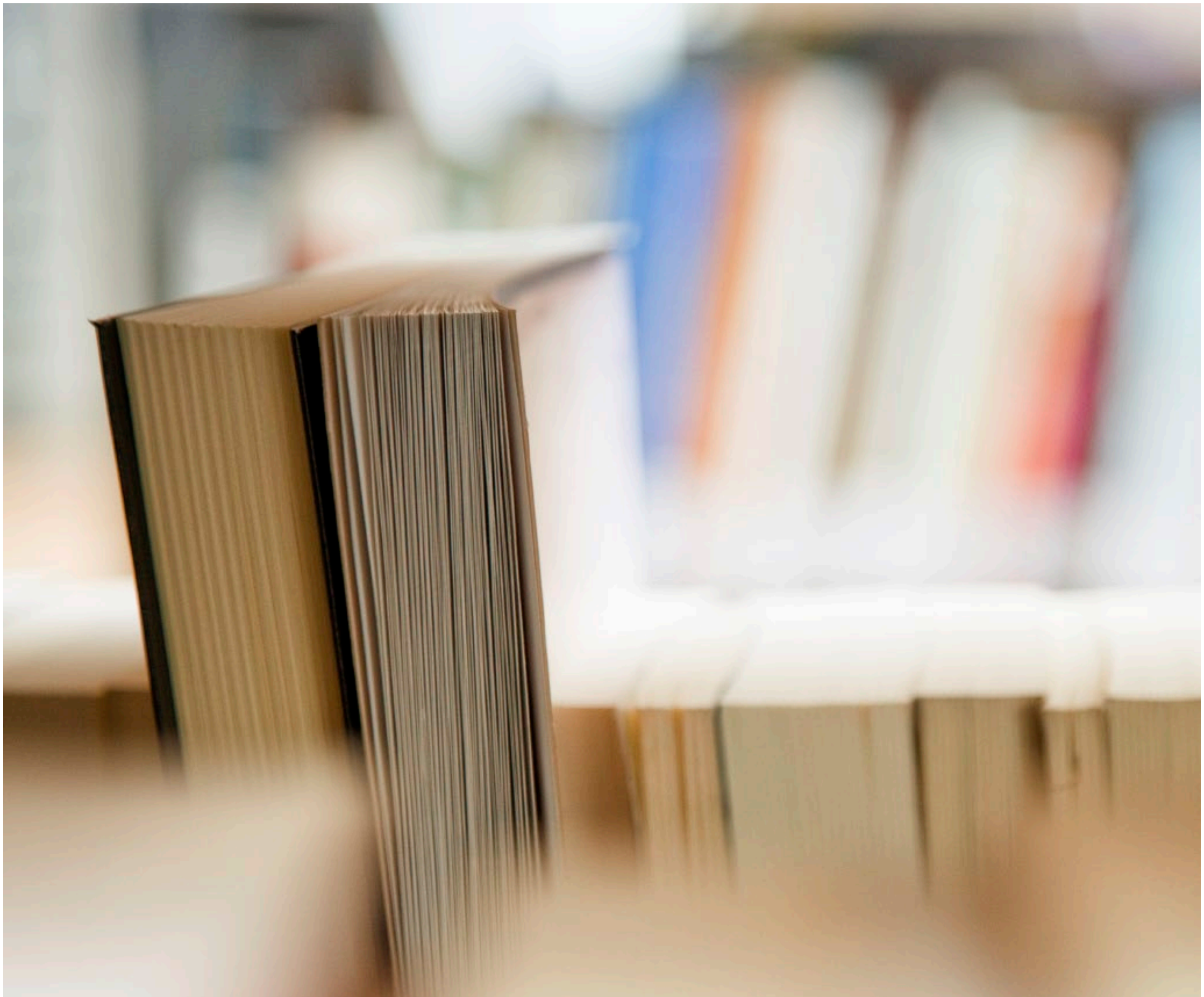

From Scratch to Match:

Russ & Noah's Guide to Internship *Interviews* in Clinical and Counseling Psychology

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Second edition - 2022

From Scratch to Match: Russ & Noah's Step-by-Step Guide to the Internship Process

Scheduling Interviews

Sites tend to begin inviting candidates to interview around two weeks after the application deadline (which in most cases is Nov. 1st), but because every site has a different application evaluation process and timeline, invitations may continue to be sent until December 15th (APPIC's deadline for notifications). All sites are supposed to provide a deadline by which their invitations will be sent out. Regardless of the date listed, invitations can come at any time. Most sites will provide you with options for your preferred interview date on a first come/first served basis. Accordingly, you should be prepared to respond as soon as humanly possible to ensure your preferred dates. Sites will vary widely both in terms of the number of interview days and the timeframe in which they are offered (e.g., three days in one week, twenty days over one month), with some consolidated to one day. Because of this, it is essential to map out your preferred dates assuming you are invited to all sites you apply to. Some sites may publish their dates in their brochure or their APPIC directory. For those that do not provide a date, if you are so inclined, you can search for the previous year's dates on the Student Doctor Network. To assist with this, below we provide preparatory recommendations, so you are well positioned to respond effectively and secure your preferred interview dates.

Here are our suggestions:

1. Ensure email notifications on your phone are enabled.
2. If you use Gmail, use "labels" to keep your emails organized.
3. Accept calls from unknown numbers (You may have to disable the spam blocking feature depending on your device and carrier).
4. Have a generic email response readily available on your phone–either in a notes app or in your email's drafts folder–so you can quickly reply to emails with your preferred interview dates. Remember, time is a factor and interview days are often assigned on a first come/first-served basis. We provide an example below:

   Dr. [NAME],

   Thank you for your email and for the opportunity to interview at [SITE]. Per your request, I am available to interview on [DATE 1], [DATE 2], and DATE 3]. Please let me know if you require any additional information.

   Thank you. I look forward to meeting you in the coming weeks.

   Respectfully,

Given that you will be responding to calls and emails, we recommend you have **printed** calendars for December and January so that you are prepared to reply. Here are some tips:

5. Print out three calendars. On the first one, plot out every available interview date you can find for every site to which you have applied. This will give you a bird's eye view of all the interview possibilities. Now, on the second calendar, plot out the ideal, best case scenario interview schedule (i.e., if you were to be invited to every interview). This will minimize the likelihood of crisscrossing the country and any number of other problems you can image. Leave the third calendar blank to record confirmed dates and/or dates you've offered to sites to avoid double booking. Keep these on you **AT ALL TIMES**

6. January is a notoriously busy time for internship interviews. Scheduling dates in December, when possible, can help with this, but be prepared to have to choose between sites if you are a popular applicant. A word of caution: interviewing for internship sites, like most skills, takes time to master. It may be wise to schedule sites that are a little lower on your list first, when possible, so that by the time you get to your top sites, you have several interviews under your belt.

    a. As you might imagine, this can be quite complicated to execute without conflicts. For example, in the case where you have two sites that list the same interview date, and your less preferred site (site #2) sends you an interview invite before your preferred site (site #1), we recommend you accept the interview from site 2 right away. If you then receive an invitation from site #1, we recommend you commit to that site and contact the other site to reschedule if possible. Situations like this are rare and if you follow the steps outlined above with our **printed** calendars (you read correctly, **printed** calendars), it's unlikely that you will need to cancel an interview. This is an instance where taking a few extra steps in preparation will avoid larger consequences later.

How to Approach the Interviews

Congratulations on making it to this stage of the internship process! What follows next are among the most essential skills and guidance contained in the Scratch to Match.

Over the years of aiding and interviewing applicants, we have identified two common missteps: underpreparing and overselling yourself. It is common for applicants to *believe* they are already prepared for this kind of interview because of their clinical skills or to approach this as a job or graduate school interview where it is your task to sell yourself by highlighting your wealth of experiences and qualifications. Neither of these, on its own, is the most skillful approach. This section provides a condensed overview on skillfully interviewing for internships. We strongly believe that if you follow these recommendations and practice these skills, you will be successful in your interviews.

Remember, you will invariably refine your interview skills as you go through the process, and your first interview is not a good predictor of your last one—or even your second one. So, if you stumble a bit early on, try not to worry (or 'thank your mind for that worry,' if you prefer). Remember, anxiety is just your body reminding you that you care. Point being – these skills are not mastered but refined at each stage of the process.

We recommend taking a professional yet personable stance in which you can be yourself and convey what you know, while also being present and human. Some interviews are conducted with a list of standard interview questions, whereas others are more casual and free flowing. Whatever situation you find yourself in, we recommend, if possible and appropriate, that you strive to turn it into a conversation. This will facilitate a dialogue where you can highlight your strengths and allows you to shape how you discuss your growth edges. It also provides insight into how you are as a clinician (e.g., how quickly you can establish rapport, defuse a tense situation, think on your feet). Similarly, it is an opportunity to get a feel for what it would be like to work together for both you and your interviewer. People don't always remember what you said but they will remember how you made them feel. Thus, skillfully turning the interview into a conversation, when appropriate, lets you to lean into this.

Aside from making it conversational, there are two components to successful interviews that we call the "What" and the "How." The "What" refers to communication of content knowledge (e.g., clinical cases you've encountered, research experiences, your dissertation, training goals for internship). The "How" refers to the way you organize, present, and communicate your content (the "What").

The "What"

Below we describe some specific content areas you should be ready to launch into at a moment's notice. Some of the best and most paradoxical advice one of us received was to know your "script" forward and backwards and then forget it. We offer this adage as a means of saying you should readily know the meaningful points that you want to get across but remain flexible and not overly scripted.

Interviewing is like painting a picture. You have a palette containing individual colors that you've organized neatly (e.g., prepared cases/topics). To paint the picture you want though, you need to identify where the reds and blues make the most sense and fit into the picture you're painting. You may also need to mix some colors together to achieve your vision. Interviewing for internship isn't paint-by-numbers. It's about considering which colors are likely to be most useful to help paint the picture you want, while knowing how to mix red and blue together on the fly if you need purple. Channel your inner Bob Ross!

Content to prepare

- **Dissertation/Program of Research.** Whether you are planning for a research career or preparing for an early retirement from research after your dissertation, you should be ready to speak about your research and demonstrate your scientific acumen. Clinical work and research are interwoven processes; hence, this is a wonderful opportunity to demonstrate what that means to you.
  - We recommend preparing two versions of your research talk:
    - 1) An elevator speech (i.e., a 2 to 3-minute spiel that works when your first interviewer is taking you down the hall to your second interviewer (in non-COVID-19 times) or perhaps, say, even in a brief elevator jaunt).
    - 2) A more detailed discussion for conversations with potential research preceptors.

- **Clinical Approach/Theoretical Orientation.** No need to reinvent the wheel. Refer to your theoretical orientation essay. What matters is conveying this in a succinct and accessible way. We discuss this further in "The How" section that follows, but practice is key.

- **Specific Cases**
  - **Cases where you believe you were effective.** You are likely to be asked this question, so be ready. This is an opportunity to demonstrate your skills as a clinician, approach to case conceptualization, and how you think about etiology and treatment together. Consider discussing progress in ways that are explicitly linked to the

mechanisms of change proposed by your theoretical orientation with concrete examples (e.g., "as evidenced by").

- **Cases where you learned a lot along the way (e.g., cases you struggled with).** Few things are more uncomfortable than trying to answer this question by the seat of your pants. Do yourself a solid and give this one some serious thought so you can answer it skillfully. Areas to consider– missed opportunities, ruptures, missteps, things you didn't know when you started treatment but learned along the way. These are all indicators of your thoughtfulness as a clinician and your clinical communication skills. It's a fair assumption that your ability to respond to these questions skillfully maps on to your ability to respond as a clinician. At the same time, it's important to know that this question can come in many forms. One of us, in our first interview to boot, was asked about a case where we delivered an intervention recommended by a supervisor that we weren't entirely sold on. This wasn't a question we anticipated, and the first answer that came to mind was from a case earlier in our training. Throwing out an answer where details were hard to recall, especially given the early nerves of the interview, did not create an avenue to effectively discuss this case. Point being– having a short list of cases to draw from can go a long way. What is most important is to get to the things you learned as a function of this experience as quickly as possible. No need to linger too long on the details of how you bungled things. Rather, control the narrative and move through it to what you learned as efficiently as possible.

- **Cases related to individuals with diverse identities.** Being a culturally responsive clinician is tantamount to providing effective care. Some sites will ask you about culture and diversity specifically but even if they don't, demonstrating how you think about and integrate aspects of diversity into your clinical care is very important. Things to consider could include culturally responsive adaptations you made to an intervention, working with a client whose identity differed from your own in an important way, outside learning to inform your work with diverse populations, models you've drawn from (e.g., the ADDRESSING model, MECA model). You may remember writing an essay about this very topic as part of your application, so draw from it.

- **Times you disagreed with a supervisor/how you handled this.** As with all these questions, there is a delicate balance required to show up the way you want to. We have found that, whether professionally, in research, or special cases like interviews, it is best to maintain a stance of diplomacy as you describe differing views. In our experience, ones that land well here are cases where you advocated for a client or addressed an ethical dilemma. In our personal experience, one of us spoke to an issue that involved requesting that a supervisor use person-first language rather than pejorative terminology ("alcoholic").

- **Ethical dilemmas.** This is another question that comes up very frequently. As with the other interview questions, this question is meant for you to illustrate how you navigated a difficult situation as well as your knowledge of ethics. This is less about showing that you know the entire ethics code; rather, this is about your consideration, thoughtfulness, and approach to ethical issues. Again, it is critical to be diplomatic during these conversations. There is no need to dunk on anyone here. In our personal experience, one of us described a situation where a client asked us to attend an art exhibit, which was the final step needed for their fine arts degree. This person had been depressed for a long time and avoided completing this step, rendering them credits away from graduating for the better part of a decade. Their progress in treatment allowed them to complete this final assignment, which made it appear relevant to the treatment. In the interview, this facilitated a discussion about multiple relationships, privacy, and the logistics of interacting with a client in nonclinical situations.

- **Training Goals/why *their* site.** Everyone wants to match. However, matching anywhere and matching to the site that will round out your years of training are two very different things. Be specific! Link your goals to their specific rotations–just like you did in your cover letter. Make it clear as day why you fit there. Don't leave anything to the imagination.

The "How"

This section provides tips to help with the mechanics of interviewing. For many, these types of professional interviews may be very new. Although they can be quite enjoyable, they can also be stressful. This is why it's important to have a few skills to fall back on.

- **Discussing cases.** In general, when discussing cases, we recommend beginning with a brief descriptor of client demographics (e.g., age, race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexuality, etc.) followed by their presenting concerns. From here, it can be useful to briefly describe your conceptualization, what factors informed this, any models you incorporated, and how this informed your treatment approach. You might also discuss treatment course, challenges you encountered, as well as outcomes and measurement. This isn't meant to be a checklist, but it can give you some scaffolding around how to discuss cases, consistent with site supervisors' expectations.

- **Be concise.** Much like this bullet point, try to be succinct. It can be easy to meander, especially when nerves kick in, so, draw from your clinical skills; read the room, and recalibrate if you start to go afield.

- **Don't bury the lede. (**First of all**,** yes, it is spelled lede—not lead. The More You Know…) However you spell it, what we mean here is don't bury the main idea so far into your spiel that you run the risk of being cut off and never arriving at your point. Come in with strong topic sentences that organize your thoughts and show the direction you are heading. Slow down. Find your middle ground to convey what is necessary to know and what is superfluous.

- **Discussing your research.** This is a matter of knowing your audience; meaning, is this a conversation where you get into the weeds of your work or do you provide a quick-and-dirty summary of your area. Depending the site and their interest in research, sometimes these questions are a euphemism for whether your dissertation is on track, while others will be conversations designed to determine your fit in a specific lab (like grad school).

- **Asking Questions.** It is important to demonstrate your familiarity with the site and questions are a wonderful vehicle for this. You want to ask questions that you cannot easily find in the sites' materials, but that may reference to the materials (e.g., "I read about the XYZ clinic in your materials. How do they approach issues of….?). This can be challenging because sites begin to blend together after a while. If you have used the materials from the *Scratch to Match* guide we've provided to this point, you will have a great trail of breadcrumbs to draw from when it's time to interview. If not, we recommend using our Internship Site Notes Worksheet to organize information for each site before the interview. We think it is important for you to know that you *can* and *should* ask multiple staff/interviewers the same questions. This will provide convergent or discriminant answers to your questions, both of which are telling, while not putting you in a position to come up with unique sets of questions for each person. With that said, it can be helpful to have a standard list that apply to all sites and a few questions specific to your interviewer (assuming that information is provided in advance). There are great resource guides that offer a starting place for questions, but we suggest you treat them as just that: a starting place. Interviewers meet with dozens of applicants every year and have come to know these well-worn, and sometimes hollow, lines of inquiry. If you find items from a list of recommended questions that are particularly relevant to you, personalize them.

- **Asking Questions Part II.** Per above, there will likely be designated times when you meet with faculty/staff members and interns. The sites will usually communicate explicitly who is *evaluative*, meaning, they have a voice in ranking you, and who is *non-evaluative*. We note this distinction because there are some questions that are more appropriate for non-evaluative interviewers, like cost of living on the sites' salary. Considering this in advance will help you focus your questions to make the most use of your time with evaluative personnel.

- **Practice These Skills!** This is important. As with clinical work, there's a big difference between reading about skills and *cultivating* them. So, practice. Record yourself, think through questions in advance, have someone who has gone through the process interview you, workshop your responses as you go through the process. You don't want to find yourself in a situation where you're asked a question on a topic that you've never considered. You might not get these exact questions as we've laid them out above, but at least you will be able to discuss a similar topic from an adjacent area. That is what we are trying to help you with here: preparing the palette of prepared topics to draw from as needed when the situation presents itself.

General Overview of Interview Days

- Interviews will differ across sites. Even though they typically spend the first part of the day orienting you to the training program, the interviews are easier if you already know the structure, rotations, etc. This might sound like common sense, but the rotations and training experiences across sites are likely to run together over time. It is helpful to re-familiarize yourself with the program's structure, as well as the major and minor rotations that interested you before you get there. Reviewing your cover letters is one way to do this. You might also want to glance over the faculty profiles in the event they interview you. Something we learned along the way: sites don't always tell you who is interviewing you until you get there. Other times, you may think you know and this will change. You typically get breaks before you start interviewing, so it is worthwhile have the training faculty profiles available so you can quickly read up on your interviewer.

- In general, sites will have some of the following elements. Below is a list at a glance. After that, we go into detail.
  - **A large group overview of the training program**
  - **Individual or small-group faculty/supervisor interviews**
  - **Meetings/interviews with current interns**
  - **A large group end-of-day wrap-up session**

- **A large group overview of the training program.** The overview of the training program is typically a large group meeting, including all students interviewing on that date, the training director, and possibly other faculty/staff and current interns. Depending on the size of the meeting, some programs will have all of the interviewees introduce themselves briefly during this meeting, including things like your name, program, where you're from, what track you're applying to, and possibly some kind of "fun fact," so be ready for this.

- **Individual or small-group faculty/supervisor interviews.** Interviews with faculty and/or interns could be one-on-one or in a group setting. I know, awkward, right?! However, thus is life – so be prepared. The way to be prepared is to be ready to discuss the "What" and the "How" sections above. There is no standard format to the interviews. Some sites will ask you lots of questions; others might prefer that you ask them questions. If you are in a small group setting, these people may also be evaluating your ability to effectively navigate that shared space (i.e., the "How"). So, be thoughtful and respectful of your co-interviewees, and do not treat this as a competition for airtime. If you tend to be more introverted in a space like this, perhaps be more deliberate in your preparation by to ensure you are actively engaged in the conversation. If you are so inclined and have the support, mock group interviews are a great way to prepare for this.

- **Meetings/interviews with current interns.** These vary widely in their organization. Some will be formal one-on-one meeting; others may be informal Q&A sessions over lunch. These can also vary in terms of whether they are evaluative or non-evaluative. Sites *should* disclose this to you. In our experiences, not only are training faculty not interested in current interns' input about applicants, but they often explicitly discourage interns from sharing feedback about current applicants. This is to create an environment where applicants feel safe to ask the real questions necessary to inform their choices, without fear of compromising their application standing. If the program does not disclose, the interns should at the beginning, and it is okay to ask if you are unsure.

- **A large group end-of-day wrap-up session.** These are largely to ask any remaining questions after you've interviewed, provide any details regarding timelines, and request any information from applicants that might be necessary to facilitate the ranking process (i.e., which tracks you would like to be considered for). Sites may also collect anonymous surveys about the experience. Sites will often communicate this, but these wrap-ups can be optional, and you may find that you are free to leave the site once you've completed your last interview.

Advice for Virtual Interviews

- The majority of sites are expected to continue offering interviews in virtual format in the coming cycles, so here are a few tips that are specific to interviewing virtually:
  - Find a quiet, private space either in your home, a lab, office space, or somewhere quiet on campus with minimal distractions (e.g., a room in the library). There are numerous reasons for this; among them, some interviewers will be evaluating your background and using that as they make decisions, for better or worse, so control the controllables. Some interviewers are more sensitive and less forgiving about things like pets or other disruptions. While we recognize that some of these variables exist outside of your control, not all interviewers share this perspective.
  - If your home Internet is unreliable, consider connecting to an ethernet cable for the interview day, or work from a location that meets the above criteria and has better Internet service.
  - Ensure that you either use an appropriate virtual background (i.e., this is not the time to see what you would look like on the set of The Office) or position yourself such that you have a professional-looking or neutral background (e.g., a blank wall). Sitting casually on a couch or having a messy room in view may attract negative attention.
  - Let's talk lighting. If possible, position yourself so that the light faces you (i.e., is not behind you), and you are as visible as possible.
  - We find that peak performance in a virtual interview format happens when people dress as if they were at a real, in-person interview. This means professional dress from head to toe. The rationale behind this is that it establishes the appropriate headspace given that your setting is likely to pull for you to be more casual (e.g., interviewing from your bedroom or kitchen). What this looks like will be different for everyone; however, we strongly encourage you *not* to channel your inner Ron Burgundy by wearing your best 'business on the top/party on the bottom' outfit. It would be unfortunate (and highly preventable) if you needed to get up suddenly only to reveal you are wearing board shorts under your sport coat. Stay classy, San Diego. Just as a note around standards: when these were in-person, interviewees almost always wore a suit or equivalent.
  - Stage your area, and make sure you have what you need before the interview starts. Some sites will build in breaks; however, in the virtual format, that may get neglected. Things that might make sense to have nearby: water, caffeine, lip balm, tissues, snacks, and any writing tools for notetaking. Unlike other virtual gatherings you might have experienced where it is common to keep your camera off (e.g., Grand Rounds), the norm here is to keep your camera on during every interview (group or individual).

- The night before interview day, double check which videoconferencing software (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Webex) will be used, and ensure that it is installed/works on the device you plan to interview from.

- Consider having lunch fully prepared in advance for sites that use the lunch period for the "current intern Q&A" or other large group sessions. Unfortunately, some sites might not budget more than a few minutes for you to get your food, and eating is essential during these days. Interview days are likely to be long and emotionally taxing, so taking care of yourself throughout the day when possible, will be paramount.

- As with teletherapy, you may want to be a bit more facially and verbally expressive than you would be in-person. Interviewers don't have the usual body language cues, and your emotions may be harder to read virtually. It can be beneficial to make your enthusiasm about the site explicit verbally and non-verbally.