

How to Excel in a Virtual Interview

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Hello Pathology friends!

Congratulations on participating in the 2023 Residency application cycle! This time can be a rollercoaster of emotions: from stressful to excited and disappointed to elated! However, you should be proud of getting to this point in your career and choosing a highly engaging and rewarding specialty!

My name is Olivia and I participated in the 2022 Pathology Match. I went to medical school at the University of Toledo College of Medicine and Life Sciences and participated in the Pathology Post-Sophomore Fellowship during my time there. I am a current PGY-1 at the University of Rochester Medical Center. I am loving every second of my experience!

Coming into the application cycle last year was daunting with virtual interviews. I was worried about how interviewing virtually would impact how I presented myself to programs, as well as how I would be able to get the information I needed from programs to make my rank order list. Thankfully, I have amazing friends who took part in the previous Match cycle as well as #PathTwitter, which is full of very helpful people and advice. Here are some tips and tricks that I found helpful during the #PathMatch2022, which I hope will help you navigate the #PathMatch2023:

Tips for your outfit:

- Wear professional attire (whatever you would wear to an actual interview).
 - Dress shirt with a suit jacket or nice sweater +/- a tie
 - Dress pants or skirt
 - Other options based on your personal style and comfort level
- While it may be tempting to wear casual bottoms for a day of sitting, I would recommend still wearing professional looking bottoms just in case you forget to turn off your camera.
- Your outfit and overall styling is another way to show off your personality. If you are a bold and colorful person and like to show this off in your clothes, choose a statement piece for your outfit (i.e., a necklace, tie, pocket square, glasses). There is a balance between presenting yourself as professional and showing off your personality. If in

doubt, fall back to something more traditional (clothing) or natural-looking (hair and makeup).

Tips for your space:

- With all of the suggestions below, play around with your set up at different times of the day, at different angles of your camera, and with different video conferencing platforms. What is most comfortable for you will be the correct choice.
- While natural light can be great in making you look like a real person behind the camera lens, be careful of how the sunlight changes based on the time of day. A golden morning glow can appear harsh towards the end of the day.
- A ring light is a good investment for this reason. I personally like ring light models that have a “warm light” feature as well as ones that have the controls on the light themselves (instead of on the electrical cord) but there are multiple models at multiple price points for one to choose from.
- Your camera may also need an upgrade. Most laptop cameras are decent but investing in a camera may not be a bad idea. Once again, there are many models at multiple price points to choose from. Just make sure to test it out before your first interview!
- If you will be using a laptop, a laptop stand could also be a good investment (or use all those books from medical school that you’ve been accumulating over the years). No matter what you choose, make sure you can replicate your set up. I put washi tape on my desk where the front of my laptop stands rested so I could replicate the set up for every interview.
 - You want the camera to be as eye level as possible, so you are actually looking at your interviewers. The tendency is to look at the screen since that is where the interviewer’s face is showing, but then it looks like you are looking down for the entire interview. Make sure to take this into account when setting up your camera as well as how you configure your virtual conferencing platform. Centering the interviewer’s video or your video (depending on where your eyes tend to wander) right below your camera can help your eyes from drifting during your conversation.
- Check the quality of your microphone. If you need to upgrade to a better microphone, there are many options available. You want to make sure you are heard crystal clear during the interview.
- Avoid sitting in a swivel chair. You may not realize you are moving side to side in the chair, but your interviewers will notice.
- Focus on having a quiet space for your interviews. However, this doesn’t mean you cannot show off your personality in your background! Whether that means plants, trophies, art, or decorative pieces, this is another way for your interviewers to get to know you and can be a nice conversation starter!
 - I had a canvas print of one of my photographs (I highlighted my love of photography in my application) along with a vintage microscope on a bookshelf.
 - It may be tempting to go all out on your background, but YOU should be the most interesting thing in the shot! Try to limit what you have to 5-10 items. If

they are bigger items, go with less of them. If they are smaller, you can have more. Once again, it is a balance, but the key is to break up the background while keeping the focus on you.

- It is best to avoid zoom background filters. Again, they distract from YOU.
- Practice different set-ups at different times of the day to see what will look best.
- Keep pets out of your space, at least during one-on-one interviews. During lunch hour or resident time, showing off a pet can be a fun way of showing more about yourself!

Tips for interviews in general:

- Mock interviews are a great way to get nerves out of the way before interviews! Sign-up for practice interviews with your medical school, professors, residents, and friends.
- Be at least 5 to 10 minutes early before the first scheduled item on your itinerary (some programs have this time built in). This time is good to catch any technical difficulties and also to show that you are engaged and punctual.
- Look up your interviewers along with the program at least the night before your interview. I found that where they went to medical school, residency, and fellowship was helpful along with what their current role in the department is and any other information that I could find (research, fun facts). This way I could tailor my questions to that specific person like as follows:
 - For an attending who did residency or fellowship and stayed on as faculty: “how has the program changed or grown since your training?”
 - Write / print these items in a way that you can easily access during the interview. I had a running list of questions I wanted to ask every program and then tailored the questions on the list to each program based off what I could find off their website or things I learned at open houses. I printed these off so I could remember all of them and have space to write down the answers throughout the day.
- Keep notes on the programs you interview with, in whatever way works for you. I would also recommend keeping a loose ranking as you progress through interview season, whether that be numerically ranking each program or placing them in loose categories (high, medium, low, etc.). This will help at the end when all the programs start to merge in your mind.
 - Another thing I found helpful was creating a voice recording of my thoughts right after every interview. It was mostly a random flow of consciousness from everything I had learned that day but it was so valuable to go back and listen to the tone of my voice and what I chose to highlight when it came time to rank my programs.
- Pathology interviews, in general, are conversations in which the interviewers are trying to get to know you. Be ready for the “general” residency interview questions: “Tell us about yourself,” “why pathology?” and “why our program?” Being true to yourself, knowing your ERAS application, and having at least partially rehearsed answers to these

and the other general interview questions will get you far in any pathology interview you have.

- With in-person interviews, you can see a lot more since you are physically experiencing the program. Virtual interviews can provide you the same information, you just need to be aware of how to look for it:
 - Do you meet the program coordinator? How are they treated by / interact with attendings and interviewers? Did you have a good experience in signing up for interviews? If you had questions, were they followed up with appropriately?
 - Did you meet the (assistant) Program Director(s)?
 - How do the faculty interact during breaks (Some interviews set ups do not allow for this)?
 - How is the program website? Is it up to date?
 - How much information is given before the interview? Is there time to follow up and ask questions about it?
 - How many residents are you able to meet? What opportunities are there to meet with residents (open houses, meet and greets, group time on the interview day, more personal resident meetings on the interview day)? Do these people have personalities that you could get along with?
 - How diverse are the residents? Are there actually DOs/IMGs at the program when they say they are DO/IMG-friendly?
 - Need more ideas of questions to ask? Check out this document of suggested questions from the AAMC: <https://students-residents.aamc.org/media/11091/download>
- Have snacks at the ready! Sometimes the scheduled lunch time is a strange stalemate of waiting for the first person to eat that never breaks. Having snacks available to eat on breaks as a backup may be a good idea. Also, there is no good way to eat gracefully on camera. If you feel silly, chances are everyone else feels silly too!
- Remember that even though you are trying to sell yourself to programs, that programs are selling themselves TO YOU! Ask the questions you want to ask in order to get to know the program as well as you can!
- After the interview, you may send a thank you note/email. This is not required. Some people personally want to thank their interviewers.

Tips for internet connection and troubleshooting:

- Ideally, you do not want to have any connection issues during the interview. However, things can happen unexpectedly. Here is how to handle these situations professionally:
 - Ensure you have optimal internet speed BEFORE the interview.
 - If you lose internet, contact the coordinator immediately and explain what is happening.
 - Thank your interviewers for their patience and apologize for the unexpected technologic issue.

- If the power goes out, ask to postpone, and reschedule for another day.

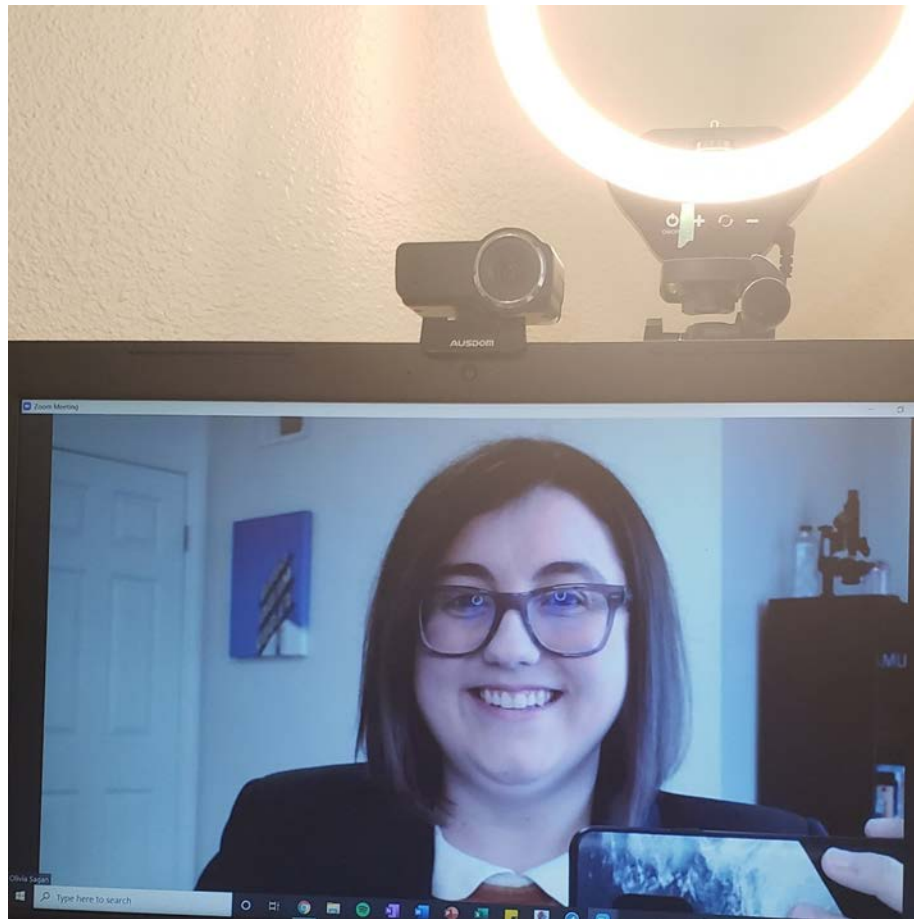
Alright, take a deep breath! You are now even closer to your first interview and finding the perfect pathology program for you. Have fun, be yourself, and you've got this! I hope to see you on the interview trail!

Best of luck! 😊 Olivia

Images



My PGY1 headshot at the
University of Rochester
Medical Center



My #PathMatch2022 virtual interview selfie, which shows my set up with a ring light and additional camera, my background with my microscope and photography, and my outfit.



Me with my co-PGY1s at the end of the Bootcamp rotation at the University of Rochester Medical Center