Work Psychology Group
Thinking differently

Preparing for an online Multiple Mini Interview(MMI): Guidance for Applicants

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on multiple aspects of the medical school application process: work experience, exams, and the interview process. Most medical schools have adopted Multiple Mini Interviews (MMIs) as part of the application process, as they are capable of assessing multiple skills and attributes. Due to social distancing requirements and travel restrictions, medical schools have had to adapt their admissions processes, with many running their MMIs using an online platform. This guidance document has been written by Work Psychology Group, who work closely with Medical Schools Council on their MMI development project. It is intended to help applicants prepare effectively for an online MMI.

The guidance will cover:

- How an online MMI will work in practice
- How to prepare for an online MMI
- What to do on the day of an online MMI

2. How does an Online MMI work

MMIs typically consist of six to eight different interview 'stations'. Each station lasts for a short amount of time (5-7 mins) and assesses applicants for specific attributes. This can range from discussing applicants personal statements or experience (like in a regular panel interview) to more practical scenarios that involve interacting with an actor. Each medical school runs their MMIs slightly differently; when you are invited to an MMI, you will be provided with further information about the structure. Online MMIs are very similar to face-to-face MMIs in terms of content, and many of the same stations will be used, however, it may be that there are fewer stations or the types of stations may differ.

The traditional format of an MMI i.e. a circuit of stations, whereby each applicant rotates through each station can be replicated through virtual rooms using a video conferencing platform. In some cases, it may be that this format is reversed i.e. it is the interviewers that move around each station, not you the applicant. Alternatively, some online MMI's use a single panel interview model where you as a applicant are assessed by a single panel of interviewers across all of the stations. Some medical schools may ask you to do your MMI using an asynchronous interview platform. This format is slightly different to the others described above because you don't have to interact with the assessor but instead you will be expected to respond to questions on screen by talking on camera, which will then be recorded. Before your MMI, you will be told what type of MMI you will be taking part in. The preparation required will be similar for all types of MMI.

Although the process will vary between different medical schools, every medical school will be sure to provide you with the information you need prior to your MMI. Invitations to attend and online MMI will typically be sent via an email, which contains information such as links that will help you access/join an online MMI. It is important to carefully read all the information that you receive from the medical school.

On the day of the online MMI, you may be provided with further information during a briefing that will inform you about the format of the day and essential information, such as what to do if something goes wrong. There will be a process of the interviewers checking some form of ID in order to confirm that you are the person who should be taking the online assessment. At the end of the assessment, you may be invited to join a debrief session or provided with an opportunity to ask any questions.

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3. How do I prepare for an Online MMI

You still need to do your preparation for the topics that come up in medical school interviews. The knowledge and skills needed have not changed. Medical Schools Council have an Interview Prep website which you can use to help prepare for the types of questions you may be asked. Whilst some interviews are 'open book' in that you may be allowed to keep notes in front of you, you will find you will not have the time to refer to them in any detail. As with any interview, you will get the best results if you take time to prepare in advance. Just because you are in front of your computer does not mean you should rely on the ability to quickly look up answers or rely on pre-written answers you can refer to. You should prepare so you are able to have a natural conversation without clicking around or reading directly from a script, which can seem rehearsed and unnatural. Some MMI's may give you reading materials in advance which can help you navigate your research. More often, you will be asked to give answers without prior knowledge of the questions.

Practice in the Platform

Medical Schools are likely to use one of a handful of online video communication tools. When you receive an invitation to an interview make sure you find out which one the school is using. Popular choices are Microsoft Teams, Skype for Business, Zoom and Blackboard. If you do not have the platform already, you may have to download and install on your device ready to use for your online MMI.

Some medical schools may provide some sort of briefing, training, or a platform familiarisation session before the day of the MMI. It is important that if these are offered that you attend as this will help you to become comfortable in the environment. Whether these are provided or not, it is recommended that you practice using the platform and experience it yourself before the MMI. It will help you build confidence in your ability to perform in unfamiliar circumstances. Other ways you can practice are:

- Practice being interviewed with a friend or relative over the platform (or another video call method) and ask them to provide you with feedback.
- Record yourself answering questions and then self-reflect on your performance. You could also show your videos to others.

Practice communicating in a video call

It is important to understand the similarities and differences in effective communication through an online platform. The firm handshake and enthusiasm you typically greet employers with during an in-person interview will not translate via video. Interviewing via video poses the same challenges for everyone, so you do not need to worry that you are at a disadvantage. It also poses the same challenges for interviewers, who will understand the difficulty communicating non-verbally online and will assess applicants accordingly. Everyone involved within the interview process will be mindful of their non-verbal communication and will practice how to communicate effectively online. Below shares with you plenty of ways that will help you communicate well on screen.

- Body Language: It is harder to read body language through a video, so be especially aware of your nonverbal cues. A simple way to help this is by creating a suitable distance between you and the webcam. A good rule of thumb is to make sure your chest and shoulders are visible, with a little space between the screen and your head. Sit up straight and smile.
- Eye contact: In video, everyone can be tempted to look at the other person through the screen, however if you align your webcam so that it is eye-level, it becomes easier to look straight into your webcam. By looking straight into your webcam the interviewers will feel like you are making eye contact with them. Check if your software has a function to help you by positioning screens of active participants near the camera and using full screens.

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- Active listening: Use active listening techniques such as nodding your head to show that you are listening whilst maintaining eye contact with the camera.
- Speech: Sometimes there can be lag during video calls, so you should be mindful of this. Let the interviewer finish talking and pause for a second before you begin talking, so that you do not accidentally interrupt them.
- Unexpected questions: If you get asked a question you weren't expecting, stay calm and take a moment to collect your thoughts.

Location and set-up

Unlike in-person interviews, you will have full control over the layout of the room for online interviews because you will be in your own space – and this should help you to feel more comfortable and confident. However, this also means that you need to make sure that the area is appropriate and that you set yourself up somewhere that you're less likely to be interrupted or experience WiFi issues. When preparing a location for your online interview, you should take into consideration the following:

- You will require a strong and stable internet connection
- You will need a device that has a camera and a microphone. This might be a desktop, laptop, tablet, or phone. If you do not have a suitable device, you could ask your school or college if you could borrow one.
- A quiet and uninterrupted space. You must be alone in the room when you do the interview. The interviewer might ask you to move your camera around the room so that they can see you are alone.
- Plain and minimal background. If this is not possible, on some platforms there are functions to either a) blur out a busy background or b) showcase a more professional looking background virtually.
- Face a window, if possible, as natural lighting makes it easy for interviewers to see you. Try to avoid any glare or shadows if you can.

If you do have concerns around sourcing a suitable location, a suitable device or internet connection please discuss these concerns with the medical school's admissions team as they may be able to offer support in resolving these concerns. Alternatively, you could ask your school or college about the possibility of using a room for the duration of the interview.

What will be tested?

MMIs are typically mapped to values and attributes of the profession: General Medical Council Good Medical Practice, NHS constitution and University values. The attributes most commonly assessed during MMIs include Communication Skills; Empathy/Perspective Taking; Resilience & Adaptability; Teamworking; Commitment to Healthcare. Like traditional MMIs, online MMIs could take a variety of forms.. However, it is unlikely all of the traditional MMI activities will be present in an online MMI as they are difficult for applicants to complete in an online format, such as stations involving physical interaction or manual dexterity.

Any other questions?

If you have any other questions or concerns prior to your online MMI, you should raise these with the medical school. They will be able to provide you with all the information you need. It is recommended that you contact them as soon as possible, as this will give them time to respond and should also help settle your nerves, if you are worried.

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4. What to do on the day of the Online MMI

Test your technology beforehand

A virtual interview requires tools like a camera and microphone on your computer, a software program (e.g. Microsoft Teams) and a reliable internet connection. Within 24 hours of your online MMI, check all of your technology to ensure it works effectively and can be used to communicate effectively. That means having a functional computer that meets technical specifications, downloading any necessary software and ensuring the connection is strong enough to sustain streaming video. In the 15 to 30 minutes before your interview, check your internet connection and sign into the video or phone meeting provided within your invitation. Turn on the sound and video to ensure everything is in working order in time for your conversation.

Dress professionally

In a virtual interview, you should dress the same as you would in a face-to-face interview. Doing so not only makes you appear professional and excited about the opportunity, but it will also make you feel more prepared and confident. When an interview takes place from a remote location like your home, you should expect it to be just as formal as one that takes place in an office. If you are unsure, business casual is a good standard to follow.

Limit your distractions

Distractions come in many forms and some are impossible to avoid but many, with appropriate planning, can be removed. The best place to take an interview in your home is a quiet location. Choose a room that is tidy so the interviewer can focus their attention on you and not what is around you. If you do not have a dedicated office space, you can also use a living area, a bedroom, or your kitchen table. Try to place your computer on a table or desk instead of your lap. The following points below outline simple ways to limit possible distractions:

- Tell others that may share your space with about the area you'll be using for your interview, the time of your interview, and that you and your quiet space will be off-limits during that time. Respectfully explain that during this time, it is best that the house stays quiet with limited distractions. If possible, you might also place pets in a designated room.
- Declutter your frame: a cluttered desk or an interesting artwork behind you may be a distraction.
- Close the doors to your room to avoid people interrupting the interview.
- Only have the video call screen open. Close all other tabs and applications on your device.
- Mute your microphone when you are not speaking to minimise disruption of any background noise.

Do not read from notes

It is tempting to have a set of notes close by to refer to off camera. You should avoid doing this because it quickly becomes obvious to the interviewer that you are reading. Even if you are completing an asynchronous interview, it is still best to engage with the camera rather than reading out a prepared answer. Instead, you should practice talking about your experiences without writing out a formal response. You will appear more natural and authentic if you do this.

Relax and be yourself

Interviewers are looking for more than just someone you can recite information they have rehearsed. They want to hear from you. It is natural to feel nervous before an interview, but try not to let this stop you from being yourself. Take a deep breath before the call, and try to remain calm and collected during the interview.

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You should feel confident that you can show your ability and make a positive impression with the interviewers. Have a glass of water nearby just in case you need it.

Have a backup plan

Technology is notorious for malfunctioning at inconvenient times. Before your interview you should have been briefed about what to do if in case of a glitch, be mindful to take note of this information and follow the given instructions on how to deal with this issue. Transitioning to a phone call or rescheduling for a later time are both possible solutions that may be offered. Do not panic if your software experiences an issue. If the problem is outside your control, the interviewer will understand.

Code of conduct

Before you take part in an online MMI, you will likely be asked to read and sign an applicant declaration form which explains the rules you will be expected to adhere to around confidentiality and professional standards of behaviour. It is important to understand and adhere to the following points before you take the online MMI:

- Confidentiality: You will be given access to online assessment materials and processes that are used to assess suitability of applicants for a particular course. Any applicant found to be disclosing information about the content of the exercises (for example sharing content via social media or discussing content with teachers, colleagues, friends, schools, private companies etc) will be deemed as a breach of professionalism, which may result in serious consequences.
- High professional standards of behaviour: As an online applicant you are expected to continue to act in accordance with the same behaviours that are considered within a face-to-face MMI. Failure to do may result in serious consequences.

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