

# 08| Nailed it! Advice for Internship and Postdoc Interviews

November 15, 2018



This is an audio transcription of an episode on the Navigating Neuropsychology podcast. Visit [www.NavNeuro.com](http://www.NavNeuro.com) for the show notes or to listen to the audio. It is also available on the following platforms:



**Speakers:** John Bellone, Ryan Van Patten



**Intro Music** 00:00



**John Bellone** 00:17

Welcome, everyone, to Navigating Neuropsychology: A voyage into the depths of the brain and behavior. I'm John Bellone...

**Ryan Van Patten** 00:23



...and I'm Ryan Van Patten. Today's show will be a bit different from our usual episodes. A good friend of mine, Taylor Greif, is in the throes of the internship application process and she sent us a few questions about the interviewing process. So we thought it would be useful to talk through some common questions that students have about interviewing. We think that we're both probably in a good position to give advice because we just went through this over the past few years, so it's relatively fresh in our minds. I am absolutely thrilled that Taylor agreed to ask us these questions. Just to briefly introduce her: She is a fourth year graduate student at St. Louis University. And she is on the path to becoming an outstanding neuropsychologist. I would say a lot more, but I'll stop myself here so I don't embarrass her too much. As a public service announcement for all of our listeners, today's discussion will be more tailored to internship interviews but the vast majority of the content will be applicable to people applying to fellowships and practicums, and even faculty positions as well. At the end of the episode, we will also answer some listener mail, so to speak, from a couple other friends of ours who are applying to postdoc positions this year.

**John Bellone** 01:40



Also, although this is obviously a neuropsychology podcast, almost all of the internship content we cover will be applicable to all applicants to psychology internships and postdocs. We should also say up front that much of this episode consists of our opinions, based on our own experiences and the experiences of people we know. Of course, this is not perfectly representative of all interviewees and you should talk to other colleagues and supervisors about their experiences as well. We will also post a lot of resources in the show notes, including other people's advice and perspectives. So, I'd encourage you to look there for more info. It'll be at [navneuro.com/08](http://navneuro.com/08).

**Ryan Van Patten** 02:27



Okay, our first question pertains to managing the interview schedule. So Taylor is specifically interested in the logistics of scheduling multiple site visits.

**John Bellone** 02:38



Yeah, so hopefully, you, the applicant, the listeners, began planning for this during the application phase - when sites asked you to list your interview date preferences. But if you're lucky enough to get a lot of interviews, then you'll likely have at least a couple of conflicts. This should be obvious - this next piece that I'm going to give you, but try your best not to reschedule any of your top sites. I had enough

interviews, luckily, that I felt confident asking my lower-tiered sites if they would be willing to change the day or opt for a phone interview. Some did, some were accommodating. But I did have to let a couple go because it just didn't work with my schedule. Also try your best to do in-person interviews with your top sites, rather than phone interviews if you have the option. Another important tip is to build in a safety margin. Like, if you have to fly for an interview, try to arrive a day or two beforehand, especially for the extra important ones, just in case there are delays or flight cancellations. If you have multiple sites in the same location, then it's best to try to line them up on consecutive days or within the same week. But sometimes it's just not going to work out that way. Start booking planes and hotels as soon as you know for certain where you'll be so you can get that on the calendar and start planning for it. If a site is taking a long time to let you know if they want to interview you, but you really need to start scheduling things, then you shouldn't be bashful - you can email them to ask when you might hear back. You know, don't pester them, obviously, but you can definitely email them to ask.

**Ryan Van Patten** 04:31



And I would just add, be mentally prepared for the fact that flights may be cancelled or delayed. In fact, most people I know, including myself, had at least one flight delay or cancellation during their interview journeys. The probability is that this will happen. There is literally nothing you can do about this, and sites won't penalize you. In fact, you can think about it as a good thing, in a way, because if you miss the original interview day for one of your top sites, you can then request that you come in on a later date for the interview. If you're able to swing this, then it shows just how dedicated and conscientious you are. I'm not saying this in the abstract, I've actually seen this happen. And I think it helped the interviewee who ended up matching to the site in question.

**John Bellone** 05:19



This is the time to get really organized. Keep a paper or electronic calendar of what city you're going to be in, where you'll be traveling from and to, what time the interview is at - things like that. Just get really organized early on. So, Ryan, Taylor asked us for some tips for flights and travel in general.

**Ryan Van Patten** 05:42



Sure, off the top of my head, I would say prioritize your safety over any and all interviews. This came to mind because I've heard stories of people driving for hours through the night, in the middle of severe snowstorms, just to get to an interview. And it is not worth the risk.

**John Bellone** 06:01



Yeah, and another really important piece of advice is to make sure you carry your interviewing outfit onto the plane. You do not want to show up to the interview in your pajamas. It has happened before - not to me, luckily, or to Ryan, I don't think.

**Ryan Van Patten** 06:17



No. [laughs]

**John Bellone** 06:18



But I have heard horror stories of people who had their luggage lost. Their flight was delayed and so they didn't have any time to even go buy something. They had to just wear what they had. Awful. So, carry your clothes on. Bring extra clothes in case you're missing something or you spill coffee on your shirt, you know, things like that. A couple other random travel tips: make sure you carry some cash or change on you just in case you need to jump in a taxi or take a subway or a bus or something. Try to look for Airbnbs and hostels to cut the cost - I know this is an expensive undertaking. If you can stay with friends, you know, if you have friends in the area... Things like that.

**Ryan Van Patten** 06:58



Yeah, I generally agree with that. I would say, though, don't sacrifice your comfort, right? You can stay at a more affordable and practical location like an Airbnb or hostel, but you also want a decent bed in a safe place, right? One that doesn't smell like cigarettes and marijuana, hopefully. [laughs] So think about balancing cost with comfort. And hopefully you're not as cheap as my co-host is.

**John Bellone** 07:25



[laughs] Ryan's just a prima-donna.

**Ryan Van Patten** 07:27



[laughs] Okay, back to serious matters, John. Taylor's next question relates to staying healthy while traveling during the winter. What do you think?

**John Bellone** 07:38



I think it's good to prioritize sleep. Very important for overall health, as we all know, and it can definitely be affected by traveling to different time zones. So try to make that a priority. Try to have fun. You're likely going to see a lot of new, cool places.

Try to build in some time to do something fun - sightsee, you know, at least see one thing in the city that you're in.

**Ryan Van Patten** 08:05



Yeah, I strongly agree with John's last point. I'd actually like to take a couple minutes to talk about this in more detail. What I'm thinking is that a huge part of your success and interviews is your mindset. So think about how we talk to people about CBT, for example. As we know, the same challenging event can happen to two different people and their interpretations and experiences can be totally different. So think about that as it applies to this experience - which is very challenging - of internship interviews. To the extent that you can, cultivate excitement and interest in these interviews. This can be a really fun and enjoyable period of time. And it goes a long way to helping you relax and perform better if you're genuinely happy to be somewhere. It's also better for your health because you're not stressed and fatigued any more than you already have to be based on travel. So I know these things are aspirational and easier said than done, but we know the power that the mind can have, that thoughts can have, on emotions. So practice what you preach as much as you can and try to use it to your advantage. Moving on, Taylor's next question is asking for tips for handling nerves before and on interview days. What do you think, John?

**John Bellone** 09:24



Yeah, this is super important. I get this question a lot from people who are applying for internship. Everyone has their own way of managing anxiety. For me, I find that the more prepared I feel, the lower my anxiety is. I also try to minimize any non-essential stressors by knowing exactly where I need to be for the interview - I like to print out the maps and the info sheets that sites gave me. Getting there with plenty of time to spare is really important. Same goes for traveling in general - it's better to sit at the airport for a couple hours than to be rushing there and adding to your baseline anxiety. I also liked to introduce myself to other applicants while in the waiting room before interviews. Talking with them about how much it just sucks to travel during a snowstorm - it tends to decrease my anxiety, or at least it distracts me. But I will say that anxiety can be contagious, too. So try to stay away from the overly negative people during this process.

**Ryan Van Patten** 09:24



Yeah, I agree. I would add a strong recommendation to be pretty careful about spending time on forums and listservs that pertain to internship applications. The way I thought about it was: if the information is directly useful to your application

and it will clearly increase your competitiveness in some way, then it's definitely worthwhile. But, unfortunately, many of these venues include a lot of co-rumination and other anxiety producing content that is completely unhelpful. So, buyer beware.

**John Bellone** 11:10



Yeah. And try avoiding the negative thinking and the distortions that we all have at times - like the catastrophizing of, you know, if we don't get this interview or if we don't match up the site everything's going to be terrible, those kinds of things. It's easier said than done but don't underestimate the value of relaxation techniques, like deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation. Try to build in time, while you're traveling, to do the things that you find most relaxing. And you're going to be anxious, know that that anxiety is normal and it's expected. Everyone else is also nervous. Don't let that prevent you from letting your personality show because it's so important that you do that. A lot of the anxiety, I found at least, tends to dissipate after the first couple of interviews. So, actually, one strategy might be to try not to schedule your top sites first. Try to schedule them after you've had a couple under your belt. Sometimes it's unavoidable. But, you know, not a big deal if you don't. All right, so Taylor asked us what kinds of materials she should prepare for interviews.

**Ryan Van Patten** 12:28



Sure. I would spend a good amount of time looking over the program's brochure and the other online information. I would both review it ahead of time and then also look over it again the day before the interview. To the extent that it's possible and fits with your schedule - in other words, it should not interfere with sleep and self-care - I think it's really helpful to familiarize yourself with rotations, supervisors, clinic names, and didactics. Each site has its own particular terminology and people's names to remember. Obviously, you're not going to memorize everything for each site but the more work you put in on the front end, the easier it'll be on the day of the interview. My perspective is that training directors and other faculty are often really impressed when an interviewee can rattle off names of programs and people at their site, as if the person works there already. So, in this regard, I spent most of my time on this for my top sites, and then less time for my mid- and lower-tiered sites, but I still did it to some extent.

**John Bellone** 13:35



Yeah, having the specifics about the site shows that you're really interested, which makes a big difference. We'll also include in the show notes many common interview questions. It's good to look over what the most common questions might be, and think through how you will answer each one. I even wrote up some of my

responses ahead of time, beforehand, and then memorized them so that I wouldn't fumble around the question when I was asked later on. So that's also something to prepare.



**Ryan Van Patten** 14:10

Yeah, I did that too. That's a good strategy. Taylor's next question is, "How much do interviewers typically refer to specific information from your application materials, essays, CV, etc.?" What do you think?



**John Bellone** 14:25

Well, from what I recall, the short answer would be not much. So I think it's typically safe to assume that the person either didn't look at any of your materials or maybe just glanced at them two minutes before you sat down with them. In their defense, though, they have to wade through a lot of materials in addition to their already busy schedules. So, it's completely understandable. But, I think, you, the applicants should still make sure you highlight your strengths, even if it is all over your essays and your CV. Keep in mind that, even if you're applying to a neuropsych heavy position, you'll likely still be interviewing with general psychologists at most sites. So they might not have been the ones who initially selected you for an interview - they might not know much about you. And don't be put off if the interviewer is not even involved in any of the rotations that you're interested in - this happened to me quite a bit. If you're not scheduled to meet with the person that you really wanted to talk with, then feel free to ask if you can meet them that day, or if maybe they're available for you to call them later on.



**Ryan Van Patten** 15:42

Yeah, I have a bit of a different take on this question. Of course, reasonable people can disagree. And if you've happened to listen to our podcast thus far, you're aware that John is very prone to being wrong.



**John Bellone** 15:56

[laughs] Well, don't forget, Ryan, that someone did leave us a comment on our website backing me up for that controversial stance on driving from our last episode. I don't know if you saw that.



**Ryan Van Patten** 16:05

And, how much did you pay them per comment?



**John Bellone** 16:07

[laughs]

**Ryan Van Patten** 16:07

Don't answer that. Anyway, so with regard to the original question, how much does the interviewer typically refer to these specific pieces of information? My experience was that I was asked about my CV more often than not, actually. These were usually general questions, but I did get a few questions that were pretty detailed. For example, what comes to mind is, as an undergraduate, I spent a little bit of time working with MediaLab, which is the software for document control in laboratories. And I put it in my CV under my duties in a specific research lab. I was far from an expert, it had been almost seven years since I had actually worked with MediaLab, but during an interview I was asked about my competency with the software and what I liked about it. So, unfortunately, I really had to BS the answer. [laughs] But I did get through, I survived. And the interview went okay, overall. Most of the CV-related questions that I had, though, were much broader and easier than that one. My conceptualization, or understanding, of how most interviewers approach this is that they tend to look at your CV beforehand - often, as John said, just a couple minutes before you come in they glance through it. And, as they're flipping through it, they pick out aspects of it that they can identify with. Then they ask you about these things to start a conversation - makes sense. But since you have no idea what this person might identify with and choose to ask you about, I would suggest knowing your own CV very well - even the stuff from years ago that you haven't necessarily thought about recently. Then in addition to the CV, I also got a fair number of questions about the cover letter for each site. My experience was that these were big picture questions and pretty easy to answer. They tended to relate to the fit between the site and myself. So I would always read over my cover letter before the interview and I found it to be really helpful. So I would strongly suggest doing that. As you read over the cover letter you wrote, keep in mind how specifically you will talk about the fit between yourself and this site. And then, to answer Taylor's question more completely, I did not get any questions about my essays, work samples, or clinical hours. So, to summarize, I'd recommend focusing on your CV and cover letter rather than your other application materials for each site.



**John Bellone** 18:50

All right, Ryan, well, here's where Taylor asked us about some common interview questions. Good one to talk about.



**Ryan Van Patten** 18:57



Sure. Probably the question that is most commonly asked, or the area where you should focus on the most, is when you're asked to describe your dissertation. So John and I both strongly recommend that everyone prepare for this question. You can even prepare several different dissertation descriptions that will fit the various situations you'll be in. A place to start would be to have a 30 second summary with a few sentences on the background, method, results, and conclusions, while stressing the broad applicability of the study. You can think of this as similar to an abstract or a poster that you might present. But, then, also be prepared to elaborate on each of those points if someone asks you follow-up questions, because it's likely they will. Again, John and I both recommend rehearsing this quick summary that you have, and even role-playing it with other people if you can. It really helps to take the edge off if you've been through it a couple times. And you can consider this general model that I just described for other research you've done - other papers or posters that you have in your CV as well. But, again, the focus on your dissertation is front and center and it comes first.



**John Bellone** 19:14

Yeah, everyone I sat down with, I think, asked me about my dissertation.

**Ryan Van Patten** 20:17



Yeah, me too. Without fail. Another question that's pretty common, that a lot of us have heard about is, "What are your strengths and weaknesses?" This is a question that is pretty common in job interviews in general, right? In psychology, you also might be asked, or the phrasing might be, for your strengths and areas of growth. Most people find the strengths part to be pretty straightforward, but find it challenging to talk about their weaknesses or areas of growth without disparaging themselves. I would say to be honest but don't incriminate yourself. In other words, this may seem obvious, but don't say that you have trouble not hitting on your patients and that's something you really need to work on. [laughs]



**John Bellone** 21:00

Ryan has a lot that could incriminate him so he's really good at these. [laughs]



**Ryan Van Patten** 21:04

I'm not going to address that. I'm just going to move on. [laughs]



**John Bellone** 21:06

And I just want to say really quickly, I think you should try to think of something better than, "I'm too much of a perfectionist" for that weakness question. That's kind of a cop out.



**Ryan Van Patten** 21:18

Yeah, I agree. But now that we've told you what not to say, some advice about what you can say in response to this question about areas of growth. Again, be honest. Don't be afraid to mention the clinical populations, interventions, neuropsych tests, or other general skills that do really represent gaps in your training thus far. Sites want to know that you have areas of growth, it's not a bad thing. If you didn't, what would be the point of a clinical internship? They want to know that they can help you fill in gaps in your training, that's what they're there for. So don't be shy in talking about what you want and need to learn.



**John Bellone** 21:56

Yeah, I also have several questions to add for what I feel like you should prepare for. You should be able to provide an example of an ethical dilemma that you've encountered and how you handled it. Also have ready an example of a disagreement you've had with a supervisor and how you handled it. They really want to see how you work through those kinds of problems. You'll likely be asked, directly, why the site would be a good fit for you, and vice versa, why you would be a good fit for the site. We've used this word "fit" a couple times already, and everybody talks about this idea of "fit". It's kind of an elusive concept, though. So, my sense is that what people generally mean by this is the degree to which the site is able to meet your training needs - whether you need more assessment experience or you want to work with serious mental illness or other populations, those kinds of things. Do they have access to those populations that could fill that gap for you? Also whether your skills and training experiences are likely to meet the needs of the site. So I'd recommend bringing up specific details from the brochure, like we mentioned before, and using those details to explain how the site can meet your needs and how your training makes you really well-suited to those rotations or research opportunities, whatever it might be. Also, prep for the very vague, "Tell me about yourself..." question. It's hard to answer. Personally, I liked to say that, "I was specializing in neuropsychology, I aspire to become board certified in the near future", which was quite true. And it's good for sites to know that about you if you are actually aspiring to become board certified in any specialty. And then on a more personal level, I liked to say, "You know, I enjoy playing racquetball. I like to travel..." - things like that. I found that it really sparks good conversation. But you

know, you might have a different approach to this very vague question. You should have thought through what your views are on diversity and cultural competency as well. And a few other questions that you should be ready for are things like: What brought you to neuropsychology, or whatever specialty area you're pursuing? What's good and bad supervision, in your opinion? What are you looking for in a supervisor? What are your internship training goals? Make sure you make those somewhat specific to the site. Things like that. So sorry if this all seems a bit overwhelming - all these questions that you have to prep for. You don't have to have a response memorized, but just have thought through it so you're not thinking about it for the first time when you're posed that question. My preference for responding to those questions is to keep it very brief but then ask if they would like me to elaborate. You know, many of us have a tendency to get over verbose or to over explain, especially if we're nervous - that's what I do. So, I try to just keep it to the point - be very to the point.

**Ryan Van Patten** 25:24



Yeah, that's all good. I also wanted to add that, just so everyone knows, APA has an article that answers five very common interview questions. I highly recommend this to everyone. It's not a long or difficult read but I think they've got some useful content. And so we'll link to it in our show notes. The five questions are: Why do you want this internship? Tell us about a good and a bad experience that you've had with a client. What is your professional philosophy? Where do you see yourself in five years? And, do you have any questions for us? So John and I are not going to run through the answers that are on that article for all five questions. But, the last one, this question of "Do you have any questions for us?", is pretty ubiquitous. So I think it'd be helpful if we actually tackle that now.



**John Bellone** 26:19

Yeah, definitely.



**Ryan Van Patten** 26:20

John, what do you think? What advice do you have for folks?



**John Bellone** 26:24

Yeah, I think that you should have probably four to five questions ready to ask each person you interview with. You can, you know, even recycle the questions - use the same questions for different interviewers. A couple of the interviews that I had were actually just the interviewer asking me what questions I had about the program and that was the whole meeting. So, you know, you don't have to feel the need to ask all

of the questions that you have at the ready. It's always better to go with the natural flow of the conversation, but it's going to be very rare to have an interview that doesn't end with the question, "What questions do you have for me?" So just be anticipating that. Try to avoid asking cliché questions, or ones that are kind of difficult for interviewers to answer. Like, "Tell me what a typical day looks like." Or, "What are you looking for in an intern?" I don't know. Personally, I kind of find those questions annoying. But, instead, my recommendation would be to ask more specific questions. You know, "How strong of an emphasis do you place on research involvement?" Or, "Do you set aside protected time for research?" You know, very specific like that. We'll also put several sample questions - some questions you might want to ask both interviewers and current interns - we'll have those in our show notes for this episode.

**Ryan Van Patten** 27:56



Yeah, I'll just add to what John said by saying, the more tailored your question is to that site, the better. And this goes along with the idea that you should ask the questions to which you really want to know the answers. This may seem obvious and intuitive but, as trainees, we often wonder what we should do or what the right thing to do is in a situation. I agree with John that you do want to have questions in your back pocket to ask the interviewer because you want to demonstrate an interest in a position. You want them to think highly of you. But remember that you're also there to learn information about the site. So look through their materials beforehand and think about what you might want to know that will help you make a good decision when it comes time to rank the sites. The overall process is as much about you interviewing them as it is about them interviewing you. I think having that mindset can really take the spotlight off, take some of the pressure off. It's not a fallacy, it's actually true. So I would advise trying to use that conceptualization, keep that in mind. Okay, moving on to our next question. Taylor is asking for tips for preparing for these performance-based questions and interview styles. John?

**John Bellone** 29:19



This is what most people are nervous about, I think, are these performance-based questions. It's actually likely that only a small portion of the interviews will be performance-based. I only remember a couple times where I was handed a vignette or something to figure out, and, you know, these would have been really tough to prepare for anyway.

**Ryan Van Patten** 29:42



Yeah, I agree. I'm trying to think. I mean, in my experience, performance-based questions certainly are not common during internship interviews. I think I had such questions about one out of every six sites or so. And, I agree, it doesn't make sense to try to study for these questions. I would say, be confident that you've been through a good training program and that you know your stuff. Rely on your pre-existing knowledge and skills for these. We've given you plenty of things to think about and study for, but don't make performance-based questions something you're studying for. Don't try to look through every test you've ever given or study every paper you've ever read and try to remember all the information - that won't be helpful. I can share my experiences in case it's helpful. So, at one site, I was asked to interpret a CVLT profile. This was pretty quick and straightforward. At another site, the interviewer walked me through a case. So this included the clinical interview, test selection, and case conceptualization. At each step along the way, she gave me brief background information, such as the demographics, and then the referral question at the beginning. And then she asked me what I would want to know next. It felt a little bit like a fact-find, if our listeners are familiar with those. After I talked through some of my thoughts to each of her queries, we then moved on. I do remember that a few times I asked her something about the case, a question or for a piece of information, and she said that she could not give that to me yet. I get the sense that that's pretty typical. And it wasn't a black mark or negative for me in any way. So, overall, to my recollection, this took probably about 20 minutes. She was clearly just trying to hear me talk through the case and form a good conceptualization. I didn't feel like it was a very evaluative or stressful or intimidating or high pressure sort of situation. I thought it was interesting and kind of fun.

**John Bellone** 31:49



Maybe it's because I interviewed mostly at VAs that had a lot of general psych rotations, but I found that I got more generalist psych questions than neuropsych focused ones. But, either way, like we said, these performance-based interviews will be relatively rare. You really can't prepare much for them. So don't spend a whole lot of time worrying about them. Okay, Taylor asked us, "What are the do's and don'ts for self disclosure in interviews?"

**Ryan Van Patten** 32:22



So this is a bit interesting, maybe thorny. Overall, I'd say this is personal preference. Obviously, you don't want to disclose anything that will put you at a disadvantage, or could cause you to be the victim of discrimination. So, for

example, I would not start talking about your own past experiences as a psychotherapy client unless you've really thought this through and you're prepared to answer follow-up questions about it and you have a strong narrative that works to your advantage. So, with that said, personally, my style was to be pretty open in terms of talking about myself. I do think it can hurt your chances if you come across as guarded and defensive, so you don't want that. These interviewers, they want to know what it'll really be like to work with you on a daily basis. So you want to show off your personality - be open and friendly, you know, be you. So of course, based on these two different things I've said, this is a bit of a balancing act. You don't want to reveal too much, or anything that could hurt you, but you want to be personable and engaging. In my opinion, a good way to strike this balance is to put a lot of forethought into areas where you won't disclose and keep these in mind in the front end. To this end, there is a 2015 paper by Mike Parent and his colleagues that we include in the show notes, and it includes a list of topic areas that would be helpful to consider when making your "don'ts list". And then, once you're comfortable with the things that you will choose not to disclose, be an open book, don't be afraid to talk about yourself.



**John Bellone** 33:59

So, Ryan, this next question is also a softball - a very easy question.



**Ryan Van Patten** 34:03

Right. I'm sure.



**John Bellone** 34:04

So, I'm going to give it to you. I'm gonna give you the honors of answering this one.



**Ryan Van Patten** 34:06

I appreciate that.



**John Bellone** 34:07

How would you field potentially personal or inappropriate interview questions?



**Ryan Van Patten** 34:12

Oh, boy. [laughs] Okay, so obviously, this is tough. Unfortunately, this certainly does happen sometimes. Some questions are clearly inappropriate - such as being asked if you're planning on getting pregnant or whether or not you are in psychotherapy right now. But others are less obvious to some people, such as if an

interviewer asks you about personal life issues that have driven you to become a psychologist. Actually, this question is considered to be inappropriate by many people because it could put you, as the interviewee, in a position where you feel compelled to reveal a personal or family history of mental illness. So, as I mentioned a few minutes ago, we'll include this 2015 paper by Parent and colleagues, and that paper includes a list of inappropriate interview questions. The manuscript is actually written for interviewers. It's a guide for them to be aware of what sorts of things not to ask and how to conduct an appropriate interview. But I would suggest that you look it over and you can use it to think about how you might answer inappropriate questions that you could be asked. Of course, everyone is different and could approach this issue a little bit differently. I'm not going to presume to give broad reaching advice that applies to every single listener. But, I will say, one good idea is consider bringing up this issue of being asked inappropriate questions with your advisor or another trusted faculty member, and talk through how you'll handle them. And then, one other thing I'll add is that we will also include APPIC's frequently asked questions webpage. This is directed to interviewers and it's about how to conduct a good interview, but again, as an interviewee, it can be helpful to look this over. It's a bit like being able to look at the other team's playbook and it definitely gives you an advantage. And this FAQ webpage is in regard to any and all questions you might be asked, not just the inappropriate ones, which hopefully will be a very small proportion of the overall number of questions you're asked.

**John Bellone** 36:30



Yeah, I think referring to those resources is a good way to go about it. I don't recall getting any questions that I deemed as inappropriate. But, you know, I can imagine maybe women and people who are members of minority groups might be more likely to get these kinds of questions than Ryan and me, unfortunately.

**Ryan Van Patten** 36:52



Okay, so next question: "What's the most helpful type of information to get from the current interns during this process?" What do you think?

**John Bellone** 37:00



Yeah, so you're probably going to meet with a lot of interns as part of the site visits. Try to read between the lines a little bit. They might not be so upfront or forthcoming about what they don't like about the site or if they don't like the site, but you can usually tell. There was actually one site, which is going to remain nameless, that I remember interviewing at where you could just tell that they were so unhappy. All

the applicants were asking questions to a group of interns, and they were just clearly unhappy but they wouldn't say it. They stuck to the scripts. [laughs] So I think you can kind of tell if people are overworked and tired, or if they're just dead inside [laughs].



**Ryan Van Patten** 37:58

Whoa. Hold on. How does someone look dead inside? Can you give us some behavioral observations here, John? [laughs]



**John Bellone** 38:05

Fair enough. [laughs] I don't know. I could just vividly remember that one meeting with interns where they were just clearly not happy. And actually a few other applicants I talked to later also noticed that. [laughs] Oh, man, it was awful. But, you know, really, you should try to get a sense of whether they are happy that they matched to that site. How they feel like they're treated there. How many hours they work. Are there any obvious interpersonal tensions? Do supervisors really care about trainees there? All good questions to ask. And as a side note, I want to just quickly say that you should always be "on" - even when you are having lunch with interns or on the phone with a postdoc asking them about the site, you should still be in that "interviewing mode". It's okay to let your hair down a bit but not too much, I don't think. Because you never know if they're going to share their opinions with their supervisor. And same goes for other interactions, like email interactions. You know, personally, I am a bit obsessive about how many times I reread emails to ensure that there aren't any grammatical or spelling errors. But I think that's important to keep in mind.



**Ryan Van Patten** 39:29

John, I'm very aware of your obsessive nature going through the process of this podcast.



**John Bellone** 39:34

[laughs]



**Ryan Van Patten** 39:34

Anyways. We'll leave it at that. [laughs]



**John Bellone** 39:36

Way to call me out, Ryan. [laughs]

**Ryan Van Patten** 39:39



Overall, I definitely agree. I think it's helpful to be relaxed and friendly and personable, as I've said. But, of course, again, it is a balance. Of course, you don't want to get drunk or act inappropriately in any way. And you always want to be conscientious, even after hours. But I also think, as I've said, it's a turn-off for someone to be really uptight and reserved and rigid. So one way to think about the frame of mind you might be in is to imagine that you're out at a lab dinner with your faculty advisor and other cohort members. You want to interact and be engaged and have a good time. But, of course, unfortunately, this is not spring break in the Bahamas. So.. [laughs]



**John Bellone** 40:22

Unfortunately.



**Ryan Van Patten** 40:23

Yeah. So we're nearing the end of Taylor's questions here. The next one is, "How do you keep track of information from all the different interviews?"



**John Bellone** 40:34

Yeah, that's a really good question. You know, when it comes time to rank sites, all of the interviews are likely going to be jumbled in your mind or completely forgotten. So I would recommend writing brief notes immediately after interviewing at each site. I made a Word document that had a pros column and a cons column for that setting. And then I wrote some other notes about things that stood out to me. The other thing I did that I found helpful later on was I kept an ongoing rank so that by the time I finished my last interview, I pretty much had my ranking down already, because I was doing it all along while it was still fresh in my mind.



**Ryan Van Patten** 41:21

Yeah, I did something really similar. So I endorse that idea as well. Next, John, what do you think about post-interview thank you notes?



**John Bellone** 41:30

Yeah, that question comes up a lot. I think that unless they explicitly tell you not to, I think it's good to send a short thank you email to each person you interview with - personally thanking them for the interview, expressing your continued interest in the position, if you are really interested. I would try to mention something unique about the conversation you had, but still keep it short. I usually send these the night of the

interview or the day after. Most people will give you their email in case you have any questions, or you can usually find it in the brochure or the website if you're wondering where you can find their emails.

**Ryan Van Patten** 42:16



Yeah, I agree generally. Of course, it can't hurt to write post-interview thank you notes. That said, if you're feeling overwhelmed with travel plans, and preparing for upcoming interviews, don't let this be the thing that weighs you down. I think it's really unlikely that a thank you note will be the difference between you matching to a site or not. On the other hand, though, if you're stressed out and not sleeping well, and you have poor interview experiences, because you have way too much to do on your to-do list, that could have a negative effect. So, again, don't let thank you notes be the thing that gets in the way of your sanity.



**John Bellone** 42:55

Well, clearly, Ryan is an ungrateful person. [laughs]



**Ryan Van Patten** 42:59

Well, we all knew that. [laughs]



**John Bellone** 43:01

No, no, I'm kidding. I can see how it might feel burdensome if you meet with 10 people at each site, you know, thinking of something new for each one. But I would suggest that you maybe at least send thank yous to the prospective supervisors at that site. It didn't take me more than a few minutes each. I was just writing two to three sentences thanking them, but it's up to you. So, Ryan, this is the final question here. Taylor asked us for some tips for ranking sites and weighing different criteria.



**Ryan Van Patten** 43:33

Yeah, this is a great question. So to start, what comes to mind is that, of course, everyone is going to weigh different aspects of the internship experience differently. There are a lot of factors to consider here - rotations, supervisors, didactics, research experience, geographic location, etc. You should know and keep in mind which of these dimensions is most important to you, and then you can rank based on the extent to which each site is strong in the areas that you find important. Some people find it useful to create a spreadsheet for this and give sites numerical rankings, often right after the interview, like John mentioned before. I think this can

be a really helpful strategy because it sort of helps you prevent the memory interference that would otherwise happen. If you have multiple interviews, one right after the other, you're not going to be able to parse apart all the specifics that happen at each one. So take notes right afterwards. I'll also say that I've heard a lot of people talk about using their gut to make the final decision. I have mixed feelings about this. I think it can be really useful when it comes to questions like, "How did you feel after interacting with the supervisor? Did you really connect with her?" You know, in that case, your emotions are probably very telling - use them as a compass. If this person that you've spent time with is going to be someone who you'll be regularly interacting with for the next year, you want to have positive interpersonal interactions. So your emotional response is very relevant. On the other hand, though, looking at an overall site and judging it simply by your gut feeling on that day can be really misleading. So maybe this site was initially ranked as your top site, so you were particularly nervous and you didn't sleep very well the night before. Maybe other interviewees were not very friendly to you, for whatever reason. Maybe you had to walk through two feet of snow to get there. There are a lot of extraneous factors that could impact your gut feeling on one particular interview day that are not a good representation of what it would be like to spend an entire year somewhere. So I would say, whenever possible, try to use more objective criteria.

**John Bellone** 45:49



In terms of how to figure out your order of preference, my suggestion is to go for the site where you think you'll get the best training and set you up best for the next step, which is usually postdoc. The supervisor fit is also pretty important. But, you know, it's just one year. So for most people, especially for those without family or kids that they're bringing with them, it shouldn't really matter where it's located geographically or other small details that don't really weigh on the strength of the overall training. I think I should also say something about how to set the rankings up in the computer when you get to the point where you're ready to actually submit them. Because there are a lot of misconceptions around this. So you, the applicant, should rank sites purely based on your preference. Don't try to figure out who might rank you first, and then move them up in your list because of that. Just order the sites based on where you prefer to match, and let the computer do the rest. I really can't emphasize this enough. And make sure you rank all the sites that you would be okay matching with, even if they seem like a long shot or they're very far down in your list.



**Ryan Van Patten** 47:11

And I would also add, don't rank any sites that you would not want to be at, if you don't want to go there. All else being equal, if you'd rather not match as opposed to going to the site, then simply leave them off your rank order list.

**John Bellone** 47:26

Yeah, totally. Well, that was the end of the questions that Taylor gave us. Those were awesome questions, and she's definitely going to do great on the interviewing trail. I don't have any doubt. So, Ryan and I do have a few other pointers that we wanted to get out there. And some things that we wanted to emphasize that we haven't covered yet. So I recommend that you carry with you some extra copies of your CV and essays, and maybe even the abstracts to some of your publications just in case someone asks about them - especially the CVs, that's the most important. Also try not to talk badly about a prior supervisor, or say that, you know, your advisor is taking forever to get your dissertation edits back. This isn't the time to talk about inefficiencies in your grad program. You know, these all might be true, and you can be honest if things weren't as expected in your grad program or if you need to explain why you left a site or why your dissertation defense is delayed, but try to maintain respect for those people and places and be positive. You don't want the person you're talking with to think that this is how you're going to speak about them or their program. It's just good practice in general. This next thing is kind of a funny thing to share. But I found it helpful to prepare for some small talk, like about the weather or sports or something about the city, just to lighten up the mood before or in between interviews. And this will hopefully avoid some of that awkward silence that we all loathe. For people who want to specialize in clinical neuropsych and are interviewing at sites where you'd have to do non-neuropsych rotations, I think it's important to emphasize that although neuropsych is your passion you understand that you can't leave out that clinical part in clinical neuropsychology and that you are happy to hone your general psychology skills because that will make you a better neuropsychologist, which is very true. And this might also be the last chance to really focus on those generalist skills. A couple other things: so if one of your answers to a question is a little off or you stumble a bit, don't let that derail you. The interviewer is probably conducting many interviews that day. It's quite unlikely that they're going to remember that little comment that didn't come off exactly as you had hoped. Really they just want to know that you'll be easy to work with, you'll be able to learn, and that you're well-matched for the site. That's what's most important. The last piece of advice isn't exactly interview related, but, if you haven't already, you should make sure your Facebook and other social media accounts are private, and that there are no lewd or unflattering pictures boldly displayed...





**Ryan Van Patten** 50:36

Uh oh.



**John Bellone** 50:38

..like all over Ryan's Facebook page. [laughs]



**Ryan Van Patten** 50:41

[laughs]



**John Bellone** 50:41

Just in case someone happens to check, just be smart about it.

**Ryan Van Patten** 50:46

That's solid advice, John. I'll just add a couple things which overlap a little bit with what we've covered already, but a few things I want to really emphasize. First is, try to minimize impression management as much as possible. Of course, to some extent, interviews are all about impression management - you want to think about how you're presenting yourself to other people. But, interviews are also a brief trial run of what it might be like to live and work in this place. No one wants to have to pretend to be a different person day in and day out for an entire year - it's stressful and exhausting. You want to be truly happy at this place that you might move to. So be genuine in how you behave. This makes the process more natural for you, which will improve your performance. And it gives you a chance to judge the fit between you - the real you, not a character you created for the role of interviewing - and this site. A second piece that I'll share is, as much as you can, try to be fluid in your ability to move from professional to personal conversation. This is difficult and it can be hard to be flexible in this way. A lot of interviewees feel such stress and anxiety that they can think of nothing else but the upcoming interview questions and, therefore, they're reluctant to engage in small talk. But, as John mentioned, this small talk is important both for you and for the site. It can be naturally relaxing, alleviates anxiety and nerves, to find out that these scary people are really just people. And it shows the site that you're a well-rounded person who would be enjoyable to work with. Okay. So we're going to switch gears for a bit now. We do have some parting words at the end for everyone, but for a couple minutes, we want to answer a few questions we received from friends of ours who are applying to postdocs. As we mentioned at the beginning, there's a lot of overlap in interviewing for any position, particularly internship and postdoc, but there are a few things that are specific to postdocs and fellowships and we want to address those.



So our first question is from my good friend, Kyler Mulhauser. Kyler is interested in knowing, "For those people applying to neuropsychology fellowships, it seems like it could be awkward to interview in a lobby at INS while competing interviews are occurring just a couple of feet away. And this could be an interview with someone who just interviewed me a few minutes ago." John, do you have advice about this?

**John Bellone** 53:23



Yeah, it can be a little bit awkward. But, you know, more and more, interviews are not happening at INS or you're going to be in a separate room away from others. Just try your best to focus and to be conversational. I only had one or two at INS because I ended up going with a site that wasn't part of the match. But I did really like how convenient it was, the ones that I did have at INS. It also felt much more laid back and conversational. I felt like the interviewers didn't have to put on a show like they might have had to if I had taken the time to travel to their site. Okay, these next couple of questions come from our friend Chad Gaudet. He says that, "I've heard candidates are expected to demonstrate a much higher level of domain specific knowledge relative to internship interviews. Did you find that to be the case?"

**Ryan Van Patten** 54:27



Good question. Actually, from what I experienced and from what I've heard from other people, postdoc interviews are less performance-based than internship interviews. This may seem counterintuitive, but postdoc interviews tend to focus more on the fit rather than the applicant's skill level. I think this is because you're further along in your training by the time you start fellowship. You'll have your degree so it's assumed that you know the basics based on your credentials, and they want to move into the next phase which is really looking at the fit between the site and the applicant.

**John Bellone** 55:03



Yeah, I agree. I didn't notice that at all. It was much more conversational and not at all performance-based.

**Ryan Van Patten** 55:11



Okay, Chad's second question, John, I'll pose this to you: "What resources did you most heavily rely on in preparing for interviews? Were these site materials, current postdocs, something else?"

**John Bellone** 55:24



Yeah, yeah, all of those. So I did rely heavily on the site materials. If they had a brochure, or if they emailed things ahead of time, I made sure to look at the site's website. I knew what the rotation and clinic names were. And the names of the supervisors, what the supervisors research interests were, just at least the basics. Keep in mind, too, that you apply and interview to fewer sites, so it's less of a burden than it was for internship interviews. I also looked over my internship materials - like the essays that I had written and that list of questions that I had drawn up and thought through for internship interviews, that was really helpful. I would also suggest asking if you can reach out to at least one current or recent postdoc. It shows an interest in the site on your end, and it also sometimes gives you some insider info.

**Ryan Van Patten** 56:24



Yeah, I found that to be really helpful. I tried to reach out to at least one current fellow for each site. I'll share my thoughts briefly because I have a little bit of a different trajectory than John. I applied to a lot of research-oriented fellowships. In doing that, I focused on reading over the faculty's academic record, including relevant papers and grants, as well as all the written materials describing the fellowship itself. Since the postdoc interviews are more niche and focused, think about the sites that you're applying to and specifically what is valued at those training sites. Then look over the materials that directly pertain to those training experiences.

**John Bellone** 57:05



Okay, last two questions come from our friend Breton Asken. Breton says that, "I think it would be helpful to know what is different about the postdoc interview process compared to internship interviews. We're less than one year removed from that internship process, and I imagine there may be a tendency to assume it's just internship, part two. Some questions that come to mind, for me, are: Should preparations for a postdoc interview emphasize different aspects of career development and trajectory than was the case for internship?"

**Ryan Van Patten** 57:41



Yeah, I think it depends a bit on the person and what programs you're looking for. So, as we've mentioned, fellowship programs are more specialized, whereas internship programs have more standardized guidelines that they all follow. For example, prospective neuropsych fellows often have the ability to spend 100% of their time conducting neuropsych evals at fellowship, whereas on internship there's

still a strong focus on the generalist model, which is appropriate. So, in fellowship, you have more freedom to look for a program that fits your specific interests and career goals. Depending on the programs that you choose to apply to - for example, clinically-oriented versus research - they'll focus on different aspects of professional development. Okay, so Breton had a follow-up question. John, I'll pose this to you again. "Did you feel that it was permissible to play a little more offense than defense for postdoc interviews? For internship, it felt like there was always an emphasis on fit, and finding ways to make it clear that the program was ideal for filling gaps in our training, and little to no expectation that we could really dictate how the internship would be structured, with a few exceptions." So Breton wants to know, "At the postdoc level, should we be comfortable exploring ways the site might accommodate specific goals of ours?"

**John Bellone 59:07**



Yeah, I think so. Although, you know, you should still emphasize the fit as well. But feel free to ask explicitly whether the site can meet your training needs. It's super important that you are getting everything that you need in this last phase of your training. Also, if you're not familiar with the area, but you could see yourself moving there long-term, ask about how they like living there. Ask what the percentage of postdocs that end up getting hired into the system are, or end up getting hired in the nearby practices. It is very, very common for people to stay after a postdoc or to kind of settle down in the area that they did postdoc. So it's really important to ask those questions. Also ask if the site would be open to letting you start up a service or a group, whatever it is that you are looking for I think you should lay that on the table in that interview.

**Ryan Van Patten 1:00:05**



I actually think you can play offense during both internship and fellowship interviews. In postdoc interviews, of course, you have more knowledge and skills to bring to the table, but the bar is also set higher. There will certainly be a lot of talk about fit during postdoc interviews, but it's not just about whether you can fit their system, it's whether their program is a good fit for you and what you bring to the table. So a balanced offense/defense mindset can certainly be helpful.

**John Bellone 1:00:37**



Okay, well, I have just a few parting words for everyone. If you didn't get a lot of interviews or don't match with your top site, try not to get down on yourself for it. There are so many factors that go into the decision on who to take on the sites, and many of those factors have nothing to do with your competence as a psychologist

or worth as a human being. Also I know that this might be a little help right now and it might be a bit cheesy, but keep in mind that things have a way of working out. I don't mean this in a supernatural sense, but we have a knack for adjusting to almost any situation. And we never know the counterfactual - so, what would have happened if things had gone differently? Or if you had made a different decision? You know, for me, maybe if I hadn't matched for internship when I applied, it would have led me to a place that is better than where I am now. I'm quite happy here, but you can never say. Maybe the string of events after would have worked out pretty well - I'll never know. There are actually a couple of instances I can think of that didn't quite go my way at the time, but looking back at them now, I'm glad that they didn't go the way I had wanted them to. So even if you don't get your top spot, or dare I even say, don't match, things will be okay, and possibly even better than if you had gotten your top pick. I realize that this is a very "psychologist" thing to say but, in general, I also want to say that interviewers are aware of what you're going through. They're not trying to trip you up. I found that many of my interviews felt non-evaluative and that the interviewer was genuinely interested in seeing if we would be a good match. Remember that you wouldn't have gotten this far without some level of interviewing skills - getting into grad school, different practica experiences, things like that. And the site wouldn't have invited you to an interview if they didn't think that you weren't a strong candidate. So, like we said before, try to have fun with this process. As crappy as it seems from your side of the fence, Ryan and I actually look back on the time very fondly. Right, Ryan?



**Ryan Van Patten** 1:03:11

Yeah, it was a fun journey.



**John Bellone** 1:03:12

Yeah, I got to travel to a lot of new cities, see friends that live across the country, meet other trainees and neuropsychologists. We mentioned some of this before, but I wanted to reiterate that it was a good experience, overall, looking back on it. It was also kind of exciting knowing all the possibilities that could be ahead of me. So that was what I wanted to share. Also, feel free to email us at [feedback@navneuro.com](mailto:feedback@navneuro.com) if you think of questions that we didn't address today. We'll try to get back to you before your interviews.



**Ryan Van Patten** 1:03:46

Well, that should just about do it. Remember that we'll have several resources related to interviewing on our website at [navneuro.com/08](http://navneuro.com/08). If you enjoyed this episode, please tell your friends and classmates about it. We would be very grateful

if you'd leave us a rating, hopefully all 5 of those stars. You can go to [navneuro.com/iTunes](http://navneuro.com/iTunes) for easy instructions on how to do that. John and I both wish you the best of luck with interviewing and matching. Also, quick announcement: Our next episode to be released in two weeks will be an interview with Dr. Neil Pliskin, the former president of Division 40 of APA, which is the neuropsych division. And we hope that you'll join us next time as we continue to navigate the brain and behavior.



**Exit Music** 1:04:38

**End of Audio** 1:04:38

**Note:**

The Navigating Neuropsychology podcast and all the linked content is intended for general educational purposes only, and does not constitute the practice of psychology or any other professional healthcare advice and services.

No professional relationship is formed between us, John Bellone and Ryan Van Patten, and the listeners of this podcast. The information provided in Navigating Neuropsychology in the materials linked to the podcasts are used at listeners' own risk. Users should always seek appropriate medical and psychological care from the appropriate licensed healthcare provider.