturist or chiropractor?
- What do you think about medical advice being available on the Web?
- Express your opinions on:
 - genetic engineering
 - the future of technology in medicine
 - government health-care issues
 - the high cost of health care
 - doctors' salaries
 - hospice care
 - alternative medicine
 - the role of spirituality in healing

This category is often the most daunting for applicants. The admissions committee wants to see that you are familiar with current events. This is another way to test your sincerity and dedication, and it shows an intellectual curiosity and ability. It is important that the interviewer knows you want to help people, but medicine is as much science as healing and both facets need to be explored.

Questions about Your Personality and Background

- Tell me about a significant event in your life and how it shaped you.
- Do you have a favorite book/class/professor?
- Who do you not get along with and why?
- Which of your qualities would you want to pass down to your children?
- What about yourself would you change if you could?
- What three material objects are most important to you?
- What people have influenced you and how?
- Do you have any heroes?

- How do you handle stress?
- Give me an example of a time you contributed to a group effort.
- Tell me about a cross-cultural experience you have had.
- What do you do in your free time?
- What are your hobbies?
- What is your number one accomplishment?

Questions about Your Ethics/Character

- Would you work in an AIDS clinic?
- Would you prescribe birth control pills to a minor without parental consent?
- Have you ever cheated or helped a friend cheat?
- How will you deal with know-it-all patients?
- Give your opinions on:
 - genetic engineering
 - abortion
 - euthanasia
 - providing clean needles to addicts
 - supplying condoms to schools
 - animal research

These questions are a subset of questions about the medical field as well as questions about your personality, and subsequently among the toughest to answer. If you are ready for them, though, you will be able to breeze through where others stumble. There are two things that should be of comfort to you: 1) There is a fairly limited number of these "hot" issues so you can be completely ready for most of them, and 2) interviewers won't judge you based on your opinion, even if they disagree, but rather on the thoughtfulness with which you have answered. For this category in particular, preparation is everything.

Personal/Illegal Questions

- Has anyone close to you been seriously ill or died?
- Have you ever been ill or injured?
- What is your relationship with your family like?
- What is more important to you than anything else?
- Are you married/do you have children?
- Do you plan to have children in the future?
- How will you juggle a medical career with a family?
- How important is family to you?
- How do you plan to pay for medical school?

This category is different from the rest. The common thread through these questions is the reluctance of interviewees to answer them, either because they are personal, inappropriate, irrelevant, or illegal. Our advice is to accept the situation gracefully and answer the question briefly and as straightforwardly as possible.

"Why do you want to be a doctor?"

The admission committee knows that you have a preplanned answer for this question. Even if you don't, after a few interviews, you will have developed your own unique answer. You should think about what a good physician possesses; i.e., he needs to be intelligent, compassionate, hard working, etc.

In formulating your answer, include some of these qualities as qualities which you possess and like to put to good use by being a physician. For example, my response was "I like the intellectual challenge of being a physician. I have always looked forward to a career that would allow me to make a difference in other people's lives." This answer incorporates compassion and desire to help with your search for an intellectually fulfilling career.

Other questions within the same category would include:

1. Did anyone you know influence your choice of career?
2. Do you have family members who are doctors? What do they think of the field? How has their lives changed over the past few years with the changes in medicine? Do you want to follow in their footsteps? (be careful with this one. This question may be a disguised way to ask you "what specialty you are interested in?" In answering this type of questions, you should keep in mind that many medical schools are having a push towards primary care. This does not mean that you should be dishonest and lie about what you want to do. Always say the truth. If you are uncertain about what you will want to do, say the truth: I am not certain which field of medicine I will be best suited for; I hope to find the answer during my clinical rotations!)
3. Which field of medicine are you interested in? Again, keep in mind that many schools have been pressured into graduating more students interested in primary care specialties!
4. What kind of experiences do you have in the medical field? This is an excellent opportunity to discuss some of the strong points in your application. Keep in mind that some interviewers do not have time to read all of your submitted information (but some will read everything in detail and will ask you questions to double check some of your statements!)
5. What are your goals in medicine? Answer this one in a similar fashion to why you want to be a doctor.
6. Where do you see yourself in 15 years? (what specialty will you be in/ where do you plan to practice) are all the same questions!

Why did you apply to our school?

This is when having done all the reading and research about the school becomes very handy. Discuss the excellent research programs, their early clinical training, the pass fail system, etc.

Similar questions would include:

1. Would you go to our program if I gave you an acceptance letter now?-- You need to be both enthusiastic as well as practical in answering this question. My approach would probably be to say that I love their program. However, I can not make a final decision until I have completed all my interviews. I have shown my interest in their program; I have also shown a practical approach in dealing with difficult issues. I am not rushing into making such a significant decision in my life.
2. Why should we choose you? Discuss your strengths. Relate your strengths to those of the program. --I love doing research. I was involved with analysis of osteosarcomas, and I can see that your institution is interested in genetics of cancer development.
3. Our school is now looking for a new dean (a new hospital or any other issues with an uncertain future). Does that concern you? Why? Why not?

What other interests do you have?

Like answering all other questions, you want to be concise and specific. Discuss two or three hobbies; you may want to ask the interviewer about his hobbies. Be prepared to defend yourself if you are asked about your time commitment to these hobbies vs. your studies! Always keep in mind that your studies come first.

1. Do you plan to continue your hobbies through medical school?
2. If you had one day to do anything, what would you do?
3. What was the last book you read? What did you think about it? Would you recommend that I read it? The last movie you saw? What did you think of it?
4. What was the last medical book that you read/studied? If you have not studied one, don't lie. But usually, everyone has looked at medical books when someone in the family has been sick. One good book that I had used in undergrad was the Merck manual which discusses most common illnesses.
5. Which classes did you enjoy most? Why? --talk with great enthusiasm when you are talking about things you like in general. Make sure that your enthusiasm is at its highest when you talk about medicine!
6. How would your friends describe your personality?
7. If you were stranded in an island, what three books would you want to have with you and why? --think of practical books or possibly spiritual ones. You want to maximize your chance of survival in the island. For example, would you want to know which plants were poisonous?
8. What are your strengths and weaknesses? What would you change about yourself?
9. Is there something about you that would make it difficult to get along with you? What type of people do you get along with well? --good physicians have to be able to work with all types of personalities throughout their training. As residents, you need to depend on other residents to get many tasks accomplished. As surgeons, you depend on your scrub nurse and assistants. In general, you like to convey that you get along with most people well. To show that you are hardworking (hopefully one of your pre-planned strong points), you may discuss that working with people that do not give their best effort may be difficult. You should, however, add that you have been successful in working with these types of people (by putting forth more effort on your side)! This is what I honestly felt when I was asked this question; think of something similar for yourself.
10. Describe the most exciting (scary, unusual, etc.) event of your life?
11. What do you think will be the most difficult aspect of medical school? --don't come up with multiple answers which would convince the interviewer that you would have a tough time in medical school. State the obvious like the need for increased studying; you may want to add that you can handle this sudden increase in your workload based on some previous quarter or semester...
12. Why did you do so poorly in bio 191? --this is a good opportunity to defend or explain bad grades, etc. Use it to your advantage; think about what you will discuss very carefully. You may even want to bring up this subject when you are asked "do you have any more questions?".
13. Imagine that you find a lamp that gives you three wishes? What would they be?
14. What qualities would you look for in a doctor? --think of all your strength and stress the importance of possessing them as a doctor! You need to remind the interviewer that you possess all these strengths.
15. What qualities would you look for in your patients?
16. If you could be any animal/body organ/cell, what would you be and why?
17. Who do you admire the most in your life? If you could chose one figure in history to have dinner with, who would it be? --family members would be an easy way to go. Describing his good qualities and comparing them to your own qualities is yet another opportunity to sell yourself. Use these opportunities as the interviewer may not ask you about your strengths and weaknesses.
18. Have you always put forth your best effort in every situation? --you need to balance being modest with guaranteeing that you will do your best at all times in medical school.
19. Tell me about something that you know a lot about? --this could be a hobby or anything you feel like you are an expert in. You can discuss making a web page for children with cerebral palsy. Don't forget that you want to be concise.

If you find that the professor with whom you have done research has changed some of the data before publication, what would you do?

These are the infamous ethical questions that you will undoubtedly be asked in some form or other. Always do the right thing and not the politically correct thing. And, always, keep in mind that you are obligated to do no harm to the patient.

In this example, you must ensure that fraudulent data does not get published. Falsified data may support the wrong conclusions which can hurt the health of many people. You may want to discuss the matter with your professor to ensure that an honest mistake has not occurred (somehow, computer data being changed, lost, etc.). If you have no luck persuading your professor to change the data back, you may want to speak to the chairman or dean, etc. Don't let the data get published!

1. What would you do if you saw a fellow med student cheating on an exam?--Keep in mind, the patient health comes first! --I was shocked to see this actually happen in our class. You need to ensure that this does not happen again; maybe talk to the student or some higher authority.
2. What are your thoughts on abortion? Euthanasia?
3. How would you tell your patient that he has cancer? --this is one of the most difficult aspects of bedside manners. You need to show your compassionate side with this question.
4. If you are held up at gunpoint with you wife (mom, etc.), What would you do?
5. What do you think of affirmative action?
6. Would you get out of you car in a highway to help an accident victim? Exactly what would you do? -- you may want to call 911 immediately and get out and help as much as you can subsequently! Don't forget to be practical. If you get out to help and never call 911, your presence may be a complete waste unless you can perform trauma surgery!
7. If an Aids patient were bleeding profusely from a laceration, what would you do? What if you do not have gloves? What if you have an open sore on your hands? This was probably the most difficult question that I was asked during my interviews. You need to balance your obligation to the public vs. to yourself!

What is the most difficult issue facing the medical community? How about doctors in general?

Your reading of the newspapers keeps you up to date with the current issues in medicine. You should feel comfortable discussing the health cost and access issues that have been raised. Try to list the different possible scenarios for the future of medicine.

1. What do you think of herbal/alternative medicine? Should people choose them over traditional medicine? What would you do if a family member decides to solely depend on alternative medicine for his treatment of a significant illness (cancer, etc.)?
2. What are your thoughts on Medicare reform? Capitation, HMO's, PPO's, etc.?
3. How would you improve our preventive care settings?
4. How would you improve access to care in this country?
5. Do you feel that the government should be involved with mandating insurance? Subsidizing insurance?
6. How would you control the cost of healthcare? --hay, nobody has figured that one out yet. Don't pretend like you know all the answers. Think of some plausible responses and be concise and specific. State that your answer is only one of many possibilities.
7. Do you think doctors are getting paid too much? Too little? Do you think that decreasing the salaries of physicians can solve our healthcare cost issues? How about socialized medicine?
8. What do you think of the doctor shortage/oversupply in different areas? How would you improve this situation?
9. Why do you think the number of applicants has been growing every year despite the problems we face in medicine?

Ambiguous Questions:

- *** Tell me about yourself.*
- *How do you want me to remember you?*
- *What are your goals?*
- *There are hundreds if not thousands of applicants, why should we choose you?*
- *Convince me that you would make a good doctor.*
- *Why do you want to study medicine?*

COMMENTS: These questions present nightmares for the unprepared student. If you are prepared, you will be able to take control of the interview by highlighting your qualities or objectives in an informative and interesting manner.

Medically Related Questions:

- *What are the pros and cons to our health-care system?*
- *If you had the power, what changes would you make to our health-care system?*
- *What is your opinion of HMOs and PPOs?*
- *Do doctors make too much money?*
- *Is it ethical for doctors to strike?*
- *What is the Hippocratic Oath?*
- *What is the difference between Medicare and Medicaid?*
- *Should fetal tissue be used to treat disease (i.e. Parkinson's)?*
- *If you were a doctor and an under age girl asked you for the Pill (or an abortion) and she did not want to tell her parents, what would you do?*
- *Should doctors be allowed to 'pull the plug' on terminally ill patients?*
- *If a patient is dying from a bleed, would you transfuse blood if you knew they would not approve (i.e. Jehovah Witness)?*

COMMENTS: The health-care system, euthanasia, abortion, human cloning and other ethical issues are very popular topics in this era of technological advances, skyrocketing health-care costs, and ethical uncertainty. You should be up-to-date regarding changes in the province where you are being interviewed. All too often the general public is better informed regarding health-care than the medical school applicant! A well-informed opinion can set you apart from most of the other interviewees.

Questions Related to Academics:

- *Why did you choose your present course of studies?*
- *What is your favorite subject in your present course of studies? Why?*
- *Would you consider a career in your present course of studies?*
- *Can you convince me that you can cope with the workload in medical school?*
- *How do you study/prepare for exams?*
- *Do you engage in self-directed learning?*

COMMENTS: Medical schools like to see applicants who are well-disciplined, committed to medicine as a career, and who exhibit self-directed learning. Beware of any glitches in your academic record. You may be asked to give reasons for any grades they may deem substandard. On the other hand, you should volunteer any information regarding academic achievement (i.e. prizes, awards, scholarships, particularly high grades in one subject or the other, etc.).

Questions Related to Social Skills or Interests:

- Give evidence that you relate well with others.
- Give an example of a leadership role you have assumed.
- Have you done any volunteer work?
- What would you do as Prime Minister of Canada with respect to the persistent national debt?
- How would you address Canada's constitutional crisis?
- What are the prospects for a lasting peace in South Africa? Eastern Europe? the former USSR? the Middle-East?
- What do you think of the free-trade agreement between Canada, the United States and Mexico?

COMMENTS: Questions concerning social skills should be simple for the prepared student. If you are asked a question that you cannot answer, say so. If you pretend to know something about a topic in which you are completely uninformed, you will make a bad situation worse.

Stress-Type Questions:

- How do you handle stress?
- What was the most stressful event in your life? How did you handle it?
- The night before your final exam, your father has a heart-attack and is admitted to a hospital, what do you do?

COMMENTS: The ideal physician has positive coping methods to deal with the inevitable stressors of a medical practice. Stress-type questions are a legitimate means of determining if you possess the raw material necessary to cope with medical school and medicine as a career. Some interviewers go one step further. They may decide to introduce stress into the interview and see how you handle it. For example, they may decide to ask you a confrontational question or try to back you into a corner (i.e. *You do not know anything about medicine, do you?*). Alternatively, the interviewer might use silence to introduce stress into the interview. If you have completely and confidently answered a question and silence falls in the room, do not retract previous statements, mutter, or fidget. Simply wait for the next question. If the silence becomes unbearable, you may consider asking an intelligent question (i.e. a specific question regarding their curriculum).

Questions on Problem Situations:

- A 68 year-old married woman has a newly discovered cancer. Her life expectancy is 6 months. How would you inform her?
- A 34 year-old man presents with AIDS and tells you, as his physician, that he does not want to tell his wife. What would you do?
- You are playing tennis with your best friend and the ball hits your friend in the eye. What do you do?

COMMENTS: As for the other questions, listen carefully and take your time to consider the best possible response. Keep in mind that the ideal physician is not only knowledgeable, but is also compassionate, empathetic, and is objective enough to understand both sides of a dilemma. Be sure such qualities are clearly demonstrated.

Personality-Oriented Questions:

- *If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?*
- How would your friends describe you?
- What do you do with your spare time?
- What is the most important event that has occurred to you in the last five years?
- If you had three magical wishes, what would they be?
- What would you do on a perfect day?
- What are your best attributes?

COMMENTS: Of course, most questions will assess your personality to one degree or the other. However, these questions are quite direct in their approach. Forewarned is forearmed!

Questions Based on Autobiographical Materials:

COMMENTS: Any autobiographical materials you may have provided to the medical schools is fair game for questioning. You may be asked to discuss or elaborate on any point the interviewer may feel is interesting or questionable.

Miscellaneous Questions:

- *Should the federal government reinstate the death penalty? Explain.*
- What do you expect to be doing 10 years from now?
- How would you attract physicians to rural areas?
- Why do you want to attend our medical school?
- What other medical schools have you applied to?
- Have you prepared for this interview?
- Have you been to other interviews?

COMMENTS: You will do fine in this grab-bag category as long as you stick to the strategies previously iterated.

Concluding Questions:

- *What would you do if you were not accepted to a medical school?*
- How do you think you did in this interview?
- Do you have any questions?

COMMENTS: The only thing more important than a good first impression is a good finish in order to leave a positive lasting impression. They are looking for students who are so committed to medicine that they will not only re-apply to medical school if not accepted, but they would also strive to improve on those aspects of their application which prevented them from being accepted in the first attempt. All these questions should be answered with a quiet confidence. If you are given an opportunity to ask questions, though you should not flaunt your knowledge, you should establish that you are well-informed. For example: "I have read that you have changed your curriculum to a more patient-oriented and self-directed learning approach. I was wondering how the medical students are getting along with these new changes." Be sure, however, not to ask a question unless you are genuinely interested in the answer.

"I had just started a new job and was working 40 hours a week while carrying a full course load. I really thought I could balance it all. Clearly, I couldn't. This was compounded by a family member who became ill and required my help. The time commitment, not to mention the emotional involvement, was overwhelming."

Explain What You Learned From the Situation

Of all the steps in this process, I believe this is the most important. Remember, experience isn't what happens to you. Experience is what you do with what happens to you. Accordingly, the most useful information you can provide the admissions committee is what you have learned from this experience and how you are a better person for going through it. That's why excuses are so damaging. An excuse is something outside your control. At first blush, this might seem like a good idea. However, the byproduct of tough times (and mistakes) is your most valuable asset. Lay claim to these learning experiences. You might say,

"What I discovered during this difficult semester was that I do have limitations but I also have great staying power. For example, I bit off a little more than I could chew but I didn't drop the course or take an incomplete. I decreased my work hours, kept studying and steadily improved my grade in the course. I also discovered that I have a good support network of family and friends who helped me through this difficult time."

Demonstrate Correction or Improvement

This is the really tough component. Part 1 of this series talked about making the "cut on paper" and how it is of paramount importance to demonstrate to the admissions committee that you have the cognitive ability to make it through medical school. A low grade in an important class like physics or organic chemistry isn't the end of the world. However, you will still need to convince the committee that you have the mental capacity to succeed in the field of medicine. Accordingly, it may be prudent to repeat a course, to demonstrate mastery of the material. Alternatively, if the remainder of your scores is high, you may be able to reference these scholastic successes as evidence of your mental abilities. The low score can then be treated as an isolated event. Remember, you are only required to convince the committee that you have the brain power to succeed. It might be said like this,

"I knew my C in physics was not indicative of my understanding of the material so I retook the course, while maintaining my work hours, and got a B+. I would have liked to have earned an A but I am very satisfied with this mark and my understanding of the material."

Conclusion

As an interviewer at a large state school, if an applicant came to me and presented this scenario, I would be comfortable with the initial low grade in physics. In fact, I would feel more comfortable with the applicant. Now I have a good idea that when (not if) times get rough, this individual is going to have the experience and staying power to make it through.

When you're a physician, your practice of medicine won't be perfect. You'll work very hard to minimize any errors, but they will occur. Likewise, you will work very hard to avoid low grades, but they will also occur. That's not the issue. More important is how you deal with the errors. Try the above system and watch those weaknesses become your biggest strengths.

Sample Answers: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

Q: *Tell me about yourself.* {Interviewer blinded to grades}

I: {pause; total answer less than 4 minutes}

My friends call me Jimmy the Greek. The odd thing is that I'm not Greek! They've been calling me that since high-school when we were taught about the Greek scientist Archimedes. After he had discovered buoyancy for his king, he ran through the streets of Syracuse butt-naked screaming "Eureka, eureka!", which means "I found it". Certainly my friends do not think of me as the type to run around naked (!), but rather being *enthralled* by what you do - that's who I am.

. . . academic, creative, social . . .

From an academic standpoint, I have always worked hard at school primarily because I love to learn. I won an entrance scholarship to Simon Fraser University and after a period of adjustment to university life, I was able to give my energies to my craft, and be honored by receiving two more academic awards over the last two years and being placed on the Dean's list. I am in my last year of an honors program in Life Sciences.

I definitely have a creative side. I think it's partly due to the years of classical piano lessons. I learned jazz piano on my own, and I recently had the honour to play with Oscar Peterson at a benefit for cystic fibrosis. I have also developed creative skills while tutoring, which I thoroughly enjoy, and during research. I was fortunate to be awarded 2 summer research scholarships during my undergraduate studies to investigate something called *apoptosis*, which is a programmed cell death important in most forms of cancer. Since this is a relatively new concept, we have had to design new techniques - one of which I had written up and was accepted by the journal *Science* for publication. The potential for a treatment for cancer is very exciting.

My social side I express in many ways including with my family, friends and the French and Spanish clubs I've joined at school. I also play many team sports such as basketball, volleyball and hockey. My greatest experiences from a social perspective have come from my volunteer activities. Having volunteered at St. Paul's and the Children's hospital, I have opened a whole new world of possibilities in my personal growth. I learned to listen to the sick, to hold hands with the elderly, and even to cry with children who saw no hope. I always did my best to comfort.

It has been said that a doctor may cure sometimes, diagnose often, but comfort always. I am excited about entering a profession where you can learn, research, teach, and above all, interact in a most human way with those in need. That is why I am convinced that medicine is the right career choice for me.

II: {no pause}

Dr. Robinson is the main reason I want to be a doctor. When I was 10 I broke my leg and he was my doctor. He was really kind and he always had time to listen to my silly complaints. He went to practice in the States though, but I still remember him as . . .

[Interviewer: "*This is not an interview for Dr. Robinson. Could you please spend some time talking about yourself?*"]

Sorry, it's just that . . . OK . . . I've done a lot of volunteer work, like in the PACU of the VGH and the ER of CHEO, I also have good self-directed learning skills, I'm a good listener, I have leadership skills, I'm good at problem solving, I know these are important to be a good doctor . . . and that's it.

III: {no pause}

Umm, exactly what do you want to know?

[Interviewer: "*Just tell me about yourself.*"]

Umm, I, I wouldn't know where to start, maybe if you can ask a more specific question.

Q: *An eighteen year-old female arrives in the emergency room with a profound nose bleed. You are the physician and you have stopped the bleeding. She is now in a coma from blood loss and will die without a transfusion. A nurse finds a recent signed card from the Jehovah's Witness in the patient's purse refusing blood transfusions under any circumstance. What would you do?*

I: {pause}

The courts have recently ruled on this issue saying that a patient has the legal right to refuse treatment, even a life-saving transfusion. As a physician, I would have entered medicine with a purpose - to preserve life. As difficult a decision as it would be for me, I would elect *not* to transfuse. The legal aspect would not influence my decision as much as the *reason* for the law. We live in a multicultural society based on mutual respect. I may not agree with the Sikh who wears a turban into battle, but an adult knows the risks and then balances these with their culture, experiences, and so on. That is their right. I entirely disagree with the idea of refusing a life-saving blood transfusion, all the more painful my decision would be; but on some other day, I will again celebrate the many fascinating differences we have as Americans.

II: There's no way I would transfuse. She's an adult, it's against the law.

III: I'd give the blood. She's gotta be crazy to believe in that stuff anyways.