

Nailing the First Interview

A Real-World Guide for MSL Candidates

The first interview is more than a screening - it's the start of a relationship. We've supported thousands of MSLs through the early interview process, and one thing is clear: companies remember candidates who are prepared, curious, and genuinely interested in the opportunity. Your background got you in the door, but now it's your voice, tone, and insight that matter.

This guide is built to help you show up sharp, real, and ready to move forward. Here's how to stand out and stand tall in that first conversation.

Before the Call: Set Yourself Up to Succeed

A strong first interview starts well before the phone rings. Here's what preparation should look like:

- Review the company website, product pipeline, recent press, and therapeutic focus
- Understand the territory - know key institutions, networks, or KOLs in the region
- Study your interviewer's background, especially if it's available on LinkedIn or in your prep information
- Prepare notes and questions - and yes, you can (and should) refer to them during the call
- Print out your resume and jot bullet-point reminders in the margins - past wins, skills to emphasize, points to clarify

The Interview Environment (Yes, It Matters)

Minimize distractions. The goal is to sound clear, grounded, and present.

- Choose a quiet space with strong cell reception or landline access
- Skip speakerphone unless it's crystal clear (same with AirPods) - test your audio beforehand
- No background noise, no multitasking - just you and the conversation

What to Communicate (And How)

This first conversation is often 30-45 minutes. Prioritize clarity, relevance, and energy.

- Relate your experience directly to the role - show how you'd add value *now*, not someday
- Don't oversell, and don't undersell - be honest about your scope of experience
- Speak with energy - they can't see your face, so your voice carries the tone
- Be concise, especially if the call is short - know your highlights and don't bury them
- Express interest clearly at the end of the call if you want to move forward

Smart Questions to Ask (and Tailor)

Asking great questions shows that you're invested - and thinking like a future team member.

- How does this team currently measure success in the field?
- What are the top priorities for this position in the first six months?
- How would you describe collaboration across Field Medical and Commercial?
- Can you tell me more about training, onboarding, and support structures?
- What excites you most about the team or the science right now?

What *Not* to Bring Up (Yet)

Some topics are better left for later-stage conversations.

- Salary, bonuses, or benefits
- Vacation policies or relocation assistance
- Negative commentary about a current manager or team

After the Interview: Close the Loop

Don't leave them guessing. A thank-you email shows professionalism and genuine interest.

- Send it within 24 hours - sooner is better
- Personalize it by referencing something you discussed
- Reiterate your interest in moving forward and your alignment with the role
- If you're not sure, run it by your SEMbio contact before sending (that's what we're here for!)

Let's Talk About What Really Matters

At SEMbio, we've seen it all, and we know what turns a good interview into a great one. Here are four non-negotiables we'd like to highlight, and encourage every candidate to keep in mind:

1. Be Honest - Don't Fluff Your Experience

Companies can tell when a candidate is padding their story. There's no need to pretend you've done things you haven't. Focus instead on what you have done and how quickly you've picked things up. Authenticity builds trust, and trust gets people hired.

2. Let Your Personality and Enthusiasm Come Through

People want to work with people they like. You don't have to be extroverted, but you do need to be present, curious, and engaged. A little energy goes a long way, so let them hear that!

3. Showcase Your Intangibles

Yes, the science matters... but so does collaboration, adaptability, emotional intelligence, and professionalism. If you've led through influence, navigated ambiguity, or kept calm under pressure, this is the time to speak to it. Hiring managers want to know what it's like to work with you.

4. Be Ready for Common Questions

They're not trick questions, but they are easy to fumble without preparation:

- Walk me through your background - how did you get here?
- What do you know about our company and why are you interested?
- Why are you considering a move right now?
- How do you build relationships with KOLs?
- Tell me about a time you had to navigate uncertainty or limited access.
- What kind of support do you need from a manager to be successful?