Preparing for an Interview..
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Do you think preparing for an interview is pointless? Do you feel that there is nothing you can do and that the questions cannot be predicted? Have I got news for you…

During my application process, two of my four internships required an interview. I had one in-person interview and one phone interview, since I was at school (otherwise they would have both been in person). As soon as I found out I had interviews, I immediately began to jot down ideas to prepare for it. Because of my preparation, I was confident in my answers and ready for any question the interviewer threw at me…before the interview even started.

To begin, compile a list of questions that you think the interviewer may ask. Check out the “Interview Questions” article under Articles for a list of common interview questions. Ask past interns what types of questions were asked. Sometimes the interviewer may even tell you ahead of time, and if he/she doesn’t, then you can at least ask. Depending on the program, they may or may not disclose this information to you. Try to find out if they are performance-based question, “typical” interview questions, dietetics-related questions, or a combination of these.

- Performance-based questions are questions that ask what you to describe a past situation and how you acted during it. The reasoning behind these questions is that the interviewer believes the way you acted in the past will predict how you will act in the future, during the internship. An example of a performance-based question is: Describe a time when you were required to work on a team to complete a task. What role did you play and what was the outcome of the situation?
- “Typical” interview questions are those that may be asked in all interviews and that attempt to determine a person’s personality. Topics for “typical” interview questions include: strengths and weaknesses, why you chose the internship, and professional goals.
- Dietetics-related questions are those that ask you to apply your knowledge to an actual situation you may encounter in an internship. They are related to all aspects of the dietetic internship: clinical, food service, and community nutrition. An example of a dietetics-related question is: A man is diagnosed with Type 2 Diabetes. Describe what your steps would be in treating this patient. Include addition medical information you would need, your counseling techniques, and your treatment goals for the patient.

Develop answers for your list of possible questions. I wrote out twenty possible questions and answered them all as if I were in the interview. This is the key to your success! Practicing makes a world of difference and allows you to go through the motions and get in a rhythm of answering questions on the spot. You can have an unlimited amount of time to form the best possible answer.

The advantage is that even if these questions do not come up in your actual interview, you have still practiced how to give complete answers and also stay on topic instead of digressing and...
getting off topic if you have no good answer ready off the top of your head. Getting off topic and “blabbing” on and on is never a good thing in an interview. It is better to give a short and relevant answer than a long and unrelated one.

You will probably want to answer all your practice questions using the same format. The format I suggest is this:

- Restate the question and give a general answer
- Give an example of a related situation
- Analyze the situation making connections to the question you were given
- Wrap up your answer by addressing the question again
- Restate your general answer in the context of your example

If questions are similar, you are better off if you practiced. Especially in a phone interview, this pays off. You may be so lucky as to read off your practiced answer during the interview! And please don’t think that you are “cheating” when you do this. During my phone interview, I had my answers to 20 questions in front of me, along with some notes from classes, my clinical nutrition text book, a calculator, a list of past situations I could use as examples, the personal statement I had written for this internship, and a list of questions to ask the interviewer. Obviously, this is not possible for an in-person interview though.

During the phone interview, I was able to read off my answers almost verbatim to more than half of the questions I was asked. I am not ashamed of this and even when the interviewer asked me how I prepared for the interview, I answered honestly. The interviewer was beyond impressed and complimented me on my extensive preparation stating that I was the only interviewee that prepared that much. Personally, I have a feeling I was not the only one who had that many references at hand, but I may have been the only one who was honest about it. Which reminds me, always be honest!

I believe that this kind of preparation shows the interviewer that you have taken the interview seriously, just like you would the internship. It shows that you strive to do your best in all situations and do everything you can to achieve this objective. Being able to tell the interviewer about my “cheat sheets” showed that I am honest and confident. I suspect that other applicants were too afraid to be honest because they thought the interviewer would look down upon it. I consider the opposite to be true. I was commended heavily for what others consider “cheating”. You may not even be asked how you prepared, and if that’s the case, you do not get the chance to show off your preparation skills, but you were able to give great answers!

Since I was matched to a program I ranked above the internship I had interviews with, I cannot claim that this interview landed me a spot in the internship. However, based on the feedback I received during and after the interview, I believe it was a success. Without the right preparation before the interview and honesty during the interview, it would have been a different story.