

# INTERVIEWING FOR INTERNSHIPS AND RANKING SITES

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For those students planning to start internship next Summer/Fall, this is a stressful time of year! Perhaps you are frantically scrambling to finish all of your cover letters and get everything into the APPIC portal in time (you're almost there!), or maybe you have just submitted everything (congrats!) and are starting the nail-biting process of waiting to hear about interviews. Luckily, it is usually a pretty short window of time between submitting your applications and hearing from sites. Believe me when I say, the hardest part is behind you! Now, you are ready for the fun part about applying for internship: the interview process.

## **What should I do once my applications are submitted?**

My first and most important piece of advice is this: relax and practice good self-care. Once you hit "send" and they go off into cyberspace, put the applications out of your mind. Go out and celebrate, catch up on TV, do all the fun things you've been neglecting over the past few weeks. Definitely do NOT go back and look at your applications once they have been submitted.

One thing you *can* do during this time is create a calendar where you write down the dates when your sites will be scheduling interviews. Most internship sites have these dates listed in their application materials. Although, obviously, you do not yet know which sites will offer you an interview, it is helpful to know which interview dates overlap, which dates you might want to keep free (e.g., if a site only offers one interview day), and whether sites in particular geographical regions are offering interviews around the same time (so you won't need to travel there more than once). Once the interview offers start rolling in, you will want to already have a good idea about when to schedule them.

## **When and how will I hear about interview offers?**

Sometime in mid-to-late November, you will likely start hearing from sites, either via email or by phone. That being said, APPIC gives sites until mid-December to notify applicants, so try not to panic if you don't hear anything until later on in this time frame—every site works differently. Also, although tempting, it is best to avoid online forums where applicants post where they were offered interviews—the information is not always accurate and will just raise your anxiety levels.

## **What advice do you have about scheduling interviews?**

When you are contacted with interview offers, you will usually be given multiple interview dates from which to choose (although, as mentioned above, some sites will only have one interview day). If you are given a choice of interview dates, it is very important that you get back to sites ASAP to schedule your interview. If you hesitate, you may risk losing your preferred choice. Most sites offer interviews on Mondays and Fridays in January. Therefore, if you are given the option to interview in December or mid-week, I suggest you take those options. This way, you'll be less likely to run the risk of having scheduling conflicts.

After you commit to an interview date, it is advised that you do not try to re-schedule to another day, unless *absolutely* necessary. As challenging as scheduling these interviews may be for applicants, it is even harder for the sites, and it can be tricky for them to switch things around. This is why it is strongly encouraged that you try to anticipate your schedule early on (see above). However, there is always a chance that, despite your efforts to plan things out in advance, you are offered an interview during a time in which you already have one scheduled or when you will be traveling to a different geographical location. If this situation occurs, and you need to reach out to the site to try to reschedule, make sure to be as polite and apologetic as possible and to express your enthusiasm for the site and your strong desire to interview there. Some sites may be more amenable to rescheduling than others. Some sites may also offer the opportunity to do an interview via Skype.

## How do I prepare for the interviews?

Come up with a list of questions you think you might be asked, and practice answering them. For example:

1. What are your strengths/weaknesses?
2. How did you become interested in psychology?
3. What would you be doing if you were not in psychology?
4. What are the strengths/weaknesses of your graduate program/training?
5. What type of therapist are you?
6. What is your primary theoretical orientation? Why?
7. What clients do you work best with and least well with? Why?
8. Tell me about your most rewarding/toughest case?
9. What populations have you found it most difficult to work with and why?
10. Describe the conceptualization and treatment of a recent case.
11. What is your dissertation about?
12. What type of supervision style do you like best/worst?
13. Tell me about a negative supervisory experience and how you handled it.
14. Discuss an ethical dilemma you've experienced and how you handled it.
15. What types of training do you need to round out your clinical skills?
16. What did you choose to apply to this internship site?
17. Which electives/rotations appeal to you?
18. What do you want to get out of internship? What are your training goals?
19. What are your career goals?
20. What do you do in your spare time?



You might also ask others who have been through the process about any difficult questions they were asked during interviews.

## What are the interviews like?

Remember back when you were interviewing for graduate school? Internship interviews are not that different. So, basically, you already have some experience with this process! Every site has a slightly different format, but you will likely meet with several faculty members (either individually or in a group format) and some of the current interns. Some interviews days will only be a few hours, while others will last the full day. Typically, breakfast and/or lunch are provided (but not always, so make sure to bring snacks!)

During interview, stress the match between your goals and what the training program offers. Appear friendly and enthusiastic, and ask a lot of questions. One important thing to remember is that you are not the only one being interviewed—you are also interviewing the site to make sure it is a good fit for you! The following is a list of questions you might ask:

1. What is a typical day like for an intern here?
2. What do interns typically do after internship? What are the opportunities for postdocs here?
3. What kind of professional guidance is offered during the postdoc application and interview process?
4. What is the relationship between the disciplines and the working relationships among the staff and interns?
5. How is time divided among assessment, treatment, consultation, and psychotherapy?
6. What treatment opportunities are available? Individual, group, families, couples, age ranges?
7. What is the diversity of the patient population?
8. How are the rotations assigned? How much flexibility is there in choosing rotation schedules?
9. How are supervisors assigned? How many supervisors does each intern have?
10. What are the opportunities for research? How much research time is allowed while on internship?
11. What didactics are offered?
12. Is there ever a need to travel to other satellite sites/clinics?
13. Are interns ever on call after hours? How much work do interns typically take home?
14. How many assessments are expected per week?
15. Tell me about the cost of living. Is it feasible on the stipend?
16. Do you need a car to get around?

It is very beneficial if you are able to meet with the current interns, but also remember that, even though this may be arranged as “not part of the interview process,” feedback from the current trainees can influence faculty. Here are some suggestions for meeting with trainees: be polite and engaged—even if your flight arrived late and your luggage didn't make it with you (oh yeah, a carry-on is a great idea for these trips!)... Ask relevant questions about the interns' typical day, socialization as a group, and interaction with

other trainees, the faculty, and other departments or divisions at the site. Find out about cost of living, access to necessities (i.e., grocery, gym, self-care activities, etc.), and travel/transportation. Get a sense of the amount of work done during the day and in the evenings and weekends. Additionally, Pincus and Otis<sup>1</sup> suggest that you pay attention to the following during interviews:

1. Do the interns look happy with the choice they made?
2. How do the interns feel they are treated?
3. What do the intern facilities look like?
4. Does the site emphasize service or training?
5. How many hours do interns work per week?
6. Are there any obvious tensions among faculty?
7. Are there any pending changes in the internship program?
8. Does the internship interview day appear well organized?
9. Is the area surrounding the internship site a safe place? Is there a safe place to park?
10. Are faculty members friendly? Can you picture yourself working with them for an entire year (or longer if you stay for postdoc)?
11. Will you be required to carry a pager or cell phone? How often will you be on call?



### What should I do after the interview?

First, write down your impressions of each site as soon as you get home. It will be very difficult to remember all the details after multiple (tiring) interview days. Second, as soon as you can, send a nice email to each person with whom you interviewed (make sure you get everyone's email address during the visit) to thank them for their time and express your enthusiasm for the internship site. It helps to be specific whenever possible about what you enjoyed about your interview, what you like about the internship, what rotations you are interested in, etc. (remember to do a spell check before you click the send button!). Third, start prepping for your next interview...

### Do you have any tips for ranking sites?

Once you have completed all of your interviews, you can finally start to create your rank list. There is no right or wrong way to go about doing this, but it might be useful to develop a system to help you stay organized and have all of the information needed to make your decision in one place. First, I would suggest making a list of the factors that are most important to you (e.g., location, internship class size, hours, preferred rotations, research opportunities, salary). Next, look at the notes you took after each interview to refresh your memory about the sites and think about how they compare to one another on your list of pertinent factors. You might choose to create a Likert scale system to rate sites on these items. Organizing this information in spreadsheet form can be useful (see example below).

Site	Location	Quality of Life	Supervision	Rotations	Distance	Research opportunities	Sum	Rank
Site 1	8.00	5.00	1.00	4.00	5.00	8.00	31.00	3
Site 2	7.00	3.00	9.00	7.00	10.00	10.00	46.00	1
Site 3	1.00	1.00	5.00	2.00	3.00	1.00	13.00	4
Site 4	6.00	10.00	3.00	4.00	7.00	6.00	36.00	2

Once you have organized the information and weighed each site on each of your preferences, you should have a good idea of an overall rank list. Ultimately, the best strategy for ranking internship sites is to rank them based on your preference without considering how you believe the site will rank you. Here are some additional ranking tips from Pincus and Otis<sup>1</sup>:

1. Before taking a site off your ranking list, consider if you would you rather remain unmatched or attend that site.
2. Remember that the same site can have multiple match numbers representing different programs of study (e.g., Pediatric developmental vs. Pediatric neuropsychology). Check to be sure you rank the proper site and program.
3. Review your ranking list several times before submitting it. Have a friend review your site rankings and the match numbers that you've written beside them to be sure that they match each other.
4. You will have an opportunity to review your rank order list to be sure that it has been properly entered.
5. Don't wait until the last minute to submit your rankings.

**Best of luck, and have fun!**

<sup>1</sup> Pincus, D. B., & Otis, J. D. (2001). The Clinical Psychology Internship Guide The Primary Resource for Obtaining Your First Choice. [www.psychzone.com/Intern\\_Guide.htm](http://www.psychzone.com/Intern_Guide.htm)