

# Interview Tips for Dermatology Applicants From Dr. Scott Worswick

As the dermatology application landscape continues to evolve, *Cutis* board member Dr. Scott Worswick offers expert insight into what programs value today and how applicants can stand out amid increasing competition.



Dr. Worswick is from the Department of Dermatology, Keck School of Medicine, University of Southern California, Los Angeles. Dr. Worswick is a speaker for Boehringer-Ingelheim. *Cutis*. 2025 December;116(6):222. doi:10.12788/cutis.1307

## What qualities are dermatology programs looking for that may be different from 5 years ago?

**DR. WORSWICK:** Every dermatology residency program is different, and as a result, each program is looking for different qualities in its applicants. Overall, I don't think there has been a huge change in what programs are generally looking for, though. While each program may have a particular trait it values more than another, in general, programs are looking to find residents who will be competent and caring doctors, who work well in teams, and who could be future leaders in our field.

## What are common mistakes you see in dermatology residency interviews, and how can applicants avoid them?

**DR. WORSWICK:** Most dermatology applicants are highly accomplished and empathic soon-to-be physicians, so I haven't found a lot of "mistakes" from this incredible group of people that we have the privilege of interviewing. From time to time, an applicant will lie in an interview, usually out of a desire to appear to be a certain way, and occasionally, they may be nervous and stumble over their words. The former is a really big problem when it happens, and I would recommend that applicants be honest in all their encounters. The latter is not a major problem, and in some cases, might be avoided by lots of practice in advance.

## What types of questions do you recommend applicants ask their interviewers to demonstrate genuine interest in the program?

**DR. WORSWICK:** Because of the signaling system, I think that programs assume interest at baseline once an applicant has sent the signal. So, "demonstrating interest" is generally not something I would recommend to applicants during the interview day. It is important for applicants to determine on interview day if a program is a fit for them, so applicants should showcase their unique strengths and skills and find out about what makes any given program

different from another. The match generally works well and gets applicants into a program that closely aligns with their strengths and interests. So, think of interview day as your time to figure out how good a fit a program is for you, and not the other way around.

## How can applicants who feel they don't have standout research or leadership credentials differentiate themselves in the interview?

**DR. WORSWICK:** While leadership, and less so research experience, is a trait valued highly by most if not all dermatology programs, it is only a part of what an applicant can offer a program. Most programs employ holistic review and consider several factors, probably most commonly grades in medical school, leadership experience, mentorship, teaching, volunteering, Step 2 scores, and letters of recommendation. Any given applicant does not need to excel in all of these. If an applicant has not done a lot of research, they may not match into a research-heavy program, but it doesn't mean they won't match. They should determine in which areas they shine and signal the programs that align with those interests/strengths.

## How should applicants discuss nontraditional experiences in a way that adds value rather than raising red flags?

**DR. WORSWICK:** In general, my recommendation would be to explain what happened leading up to the change or challenge so that someone reading the application clearly understands the circumstances of the experience, then add value to the description by explaining what was learned and how this might relate to the applicant being a dermatology resident. For example, if a resident took time off for financial reasons and had to work as a medical assistant for a year, a concise description that explains the need for the leave (financial) as well as what value was gained (a year of hands-on patient care experience that validated their choice of going into medicine) could be very helpful.