

NEW DDS UNFILTERED

BEFORE YOU ACCEPT THE ASSOCIATE JOB

Interview warning signs and overlooked questions that can prevent expensive surprises

A practical guide for early-career dentists who want to evaluate the opportunity behind the offer - not just the percentage printed beside it.



PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR EARLY-CAREER DENTISTS

NEW DDS UNFILTERED

A GOOD INTERVIEW IS NOT A PROMISE

It is an opportunity to compare what the practice says with what the practice can show. Your goal is not to interrogate the owner. Your goal is to understand the environment in which you will be expected to produce, learn, make decisions, and protect your license.

A high percentage does not repair an empty schedule. A promise of mentorship does not create protected teaching time. A friendly interview does not define how remakes, write-offs, or termination will work.

WARNING SIGNS TO NOTICE

- Compensation is described only as a percentage, without explaining the calculation underneath it.
- The practice is 'very busy,' but no one can explain new-patient flow, assignment, cancellations, or slow days.
- Mentorship means 'you can ask anytime,' but no one can name when, how, or by whom it happens.
- The owner and manager give materially different answers about schedule, support, or expectations.
- Clinical autonomy is praised broadly, while time, materials, labs, or treatment philosophy remain vague.
- You are pressured to decide quickly, discouraged from reviewing the agreement, or told the terms are 'standard.'
- You cannot speak with another associate, observe a full day, or see how the actual workflow functions.
- The culture is described as 'family' while roles, boundaries, accountability, and escalation paths stay undefined.

ASK PAST THE FIRST ANSWER

The most expensive misunderstandings often hide beneath words that sound familiar: busy, mentorship, percentage, autonomy, support. Ask for the operating definition.

SCHEDULE AND OPPORTUNITY

- How many new patients enter the practice in an average month, and how are they assigned?
 - What does a typical associate day look like by procedure mix - not just number of columns?
 - What happens when the schedule is light, repeatedly cancels, or is filled with low-opportunity procedures?
 - Is there a daily guarantee or ramp-up structure? For how long, and under what conditions?
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COMPENSATION AND ADJUSTMENTS

- Is compensation based on production, adjusted production, or collections? What is excluded before my percentage is calculated?
 - How are write-offs, refunds, lab fees, remakes, redos, and uncollected balances handled?
 - When is compensation paid, and will I receive a report that lets me verify the calculation?
 - How are exams, emergency visits, postoperative care, and treatment completed after another dentist handled?
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SUPPORT AND DAILY WORKFLOW

- Will I have a dedicated or shared assistant? What can that person perform legally and competently?
 - Who owns photos, scans, consents, treatment-plan follow-up, room turnover, and chart completion support?
 - What happens when the assistant is absent or the schedule exceeds the available support?
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QUESTIONS THAT REVEAL THE PRACTICE

CLINICAL FIT AND MENTORSHIP

- How are differences in diagnosis or treatment planning discussed?
- What procedures am I expected to perform immediately, and what happens when a case exceeds my experience?
- Is mentorship scheduled, observed, reviewed, or simply available on request?
- Who decides materials, labs, appointment length, and referral thresholds?
- How are complications, remakes, patient complaints, and clinical disagreements handled?

AGREEMENT AND EXIT TERMS

- What is the term, renewal process, and notice required to leave?
- How is employment status classified, and who carries which insurance obligations?
- Are there restrictive covenants, nonsolicitation terms, repayment obligations, or tail-coverage requirements?
- What happens to compensation still pending after departure?
- Which verbal promises will appear in the written agreement?

VERIFY - DO NOT ONLY ASK

- Observe a full working day, including morning setup, handoffs, delays, cancellations, and checkout.
- Speak privately with a current or recent associate when possible.
- Ask for an anonymized sample schedule and a written example of the compensation calculation.
- Request written policies for remakes, redos, write-offs, lab fees, and patient complaints.
- Confirm material promises in the agreement or another written document before relying on them.

Useful rule: A vague answer is not always a red flag. A pattern of vague answers around money, support, clinical responsibility, or exit terms is information.

THE TEN-MINUTE DECISION RECORD

Complete this immediately after the interview - before enthusiasm, fear, or urgency rewrites what happened.

PROMISED	VERIFIED	STILL UNRESOLVED

Before accepting, ask yourself:

Am I responding to evidence about the actual job - or to the relief of finally receiving an offer?

IF THE OFFER IS ALREADY IN FRONT OF YOU

A checklist can identify the questions. Your position still needs context.

The New Grad Reality Audit is private time to examine the actual offer, schedule, compensation, support, and trade-offs before you decide what deserves your yes.

[Explore the Reality Audit ->](#)

Professional disclaimer: This guide is for general educational purposes and is not legal advice. Always review every term of an employment agreement carefully and consult a qualified professional before signing or making decisions based on it.