

Presenting Research During Residency Interviews: A Framework for Explaining the *Why, How, What, So What, and Your Role*

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Received July 2, 2026; Accepted for publication August 5, 2026; Published online August 18, 2026, Kans J Med 2026 Jul-Aug; 19:122-124. <https://doi.org/10.17161/kjm.vol19.25851>.

Conflict of Interest Disclosure: Samuel Ofei-Dodoo is the Editor-in-Chief and Managing Editor for *The Kansas Journal of Medicine*.

Acknowledgment: The author thanks Justin Moore, M.D. for his feedback on the document.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most effective ways to present research during a residency interview is to organize your presentation around five simple questions: (1) Why was the study conducted? (2) How was it conducted? (3) What did we find through the study? (4) What are the implications of the findings? (5) What was my role? This approach helps interviewers quickly understand the significance of your work while demonstrating your ability to communicate scientific information clearly. The figure summarizes a framework for presenting research during residency interviews.

Why Was the Study Conducted?

Begin by explaining the clinical or scientific problem that motivated the study. Describe the knowledge gap or unmet need that prompted the research and state the study objective or hypothesis. Keep this section concise and emphasize why the research matters to you, patients, clinicians, or the healthcare system.

Example:

"Previous studies showed inconsistent evidence regarding the relationship between strength training and mental health among U.S. adults. We conducted this study to determine whether meeting national physical activity recommendations was associated with depression, anxiety, and loneliness in a nationally representative sample."

How Was the Study Conducted?

Provide a brief overview of the study design and methodology. Explain the study population, data source, key variables, and analytical approach without overwhelming your audience with excessive technical details. Focus on the methods that are essential for understanding the validity of the findings.

Example:

"We conducted a cross-sectional analysis using nationally representative survey data. We assessed physical activity behaviors



Figure. A Framework for presenting research during residency interviews: Organizing your presentation around the *Why, How, What, So What and Your Role*. Figure created with AI.

using standardized questionnaire items, and we measured mental health outcomes with validated instruments. We used multivariable logistic regression models to evaluate the associations while adjusting for relevant demographic and health-related factors.”¹

What Did You Find Through the Study?

Present the major findings **clearly** and **objectively**. Highlight the results that directly answer the research question using simple language and only the most important statistics. Avoid reading tables or listing every numerical result.

Example:

“We found that adults who met the recommended strength-training guidelines had significantly lower odds of screening positive for depression and experiencing loneliness, even after adjusting for potential confounders. However, meeting aerobic physical activity recommendations alone was not independently associated with these mental health outcomes.”¹

What Are the Implications of the Findings? (The So What?)

Conclude by explaining why the findings are important. Discuss how the results may influence clinical practice, future research, health policy, or patient care. Acknowledge important study limitations up front and suggest logical next steps.

Example:

These findings suggest that strength training may play an important role in promoting mental well-being and should be considered alongside aerobic exercise when counseling patients.”¹

What Was My Role?

Be prepared to clearly describe your specific role in the project. Did you recruit patients, build the REDCap® database, perform the statistical analyses, or write the first draft of the manuscript? Be honest, even if your contribution was modest. For example, you might say, *“I was one of four chart abstractors, and I contributed to writing the discussion section.”*

Do not hesitate to discuss what you learned from the project, the challenges you encountered, what did not go as planned, and what you would do differently in future research. It is also perfectly acceptable to discuss smaller scholarly projects, such as case reports, quality improvement initiatives, or even unpublished chart review projects. Ulti-

mately, interviewers are interested in understanding whether you have the skills, initiative, and perseverance to successfully complete scholarly work during residency.

CONCLUSIONS

Structuring your research presentation around the **why**, **how**, **what**, **so what**, and **your role** provides a logical and engaging framework that is easy for interviewers to follow. This format demonstrates not only your understanding of the research itself but also your ability to critically interpret findings, communicate effectively, and appreciate their relevance to clinical practice; qualities that most residency programs highly value.

REFERENCES

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Keywords: *residency; interviews; research*