

Top 5 mistakes that doctors make at job interviews and how you should prepare to avoid them

Hello, my name is Nalin Wickramasuriya. I am a consultant paediatrician in Portsmouth and I have also had lots of experience in coaching doctors to improve their interview skills.

Please pay close attention! Because in this report, I am going to reveal to you 5 really common mistakes that I have seen doctors make with their interview preparation and tell you how to make sure that **you** don't fall into the same traps.

If, after reading this, you feel inclined to share your thoughts with me, please email me at Nalin@medicalinterviewpreparation.co.uk as I would really value your feedback.

When deciding on how you want to organise your medical interview preparation, you must spend your time wisely by focussing on the actions are most likely to increase your chances of success.

You have to develop a system that allows you to answer any question that they may throw at you.

I hope that, as you read each and every word in this report, you consider how you could use this information to formulate your own system.

Medical interview preparation really involves developing a series of skill sets. You possess all of these skills already; it's just a case of tweaking them appropriately, so that they are fine tuned for battle on the day of the interview.

So, what are the top five mistakes you must prepare to avoid?

- 1. Answering the question**
- 2. Not structuring your answer**
- 3. Not appreciating that it is a sales process**
- 4. Not concluding your answer**
- 5. Not helping the interview panel like you**

Let's think about this a little more closely...

Answering the question

NEVER answer the question in an interview!

That's right – you should **never** answer the question in an interview.

You should **RESPOND**

This is another critical delivery strategy that will make a measurable difference to your performance

As doctors and scientists, we have developed our minds to naturally analyse a question and answer it succinctly. We naturally get straight to the point

And normally, that communication strategy is correct

But in an interview – it will kill you

You have to understand that the interview process is a sales arena – it isn't a tutorial or a ward round or a patient consultation.

You have to sell your skills

You **must** stop looking at interview questions as potential landmines that you have to gingerly avoid exploding and attack them as opportunities for you to sell your skills

So, if you are asked

“Tell me about the audit cycle”

A **good answer**, would be that

“The audit cycle is a continuous process where existing practice is judged against set standards. Step one is for the standard to be set. Step two involves judging existing practice against those set standards. Step three is about presenting and discussing the data comparing existing practice against the set standards and step four involves changing current practice to move nearer to the standards of best practice. Practice is then re-evaluated in a cyclical process to further enhance clinical practice in an ongoing, ever-improving system.”

Responding doesn't mean that you don't answer the question

It means that you answer the question and then take them to a topic of conversation that you know will allow you to sell your skills.

Great Answer – Rubbish Response

There is nothing **solid** here, apart from maybe the ability to read a book.

A **better response** would involve you briefly telling them about what audit is *and then taking them* to an example of when **YOU** conducted an audit and explain the audit cycle through what **YOU** actually did.

“An audit is ... In my last audit on discharge process at St. James’ Hospital, we decided to set our standards by looking at the policies set up in the previous audit. I then designed a proforma to look at the various aspects of our discharge procedure using Microsoft Word. All the Foundation Year doctors then collected the data prospectively, by completing the proforma whilst working on the medical assessment unit. I had met with them all to show them how they could fill in the data within 90 seconds and explain to them how useful the information would be to improve the patient flow and make our working practices even slicker. I then analysed the data using Microsoft Excel. I presented the data in a PowerPoint presentation to the department and suggested some recommendations that would help us to attain the targets with relatively little investment. The consultants and nurses seemed to think that the ideas were sensible and together, we have started to implement these improvements. The effectiveness of these improvements will be seen when the performance of the unit is analysed again as the audit cycle starts again.”

Here, notice how this response to the question creates a more **engaging** conversation and how many skills have been sold, in a relatively natural fashion. As well as showing that you know the audit cycle, you have also sold some communication skills, team work skills and computing skills

Politicians are possibly the most skilled at answering interview questions. They never answer the question – they will always try to steer the conversation to an area in which they will look good

You should try to do the same

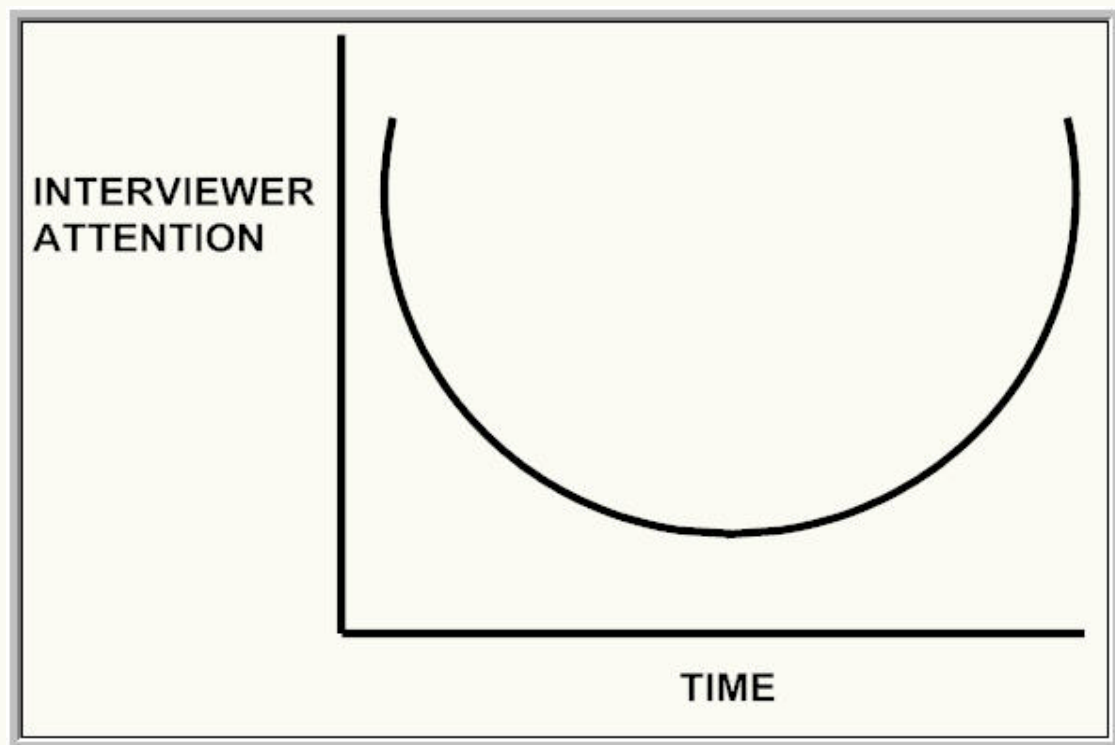
Not Structuring Your Answer

To make your responses appear more authoritative, you should try to structure all of your answers

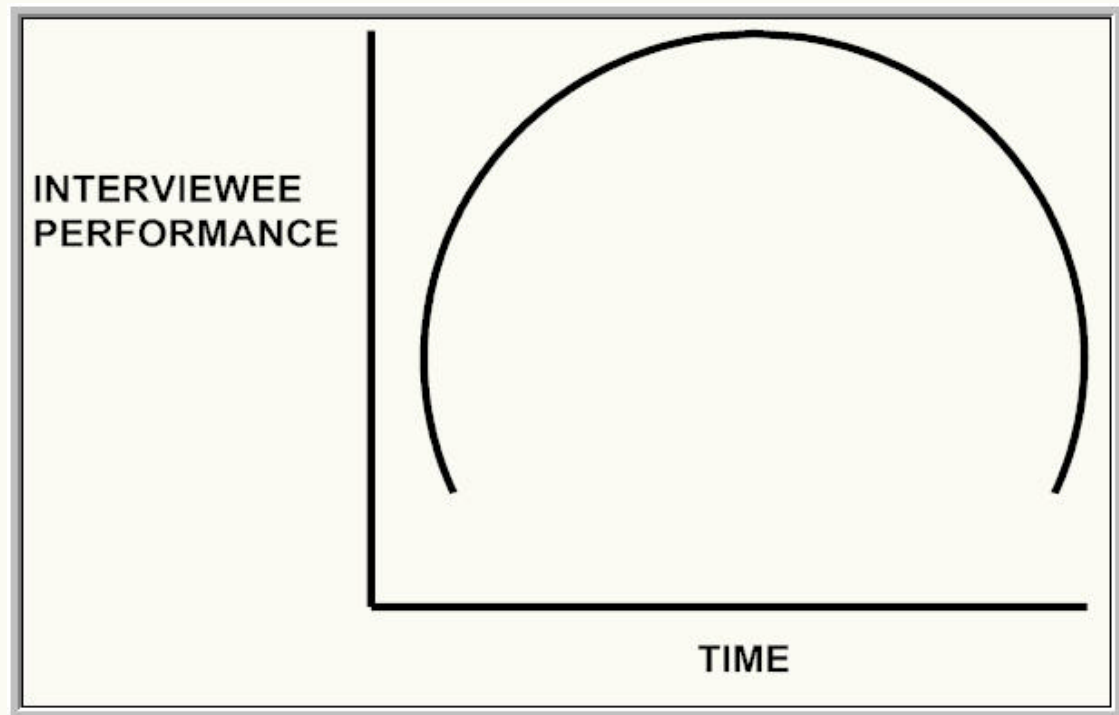
By structuring your answers

- ✓ You will give the impression that you have **organised thinking**.
- ✓ Your answers will also be **easier to listen to** (and therefore mark)
- ✓ You will also find that your answers are **more effective** in getting your messages across

Now, in any face to face sales process, you have about 60 seconds to get your message across. However, in an interview, your buyer is a little bit more committed to the purchase but still, any longer than **120 SECONDS** and their attention will start to wander and your ability to effectively get your message across will diminish.



In this stylised graph of interview attention against time, you can see that the interview panel are most attentive at the start of your answer and will formulate most of their marks at that point. Towards the middle, they are more inclined to drift off and not pay as much attention. As you come towards the end, they realise that they have to actually make an evaluation of your performance and so will begin paying more attention



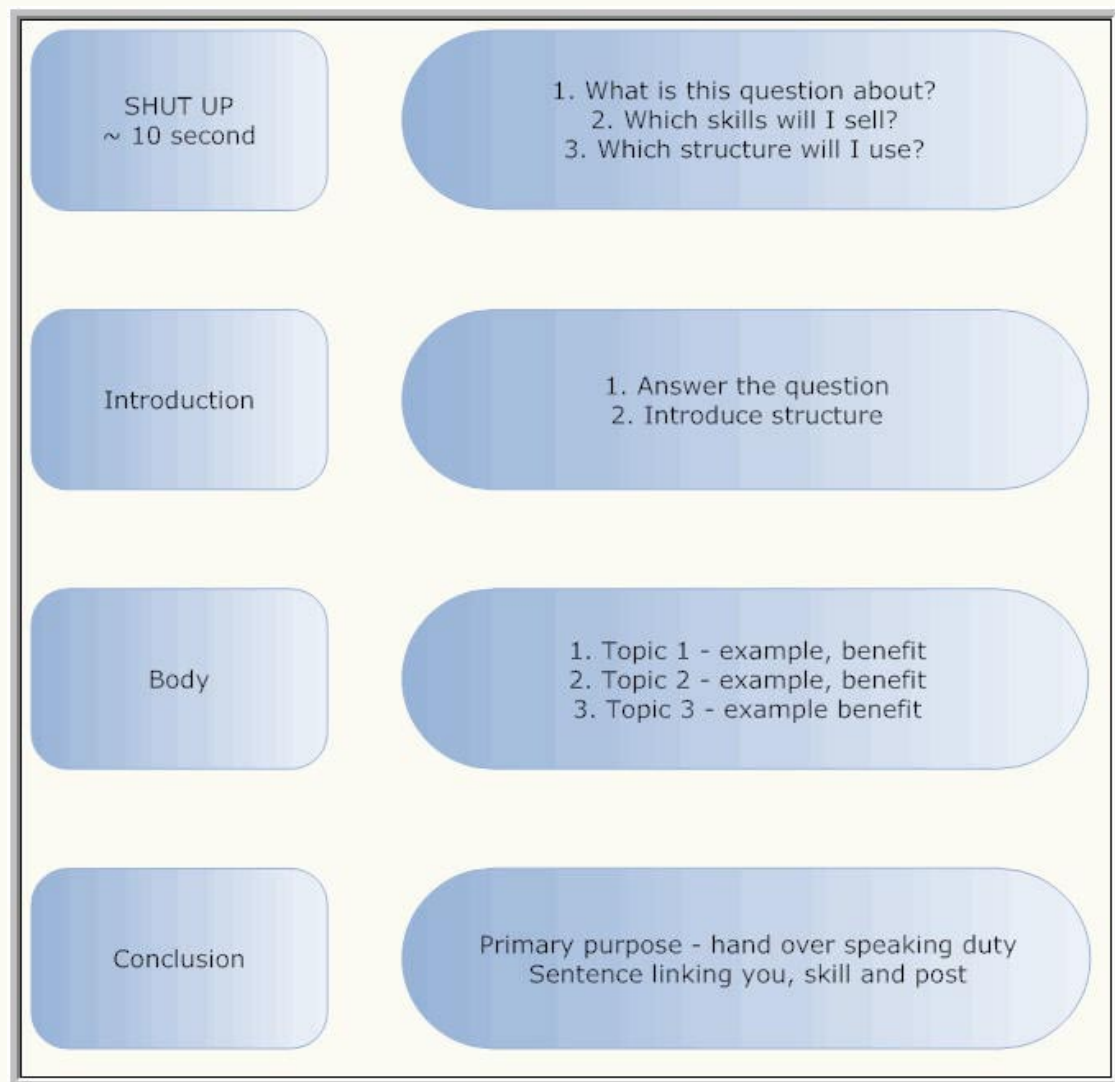
In this graph of interviewee performance against time, you will note that at the start, you naturally tend to be taken aback by the question and a little nervous and so start off, relatively weakly

Once you get into your stride, you then tend to start delivering some decent content. You may be now speaking articulately, with passion and conviction

However, after a while you might run out of things to say or not know how to conclude and so you will tend to waffle, or worse, whimper

So you see, that the time when the interview panel are analysing your performance most intently, is often the time when you are least likely to be performing well. So, you need to be prepared to hit the start with a powerful introduction and conclude well

I want to share with you a simple strategy to help you **answer any question** in the interview with a sense of structure. There is some preliminary preparation work that you will have to undertake to fully implement its power, but I would really like you to think about using this in your interview preparation...



This diagram illustrates the **basic strategy** that you should use for answering any question. There are variations on this theme for specific questions styles, such as background questions, the weakness questions, questions taking you into a negative area, questions where you don't know the answer, conflict negotiation questions and so on

I expand on this in more detail in the course, but let me quickly explain to you a strategy for answering any question thrown at you in your interview...

For the first ten seconds after you have been asked a question, don't talk, just think

Look, when you are sitting in the interview room, with all the consultants on the panel blasting questions at you – your options are to either

- Talk then think
- Think then talk
- Talk and think at the same time whilst under pressure

Which do you think would provide the best plan for delivering a great answer on the day?

If you can talk and think as you go, then this may be the optimal strategy, but if you are like me, you are going to find this hard to execute whilst under pressure in this situation. Most candidates talk about the first thing that enters their mind and then, they start to stumble, grabbing at any thought that enters their mind next

They then wonder why their answers never have any structure!

I would suggest that you **think and then talk**

Now thinking is the process of asking and answering questions and I would advise you to spend those 10 seconds considering three specific questions:

1. What is this question about? – hint: it's always about you
2. Which skills will I sell?
3. Which structure will I use?

Do you think you need to have obtained the perfect answers to the above questions before you start talking?

No, of course not

But, can you see how getting clarity on the above three questions, will allow you to talk far more sensibly in the upcoming 90 seconds?

We go through this whole plan in a lot more detail on the course, but please remember to spend a few moments thinking about what the question is about. This will save you from answering the question you thought you had heard or hoped you had heard – only to find yourself scoring no points for completely missing the point

Decide on three skills that you want to sell before you start talking. It really doesn't matter if you want to go for communication, team leading and IT skills or communicating, management and team playing skills – just know what you want the panel to appreciate after listening to you and then sell those skills to the panel well.

This requires that you invest the necessary thinking time to really understand the skills that you have to offer. This is **vital** preparation work

Use the structure, which facilitates selling these skills the best. I have got a whole load of structures that you can choose from and will be sharing these in the course, but you could spend the time and effort needed to devise your own.

Once you have gained clarity on the above three question, you can start talking.

Your answer will have an introduction, a middle and an end. This is a classic communication strategy, where you

- Tell them what you are going to tell them
- Tell them
- Tell them what you have told them

So, in the introduction, you should briefly answer the question and then announce the structure. Now, in communication, grouping your messages into three is a tried and tested tactic for getting your points across with the greatest impact, so always try to announce **three** elements to your answer

In the body of your answer, spend about 30 seconds each, expanding on three main themes or points. Remember to try and use specific **EXAMPLES** of your skills. Don't just say I have great team working skills, tell them about one specific time when you demonstrated great team working skills

Another key technique to develop is to stress the **BENEFIT** of your skills. If, like me, you are ever deranged enough to study sales communication, you come to understand that it is actually the benefit of a product that makes the sale and not the product itself

Similarly, it is important that you don't just tell them about your great team working skills, but you explain how by working as a team you managed to deliver more effective treatment to the patient or you worked in a safer way or you produced the research in a shorter length of time.

Be prepared to sell the benefit.

Not appreciating that the interview is a sales process

Like it or not, **the interview is a sales arena**

Many doctors believe that they should just go and have a chat and that the interview panel will be interested and bright enough to work out who is the best candidate

They assume that every member of the panel has had lots of training on how to select the best candidate and that their interview should be the most important thing going on in the lives of every member of the interview panel

There are some candidates, that I have trained, who actually find it really difficult to sell themselves as they believe that it is just wrong - immoral even

Clearly, in an ideal world, their reasoning might have some validity. But in the real world, just as the way in which you communicate with your patient affects the chances of them accepting a certain therapy, the way in which you talk to the interview panel affect how they respond to you and the chances of them accepting you as the successful candidate.

Now, the rules of communicating are different with sales. You must decide what your main sales points are and commit to ensuring that the interview panel are aware of your strong points and that it reaches them at an emotional level as well as an intellectual level.

I can't go into every aspect of sales here, but you should appreciate that you probably only have **2 minutes** to get your messages across in any given answer. Any longer than that and you risk losing their interest. If you take less time, you risk underselling yourself.

You must **gain awareness** of what your main strengths are and discover ways to heighten the impact of those messages. One way is to make sure that you stress the **benefit** of what your skills bring as often it is benefits that really clinch the sale. So when you take the time to discover what your strengths are, spend a few extra moments working out what the benefit of that skill is to the employer. And remember that a benefit, in this instance, is only a benefit if it benefits the employer. They are your customer, sell to them. This may be a slightly unfamiliar concept to you, in which case you may want to explore some of the more practical suggestions that I have devised on this topic in the subscriber's section of the website.

You should understand that the way in which you interact with the interview panel will have a dramatic influence on how you likely you are to get employed

You are selling you to the interview panel

That is just the way it is

Not concluding

One of the most common mistakes that I hear interview candidates make, which is probably the simplest for you to sort out is not concluding

You have to **have a plan** to communicate that this is the end of your speaking bit and that it is now the turn of the interviewer to talk

You have to **make that very clear**

Not concluding is a disaster. It is always better to conclude than not conclude – even if it isn't particularly elegant.

One tactic is to ensure that the pitch of your voice goes **down** at the end rather than up. If English is your second language, you may want to take particular note of this, as I have noticed that many people, who are not native English speakers, tend to end their sentences with an upward inflexion. This either sounds like you are uncertain or that there is more information to come. Make sure that when you finish speaking, your voice goes down rather than up

Another strategy is to figure out a sentence that links you, the skill in question and the post and use that as your final sentence:

“So, I believe that my sound communication skills will help me work well as a paediatric trainee in this deanery”

“In conclusion, my extensive surgical experience, aptitude for teaching and ability to both lead and work with a team will make me an asset to St. Elsewhere's team of consultant orthopaedic surgeons.”

“My commitment to clinical governance through teaching, audit and research will allow me to improve the standard of care that patients receive whilst I am training here in the Trent Deanery.”

This way you wrap up the message that you want to send to them and you communicate the idea that you are going to stop talking and it is now their turn to start talking.

You need to understand that the primary purpose of the concluding phase is to hand over the speaking responsibility to the interview panel

Not helping the interview panel like you

There are plenty of candidates who throw away their chances by not getting basic things right. This tends to, unnecessarily, irritate the interview panel and damages their chances of success. You must gain rapport with the interview panel. Develop a plan for ensuring that you **do the simple things well**

For instance...

Be on time

- Create a preparation folder
- Collect the time, date and venue of the interview
- Work out your route
- Download your map, or buy your train ticket online
- Collect all your documents and keep them in your folder

Behave like you belong

- Dress professionally – wear a dark suit
- Polish your shoes
- Have your hair cut a week before the interview
- Clip your nails
- Walk and talk as if you were already at the grade of doctor above you (so if you are a foundation year doctor, act like an ST1, if you are a specialist trainee act like a higher specialist trainee and if you are a higher specialist trainee act like a consultant)

Don't smell bad

- Wash!
- Use deodorant
- Don't wear strong perfume or aftershave
- Don't smoke
- Don't eat smelly food the night before
- Take breath mints – put them in your folder!

Talk clearly

- Talk a little louder than seems natural. Talk as if the interview panel are at the back of the room
- Talk a little slower than seems natural
- Deliver structured answers
- Listen to BBC radio newsreaders talk and copy aspects of their communication strategy that make them clear communicators - it's the reason why I have hired a BBC newsreader, for you to model, by copying aspects of his delivery of a lot of the teaching sessions on the subscriber section of the website

So, I really hope that you found reading this article a good use of your time. I have tried to include some useful tips that you can execute in your interview.

I have created an online course to help you **gain a deeper understanding** of these and other strategies that have helped hundreds of other candidates succeed at securing a medical post and if you **subscribe now**, you will be able to start learning some of these tactics within minutes.

If you have any questions, comments or suggestions, feel free to email me

I wish you all the best for your careers.

Nalin

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