

Pharmacy Residency Interview Guidebook

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1. What is a Pharmacy Residency?

Definition:

- A pharmacy residency is an organized, directed, postgraduate training program in a defined area of pharmacy practice. It provides the knowledge and experience that pharmacy practitioners need to face challenges in today's complex health-care environment, while also providing essential skills to meet the practice demands of the future. Residency programs are accredited by the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP).

Types of Residencies:

- PGY1 (Postgraduate Year One): Focuses on general clinical skills, patient care, and foundational pharmacy practice in a variety of settings (e.g., acute care, ambulatory care, drug information, management).
- PGY2 (Postgraduate Year Two): Provides advanced training in a specific specialty area (e.g., pediatrics, oncology, critical care, infectious diseases, administration).
- Combined PGY1/PGY2: An integrated two-year residency program that combines both PGY1 and PGY2 training within the same institution, allowing residents to develop foundational clinical skills in the first year and then transition directly into advanced specialty training in the second year without re-entering the residency match.

Program Goals:

- Enhance clinical decision-making and patient care skills.
- Build competence in teaching, research, and leadership.
- Prepare residents for board certification or fellowship.

Benefits:

- Accelerate growth beyond entry-level competence in patient-centered care and pharmacy operational services.
- Given hands-on mentorship from experienced preceptors.
- Participate in interprofessional teams.
- Increase individual's competitiveness for clinical and leadership roles.

2. Overview of Residency Interview Formats

- Residency interviews includes assessment of clinical knowledge, professionalism, and alignment with program culture. The format varies by site.

Traditional (One-on-One) Interviews

- Conducted with a preceptor, program director, or pharmacy leader.
- Tip: Be prepared for behavioral questions.

Panel Interviews

- Multiple interviewers (e.g., preceptors, current residents, and leaders) ask questions together.
- Tip: Make eye contact with all panelists, not just the one asking the question.

Multiple Mini-Interviews (MMI)

- Short, timed stations that assess different competencies (ethical reasoning, teamwork, communication, problem-solving).
- Each station may involve a scenario, role-play, or written task.
- Tip: Think aloud and explain your reasoning clearly.

Virtual Interviews

- Conducted via Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or similar platforms.
- Often include breakout rooms for multiple interviewers.
- Tips: Test your technology prior to the interview, use a professional background, maintain eye contact, and smile naturally.

3. Common and Behavioral Interview Questions

- Residency programs often use behavioral-based questions to predict future performance. The key is to respond with structured, reflective answers that highlight your experience and competency.

Response Frameworks

These frameworks keep your responses concise, organized, and result oriented.

STAR Method:

- Situation – Provide context or background.
- Task – Describe your responsibility or role.
- Action – Explain what you did.
- Result – Share the outcome and what you learned.

CAR Method:

- Context – Set the stage.
- Action – Describe what you did.
- Result – Explain the impact.

PAR Method:

- Problem – Describe the problem.
- Action – Describe the detailed steps you took to resolve it.
- Result – Share the outcome and highlight impact.

Sample of Behavioral Questions:

- Tell me about a time you made a clinical intervention that improved patient outcomes.
- Describe a time you worked as part of an interprofessional team.
- Tell me about a conflict with a colleague and how you resolved it.
- Describe a time when you made a mistake. How did you handle it?
- Give an example of when you had to prioritize multiple tasks.

Sample of General Questions:

- Why did you choose to pursue residency?
- What are your professional goals?
- Why are you interested in our program specifically?
- What are your strengths and areas for improvement?
- How do you handle stress or high-pressure situations?

For additional practice scenarios, please refer to [ASHP's Pharmacy Student Forum Interview Skills Packet for Residency Candidates](#)

4. Strategies for Answering Clinical Case Questions

Purpose:

- To evaluate your ability to assess, prioritize, and manage patient cases using sound clinical judgment.

The STEP Framework

- **S** – Summarize the Case
 - Restate key facts (age, diagnosis, comorbidities, medications, labs, vitals).
 - Clarify missing or unclear information before proceeding.
Example: "Before recommending therapy, I'd like to confirm the patient's renal function and allergy history."
- **T** – Think Through the Assessment
 - Identify and prioritize problems (acute vs. chronic, severity).
 - Connect findings to disease pathophysiology.
 - Mention relevant guidelines when appropriate.

- **E – Explain Your Plan**
 - Clearly state your recommendations and rationale.
 - Include monitoring parameters and follow-up.
 - Address both efficacy and safety.
- **P – Prepare for Alternatives**
 - Acknowledge reasonable alternative therapies.
 - If uncertain, explain how you’d verify information or consult resources.

Example Response:

- "For this patient with community-acquired pneumonia and a reported penicillin allergy, I would recommend levofloxacin 750 mg daily for 5 days. It covers the likely pathogens and avoids beta-lactams. I would monitor for QT prolongation and GI upset, and if possible, verify the allergy type to determine if a cephalosporin could be safely used."

5. Tips for Navigating “On-the-Spot” Drug Information Questions

Purpose:

- To assess your ability to retrieve, interpret, and communicate drug information quickly and accurately.

The A-S-A Method

- **Acknowledge:** Recognize the question.
 - “That’s a great question—here’s how I would approach it.”
- **Structure:** Organize your thoughts.
 - “I’ll consider the mechanism, dosing, and clinical evidence.”
- **Answer or Approach:** Provide what you know, then outline how you would verify.
 - “I believe the maintenance dose is renally adjusted, but I would confirm the exact parameters in Lexicomp.”

If You Don’t Know the Answer:

- Stay calm and confident.
- Explain your thought process and name trusted references.
- Show that you know how to find accurate information.

Key Tips:

- Think out loud—show your reasoning.
- Be concise; avoid unnecessary details.
- Clarify your assumptions if data is missing.

Common On-the-Spot Scenarios:

- Choosing empiric therapy for an infection.

- Adjusting a dose for renal/hepatic impairment.
- Managing an adverse drug reaction.
- Calculating pediatric or IV dosing.
- Evaluating potential drug interactions.

6. High-Yield Topics to Review Prior to Interviews

Clinical Topics:

- Infectious Diseases: CAP, HAP, UTI, sepsis, antibiogram interpretation.
- Cardiology: Heart failure, ACS, atrial fibrillation, anticoagulation management.
- Critical Care: Vasopressors, sedation, electrolytes, pain/agitation/delirium.
- Pediatrics: Dosing principles, NICU/PICU pharmacotherapy basics.
- Renal: Dosing adjustments, AKI vs. CKD management.
- Anticoagulation: DOACs, warfarin reversal, perioperative management.
- Endocrine: Insulin regimens, hypoglycemia treatment.

Behavioral/Professional Questions:

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why did you choose to apply to this program?
- Describe a clinical intervention you made that impacted patient care.
- Tell me about a time you received constructive feedback.
- What are your short-term and long-term goals?

Drug Information & Calculations Review:

- Renal dose adjustments.
- IV to PO conversions.
- TPN basics.
- Corticosteroid and opioid conversions.
- Pediatric dosing (mg/kg calculations).

Quick Review Checklist:

- Top 20 most common medications (mechanism, dosing, monitoring).
- Abbreviated updates from key guidelines (IDSA, ACC/AHA, ADA).
- Common lab values and monitoring parameters.
- Familiarity with primary references (Lexicomp, Micromedex, Clinical Pharmacology).

Final Tip:

- Prepare a one-page “refresher sheet” to review before interviews. Focus on your confidence, reasoning, and communication—not perfection. Programs value your ability to think critically and respond professionally under pressure.

7. Virtual Interview Etiquette:**Confirm Details of the Interview**

- Confirm the interview date, time, and time zone.
- Verify that you have all necessary links or meeting IDs/passwords.

Platform Preparation

- Download the virtual platform ahead of time.
- Practice using key functions such as screen sharing and muting/unmuting.
- Ensure your internet connection is stable and can support video conferencing.
- Test your speakers to avoid feedback or distracting background noise.
- Run a test call with a friend or family member to check video clarity, audio quality, and lighting.

Apparel

- Dress in business professional attire with solid, neutral colors that look clean and polished on camera.
- Avoid busy patterns or accessories that may be distracting on video.
- Ensure clothing is wrinkle-free and fits comfortably.

Lighting and Background

- Choose a well-lit area where the lighting comes in front of you, not behind, to ensure clarity of your face.
- Use a clean, neutral, non-distracting background.
 - If not possible, test out using a blurring background feature on the platform.
- Conduct interviews indoors in a private setting – avoid outdoor or public settings.

Minimizing Distractions

- Avoid chairs or desks that cause movement or create unnecessary noise
- Silence devices to avoid distractions (phone, smartwatch, computer)
- Tell roommates and family members ahead of time to ensure no interruptions
- Keep your space tidy and free from visual distractions

Display Name

- Use your full name rather than an auto-generated or informal username

Punctuality

- Log in a few minutes early to show professionalism and avoid technical delays

Chat Function

- Use proper grammar and spelling when typing in the chat
- Maintain professionalism in all written and verbal communication

Headphones

- Use a simple, non-distracting headset or Bluetooth headphones that offer clear audio

For additional virtual interview tips, please refer to these ASHP Pharmacy Student Forum resources: [Virtual Interview Tips: Do's and Don'ts](#) and [Video and Phone Interview Best Practices](#).

8. Preparing for Questions:

- Please make a copy of this [spreadsheet](#) to help organize your STAR situations and interventions, strength and weaknesses, and accomplishments to be of reference during interview season

Identifying strength & weaknesses:

- It is essential to take a step back and reflect on your professional identity, including what you bring to a team and what areas you still want to develop. Think about moments during pharmacy school and rotations when you felt most confident or proud of your work. What were you doing in those moments and what skills or traits were you using. It's important to reflect on how preceptors or peers often describe you. Are you known for your organization, communication, leadership, or adaptability? In addition, think about how you handle constructive feedback and what patterns have emerged from past evaluations. Think about creating a SWOT analysis to summarize your readiness and self-reflection.

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Personal internal strengths that you can lean on to help achieve your goals	Personal internal weaknesses that you need to work on to achieve your goals	External opportunities such as people, resources, or training that you can take advantage of to help achieve your goals	External threats such as upcoming obstacles that you can predict and mitigate to ensure you reach your goals

Developing “anchor” stories using the STAR method:

- Residency interviews often focus on behavioral questions designed to uncover responses to real-world challenges. To prepare, it's helpful to develop anchor stories that are concise and memorable that highlight your strengths and learning experiences. Please reference the spreadsheet for an example

formulation of your experiences to document in section __. The benefit of using the spreadsheet is to not only help with organization but to sharpen up these experiences, so they are ready to be used on interview day.

Situation	Task	Action	Result
Setting the scene so the interviewer understands the context of your example.	Describe the task you had to complete, including all expectations and challenges you had to overcome	Explain what you did and how you did it	What was the outcome, including accomplishments, rewards, and impact

Examples:

- Think about a time you managed a high pressure or time sensitive situation on rotation, what actions did you take, and what was the outcome?
- Reflect on an instance where you made a recommendation to your team that positively impacted patient care?

Each story should reflect a key competency such as teamwork, adaptability, problem solving, or communication. Once you write your stories and have them organized in the spreadsheet, you can label them by themes like “intervention”, “struggle”, “hardship”, “success”, etc., so you can easily recall them during interviews. These anchor stories not only prepare you for your interview questions but will also deepen your understanding of your own growth as a future resident.

Align Career Goals with Program Offerings:

- One of the final steps in reflection is connecting your personal and professional goals with what a pharmacy residency program offers. Consider what areas of pharmacy practice genuinely excite you and reflect on what kind of environment you thrive in. Do you prefer structured programs with close mentorship, or a more flexible experience that fosters independence? Think about how important research, teaching, or precepting opportunities are to your development. Identify the patient populations or chronic disease states you hope to gain more exposure to and outline what you want to accomplish by the end of your residency year.
- Use the following [residency program tracking sheet](#) to organize programs that may interest you.

This resource was developed by ASHP Pharmacy Student Forum Residency Preparation Advisory Group, which provides resources and support to students regarding career, leadership, and professional development. It is intended for information use only.

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