

FREE RESOURCE

How to Prepare for Your Dental School Interview

Common questions, how to answer them, and what panels are looking for.

01

02

03

04

05

06

07

08

01



Traditional Panel Interview

One-on-one or panel format with faculty, administrators, or students. Conversational. Lasts 20–45 minutes. Questions are prepared in advance by the interviewer.

Who uses it:

Still the most common format at most dental schools. Expect a mix of motivational questions, situational questions, and questions about your application.

Multiple Mini Interview (MMI)

A series of 6–12 short stations (5–8 minutes each) with a different evaluator at each. A bell signals when to move. Scenarios are presented at the door.

Who uses it:

Growing in popularity. Schools using MMI include UIC, Marquette, NOVA, and others. It tests communication and ethical reasoning over rote preparation.

Group Interview

A scenario or case is presented to a group of applicants who discuss it together while faculty observe. Rare but used at some schools.

What they observe:

Whether you listen as much as you speak. Whether you build on others' ideas. Leadership does not mean dominating — it means elevating the group.

The Key Difference

Traditional interviews reward preparation of specific answers. MMIs reward a framework for thinking through novel situations quickly and communicating clearly under pressure.

Most applicants prepare only for traditional interviews. Preparing for both gives you a significant advantage.

02



QUESTION 01

"Why dentistry?"

Do not say you love helping people. Every applicant says this. Anchor your answer to a specific moment or observation during shadowing. What did you see that confirmed this was the right path? What is it about dentistry specifically — not medicine, not another health profession?

QUESTION 02

"Tell me about yourself."

This is not an invitation to read your CV. Give a 90-second narrative: where you started, what experiences shaped your decision, and where you are going. End with something that leads naturally into a follow-up question.

QUESTION 03

"What is your greatest weakness?"

Choose a real weakness — not a strength in disguise ("I work too hard"). Describe it, explain how you recognized it, and then describe what you have done to address it. Growth is the point.

QUESTION 04

"Where do you see yourself in ten years?"

Have a real answer that connects your values to a type of practice. General family dentistry, community health, academics, or a specialty interest are all valid. Specificity signals genuine reflection.

QUESTION 05

"How do you handle stress?"

Give a concrete example. What was the stressor? What was your response? What was the outcome? Vague answers like "I exercise and talk to friends" tell the interviewer nothing about how you will perform under clinical pressure.

QUESTION 06

"Tell me about a time you failed."

Choose a real failure — academic, personal, or professional. Describe what happened honestly, what you learned, and how it changed your behavior. Committees respect self-awareness more than perfection.

03



The MMI tests how you think, not what you know. There is no single right answer to most stations — the evaluator is scoring your reasoning process, communication, and composure.

Common Station Types

Ethical Dilemma

A scenario with competing values. Example: a patient refuses necessary treatment. Acknowledge all perspectives, identify the core tension, and explain your reasoning — do not just pick a side.

Role Play

An actor plays a patient, colleague, or family member in a difficult conversation. Focus on listening actively, not solving the problem immediately.

Policy Question

A healthcare access or social issue is presented. Show that you can think about multiple stakeholders — not just the patient in front of you.

Collaboration Task

Work with another applicant or actor on a task. Evaluate and build on their ideas. Being collaborative under observation is a skill you can practice.

How to Perform Well

- Read the prompt carefully at the door — take your 2 minutes of prep seriously
- Open by restating the core issue before jumping to solutions
- Acknowledge complexity — "This is a difficult situation because both X and Y are valid concerns"
- Use a structure: identify the issue, consider stakeholders, explain your reasoning, acknowledge limits
- Do not talk the entire time — in role plays, leave space for the other person
- End by summarizing your position clearly and inviting follow-up
- Stay calm if you disagree with the evaluator's pushback — they are often testing how you handle challenge

Common MMI Mistake

Jumping to a solution in the first 30 seconds. The evaluator wants to see how you think through a problem, not that you have a quick answer.

PDI offers live mock interview sessions with dental professionals who have sat on admissions committees and interviewed hundreds of applicants. Apply for interview prep mentorship at:

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