Medical School Admission Requirements (MSAR™)

Timeline for Application/Admission

This should be considered a general guide for applicants. It is important that an applicant considering medical school consult with his or her prehealth advisor to devise a schedule that works for the individual.

**COLLEGE YEAR 1**

- **Fall semester**
  - Meet prehealth advisor and investigate prehealth advisory program
  - As applicable, ensure that prehealth advisor receives course directors' evaluations
  - Successfully complete first-semester required premedical coursework and other degree requirements

- **Spring semester**
  - Visit "Considering a Career in Medicine" Web site (www.aamc.org/students/considering)
  - Identify summer employment/volunteer medically related opportunities
  - Successfully complete second-semester required premedical coursework and other degree requirements
  - Ensure that prehealth advisor receives course directors' evaluations

**SUMMER 1**

- Complete summer paid/volunteer medically related experience
- Attend summer school, if necessary

**COLLEGE YEAR 2**

- **Fall semester**
  - Check in with prehealth advisor and participate in prehealth activities
  - Investigate available volunteer/paid medically related clinical or research activities
  - Successfully complete first-semester required premedical coursework and other degree requirements
  - Ensure that prehealth advisor receives course directors' evaluations

- **Spring semester**
  - Check in with prehealth advisor and participate in prehealth activities
  - Participate in volunteer/paid medically related clinical or research activities
  - Identify summer employment/volunteer medically related opportunities
  - Successfully complete second-semester required premedical coursework and other degree requirements
  - Ensure that prehealth advisor receives course directors' evaluations

**SUMMER 2**

- Complete summer paid/volunteer medically related experience
- Participate in a summer health careers program, if available
- Attend summer school, if necessary

**COLLEGE YEAR 3**

- **Fall semester**
  - Check in with prehealth advisor and participate in prehealth activities
  - Continue participation in volunteer/paid medically related activities
  - Investigate:
    - Medical education options in MSAR and (www.aamc.org/members/listings/alphaac.htm)
    - Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) Web site (www.aamc.org/mcat)
    - Information about the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) and American Medical College Application Service (AMCAS) fee assistance on the AAMC Fee Assistance Program Web site (www.aamc.org/fap), as appropriate
    - AAMC's "Applying to Medical School" Web site (www.aamc.org/students/applying/start.htm)
    - As applicable, information for students from groups underrepresented in medicine on the AAMC Minorities in Medicine Web site (www.aamc.org/students/minorities/start.htm)
  - Begin preparation for spring MCAT administration
  - Successfully complete first-semester required premedical coursework and other degree requirements
  - Ensure that prehealth advisor receives course directors' evaluations
about someone's personality, etc... However, admissions committees typically have thousands of applicants each year. The quickest way to separate the candidates is to look at the numbers. Further, the *U.S. News and World Report*'s annual ranking of medical schools is based upon objective measurements such as GPA and MCAT. Therefore, you must do all that you can to increase your grades. Use the following bits of advice to boost your scores.

1.1.1 Memorization

Learning vast amounts of material that can be regurgitated on an exam is vitally important for most of the pre-med core classes. Sure, you may never see those organic chemistry reactions again, but for the four times each semester that you have your exams, you'll be required to pump out facts about the various ways that an acid can initiate the polymerization of various plastics. Medical school is even worse for requiring students to memorize verbatim lots of information that they'll never use again. Simply put, the key to success in most classes is to memorize everything you can.¹

I'm sure that when you were younger, you were required to memorize Shakespearian monologues or the capitals of U.S. states. You probably read over each sentence again and again until you could recite Romeo's speeches. The good news is that you have already seen how much material you can memorize. The bad news is that you've been doing it all wrong. The correct way to go about memorizing is by reading the words backwards. Here's a demonstration. Look at this number:

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75713650058
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Cover up everything with a sheet of paper except the last digit, 8. Now slowly say, "eight," aloud three times. Next, slide the paper over one digit.

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¹Memorization is important in organic chemistry and biology because so much of the material is fact-based. The techniques described in this section are worthless for physics classes. Physics is a unique subject where the student only has to memorize a minimum amount of equations; the rest of the course is based upon understanding and applying concepts.
1.1.2 Speed Reading

Another useful tool for learning is speed reading. You’ll need to wade through a lot of material very quickly whenever you read for pre-med classes. Like most people reading this manual, you’re probably reading every single word in succession. Nicholas Schaffzin’s *Reading Smart* is what I used to break this habit. There are plenty of other books on speed reading, but they all teach the same principle. Instead of looking at words as individuals, you should divide each line into three parts, glance at the sections, and then use your peripheral vision to pick up everything.

As an example, Figure 1.1 contains an excerpt from Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*. Read the paragraph as you would normally. Now move to Figure 1.2 and read the section again—this time by glancing at the bullets. At first this technique seems pretty odd. You’ll need some time to adjust to the new style of reading. The more you practice, however, the better you’ll get at speed reading. My own pace has doubled ever since I adapted to this method. Again, I only give a summarized explanation of how speed reading works. I strongly suggest that you pick up a book on the subject and learn from it.

1.1.3 Immediate Review

Whenever you get out of class, *immediately* go somewhere quiet and review everything that the professor covered for the day. You should re-derive all of the equations, rework the ways the molecules attach, rewrite the important definitions that were written on the board, etc … Neurobiologists have discovered that if you repeat the work done in class within one hour of seeing the material, the information will become part of your permanent memory! While I’m sure that after you get done with class, the last thing on your mind is more studying, but trust me when I say that the thirty minutes you spend reworking the lecture now will save you hours later.

One final note: medical schools would rather see a steady increase in GPA over semesters (i.e., 3.2, 3.4, 3.6, …) than a steady decline (i.e., 3.6, 3.4, 3.2, …). The former scenario shows that you are serious about your studies. The latter demonstrates that either the upper-division courses are too difficult for

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you, or that you are getting too involved with your extracurriculars as time goes on.

1.1.4 What to Pick as a Major

A common source of anxiety for many entering freshmen is picking the right major. While the vast majority of pre-meds are in chemistry- or biology-related fields, bear in mind that your major really does not matter. Most people go into these areas because the pre-med requirements make up the required courses for microbiology and biochemistry. Also, applicants try to impress admissions committees with difficult or medically-oriented majors such as biotechnology or health professions. The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) publishes statistics every year about the majors with the highest acceptance rates and highest MCAT scores. As of this writing, while most medical students did chemistry and biology as their undergraduate majors, the fields with the highest acceptance rates were biomedical engineering, physics, philosophy, and music. Some of the lowest acceptance rates are found amongst the biologists, chemists, nurses, and health professionals. The take home message is that your major really does not matter. Pick something that you enjoy. In my case, I did a double major in physics and religion and then went on to graduate school in materials science. I've met nuclear engineers, psychologists, and business majors who are pursuing a medical education. Any unique background will give you a different perspective to practicing as a physician. In the case of the business major, just keep in mind that many doctors do work in private practice—they're business owners!

A word of warning is in store for the liberal arts majors. Please realize that rejections do occur. If you should end up with a stack of thin envelopes at the end of the application season, you will have to move to your backup plan (see Section 4.3). If your major is not marketable, you will have a hard time finding a job during the 1-2 years that you take off to re-apply. While I encourage you to major in whatever interests you, just keep in mind that you must have a backup plan should you not get accepted to medical school.

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5 Available at www.aamc.org

6 Medical schools are reluctant to accept nurses because they see the move as contributing to the nursing shortage.
Other than what is listed here, you are free to take whatever you want to in college. Again you’ll notice that major is irrelevant for getting accepted to medical school so long as you take the courses above. However, with a list this heavy in biology and chemistry classes, you can see why so many pre-meds go into those respective fields.

A note of caution about these classes: I’m sure that many of you have taken Advanced Placement classes in high school. While AP credits are great for getting gen-ed requirements out of the way for college, some medical schools do not accept AP classes as a legitimate fulfillment of the pre-med core courses. In other words, you might be required to take these classes a second time, even if you aced them the go around. In rare instances, some universities will not even recognize courses that you’ve taken at community colleges. Be sure to carefully check the admissions requirements at your preferred schools to make sure that your classes meet their stipulations.

1.2 MCAT (Tied for 1st)

The Medical College Admissions Test is a vitally important exam that just might be the single biggest determining factor as to whether or not you get a second look from an admissions committee. It is offered by the Association of American Medical Colleges, the same organization that controls the application process. To register for the exam, you must use the AAMC’s website. Current registration cost is $200; and you should register as early as possible—about three months before your exam date.\(^7\) The information presented in this section should be considered up-to-date as of May 2005.\(^8\)

1.2.1 Format of the MCAT

The MCAT is offered twice every year during April and again during August as a written test.\(^9\) There are four sections—physical sciences, verbal reasoning, writing, and biological sciences—meaning that you should take classes to prepare you for each section before sitting for the exam. I know that my advice sounds intuitive, but every year there are people who try to teach themselves organic chemistry and then take the test.

\(^7\) Fee reductions are granted for individuals with extreme financial hardships.
\(^8\) Information taken from AAMC website, www.aamc.org.
\(^9\) The MCAT will become entirely computer based by 2007.
The Verbal Reasoning section is comprised of reading passages and accompanying questions about author's intent such as, "Which opinion would the author support?" This part of the MCAT closely resembles the reading sections of the SAT. It does not contain any questions that involve vocabulary, nor does it have any stand-alone questions. This section is based on reading skills only, and not on specific knowledge about a particular topic.

The Writing Sample consists of two 30-minute essay questions. Each question consists of a quotation followed by the same three point outline. You might be given, "If the facts don't fit the theory, change the facts," by Albert Einstein along with the questions, "What does the statement mean, name an example when the statement is incorrect, what would be the deciding factor as to whether or not the statement is valid?" You'll then have 30 minutes to come up with a response that answers the questions in a logical manner with relevant examples. Your paper will be graded by two reviewers who will give you a numerical score that is later converted to a letter. You can only work on one essay at a time. When the first half hour is over, the first essay will be collected and you can only work on the second one. You also cannot begin working on the second essay early if you happen to finish the first one before time is called. Further, the essay must be written in black ink and in English.

The quotations in this section do not test your knowledge of physics, biology, or chemistry. They are usually political or ethical statements that force you to form an opinion and defend it. The reviewers are not interested in which side you choose, just that you can write a coherent essay about a specific belief. Again, the AAMC's website gives a break down of the significance of the scores.

Finally, the Biological Sciences Section is set up like the Physical Sciences. You will be given a series of passages about experiments along with the results. You will then have to answer a series of questions about which chemical was used, what enzyme is regulated, which evolutionary process could lead to the discovery, etc ... This section tests organic chemistry, spectroscopy, ecology, and very basic anatomy, physiology and genetics. This sections will also give you a few stand-alone questions such as, "What is the result of the following SN1 reaction?"
the best ways of helping prepare yourself for the MCAT.)" For the verbal passages, read dense newspapers and magazines such as The Economist and ask yourself, "Why did the author write this piece? What is his background? What famous figures in history would he agree with? What conclusions can I draw from this article?"

For the writing section, you should start keeping a daily journal or diary. Seriously, keep a daily diary in which you write for 30 minutes every day about your thoughts and feelings on any topic. You’ll notice your writing abilities and speed increasing as times goes on. As the exam date approaches, go to a website that specializes in quotations and statements of meaning and write practice essays that follow the outline given on page 1.2.1. Stay away from inspirational statements as they are not good sources for controversy and argumentation.

If you need any more help in preparing for the exam, see the Student Doctor Network’s section on the MCAT at forums.studentdoctor.net.

A good free online resource for studying for the MCAT is Dr. Alfa Diallo’s MCAT Pearls. This website has tons of information for getting ready for the exam.

### 1.3 Letters of Recommendation (3rd)

After admissions committees have had a chance to review your scores, they will then look to your letters of recommendation to get a feel for you as a person. While the vast majority of letters are positive, writers give clear indications as to how well they know an applicant. Therefore, you are required to get to know your professors outside of class so that they will be able to comment on your strengths. Go to their office hours every week. I don’t care if you are acing the class and have no difficulties with the subject. You should go to office hours so often that your teachers begin waiting for your arrival. You should also get a chance to know them. Ask them about research, family, opportunities on campus. You’ll be amazed at what a valuable resource your profs are. However, I cannot stress this point enough, *do not suck up to your professors*. They have been around long enough and have written far

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12Some free content available at www.economist.com
14For example, www.quotationspage.com
15Available at www.mcatpearls.com
that takes care of the letter. Some will even have a collection service where all of the writers submit their letters to a single repository. Ask around to find out which method your school uses.

As an added bonus, some professors will ask you to write the letter of recommendation. They then sign and mail it off. If you are told to write your own letter, make sure that everything is true and known to the professor. Otherwise, your writer may use your actions to show that you are delusional or dishonest. Also, according to the Education and Family Privacy Act of 1974, you are legally allowed to read anything that a school has in your application folder, including your letters of recommendation. The law does grant a provision that allows students to waive their right to access. In other words, you'll be given a form that says something to the effect of, "I waive my right to read this letter." Given that most writers are going to be uncomfortable with your reading their essays, I suggest that you waive your right. You professors will be able to write more honest opinions about you.

1.4 Research (Tied for 4th)

This section kicks off the explanation of the three most important extracurriculars that you can pursue while in college. Although your scores will grab the attention of an admissions committee, you'll fall flat if you cannot show schools that you are interested in medicine outside of the classroom. In every interview I've ever had, I was always asked, "Tell me about your research. Tell me about your volunteering. How do you know you want to become a doctor? Do you have any experience in health care?" You should follow the advice presented in these sections to the letter to gain the approval of medical schools. I start off the discussion of extracurriculars with a statement about research.

Given that the progress of medicine relies on science, all doctors are expected to have scientific leanings. Further, the majority of admission committee members are made up of professors, who themselves are usually researchers. Therefore, you should get involved with a lab to see how the information from your organic chemistry and genetics classes is actually used. You do not necessarily have to do something medically related. You can study botany, astronomy, oceanography, you name it. Whatever interests, give it a try. Just get into a lab and try to become an integrated team member.
You are not expected to save the world or commit to a thousand hours each semester. Simply find something you enjoy doing and spend one afternoon a week doing it. Many pre-meds volunteer in hospitals thinking that they will gain some kind of clinical work experience. I can’t speak for all hospitals, but most of them do not support their volunteers very well. If you were to join some of the hospitals in my area, your job would consist of handing out lollipops, filing paper work, and pushing wheel chairs. These hospitals would not even teach you CPR, much less let you touch a patient unless it’s a discharged person going home. If you want to gain clinical experience, you will have to get a medical or nursing license of some kind.

If you are still stuck on where to volunteer, the United Way generally has a directory of your area’s organizations and can point you in the right direction.

1.6 Clinical Experience (Tied for 4th)

Finally, the last thing that will show medical schools that you are interested in becoming a doctor is if you gain some kind of experience working with patients. Again, most pre-meds are duped into thinking that volunteering in a hospital will give them insight into the difficulties of becoming a physician. An easier way to get this kind of knowledge is to shadow a doctor regularly. Many primary care physicians are willing to pass the torch by allowing undergraduates to follow them around the office as they conduct physicals and consultations. You’re on your own to find a doctor to shadow. A good place to look, however, would be to ask your own physician for advice.

If you want to gain real, genuine clinical experience, you’re going to have to bite the bullet and become licensed. Either become a certified nursing assistant, medical assistant, or an EMT and get direct full-time hands-on experience. The upshot is that you’ll be paid for your time. The bad news is that you cannot count working as a CNA or EMT as volunteering. You would have to join a second organization to fulfill the volunteering requirements. Also, given that every state has different requirements with respect to licensing, you are again on your own to find the laws regarding training, testing, and employment. With the advent of the Internet, however, finding the necessary information is much easier.

Whatever you do, make sure that you have proof that you really want to be a doctor. The information presented in these last few sections is the best
Alpha Lambda Delta typically require that students have a 3.5 GPA and pay $25 in initiation fees. These societies are usually viewed as resume-padding organizations. Your name on the Dean’s List every semester is an easy enough indication that your grades are good. I suggest that you save your money and try to invest in more worth while endeavors. There are, however, some honors that you can receive that will make you stand out. Graduating magna cum laude or summa cum laude usually requires that students complete a research project and write a thesis. Departmental and university-furnished awards are generally based upon the recommendation of your professors and carry some weight that shows what your teachers think of you. Finally, Phi Beta Kappa is a prestigious organization in which membership is limited to students with amazing grades and leadership skills. It is the only honor society that I would recommend joining.

If you disagree with me and feel that you absolutely have to join an honor society, at least pick a reputable one. Many of the phony organizations have low standards of admissions and require large initiation fees. I can’t list their names here for fear of slander, but I’m sure that you know the ones. Legitimate organizations will belong to either the Association of College Honor Societies\textsuperscript{18} or the Professional Fraternity Association\textsuperscript{19}. Be sure to check with these groups before filling out an application.

Now that you are the Best Applicant, it’s time to apply to medical school.

\textsuperscript{18}Available at \url{www.achsnatl.org}

\textsuperscript{19}Available at \url{www.profraternity.org}
occupations, where you have attended college, any institutional actions taken against you, any felony convictions, if you consider yourself disadvantaged or have faced any hardships, and what languages you speak.

Next, you will have to enter (by hand) every class you have ever taken in college. This part of the application is the most tedious because AMCAS’ webpage is horribly slow about responding to changes you enter. You will list every course and grade you have ever received. You will also be required to mail your official transcripts to AAMC for verification once you are finished. AMCAS will then take your grades and compute a GPA for you. Don’t be alarmed if this GPA is different than your university’s. AMCAS tries to level the playing field between applicants so that one querry college with a unique grading style does not promote or penalize its students. Along with the overall GPA, you will be given a science and non-science GPA, based on your science and humanities/social studies courses, respectively. The science GPA is considered more important to admissions committees for the reason that humanities courses are often very easy, giving liberal arts majors an unfair advantage over science and engineering students.

You should complete the grades section as quickly as possible. Since AMCAS must receive your transcripts and verify your scores, some time will pass before you can complete your application. Therefore, finish the coursework section first and mail your transcripts immediately.

After you finish entering the grades, you’ll then be asked to enter up to 15 extracurriculars, publications, awards, and employment experiences you have encountered since entering college. Each entry will need to contain information about the number of hours every week that you spent on the project, as well as a short, 1,325 character (about 150 words) description of the activity and its impact on you. Appendix B contains a workbook to help you keep your activities organized.

The following message was posted by a member of an admissions committee to The Student Doctor Network regarding the activities section:

We want both brevity and meaningful information. Brevity because we have to read too many applications and wish to be fair to all. Meaningful information because we can’t interview everyone who is “academically qualified” and so the depth and extent of extra-curricular activities are very important—as has been said before, the more we can find out, the better equipped we are to make decisions.

This is the sort of abbreviated “map” I give to the applicants who ask
The Application Process

Finally, and what some people would consider most importantly, you will write your personal statement. It will be your one and only chance to show an admissions committee who you really are. AMCAS puts a limit of 5,300 characters (about 900 words) on the essay. In this short amount of space you will be required to show why you want to become a doctor and why a medical school should admit you.

The deadline for the AMCAS’ submission is Oct 15. I strongly recommend that you get you application in earlier than this date.

AACOMAS

Osteopathic schools are linked through the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM).\(^2\) Like the AAMC, it offers a centralized application service—this time called AACOM’s Application Service (AACOMAS). Students file one electronic application and then AACOMAS verifies and distributes the information to each of the colleges designated by the applicant. The service costs $155 to register and to submit your application to the first school, with $25–$35 extra charged per additional school.\(^3\)

The procedure for filling out the AACOMAS closely resembles the AMCAS process that I described above. The only difference is that the personal statement is limited to 3000 characters (including spaces). The AACOM recommends that applicants mention any summer study programs—such as a Health Careers Opportunity Program—that they might have participated in.

TMDAS

The University of Texas system, although consisting of entirely allopathic colleges, uses a different application service from AMCAS called the Texas Medical & Dental Schools Application Service (TMDAS).\(^4\) If you want to apply to a public medical school in Texas, you must use the TMDAS. The procedure for applying is similar to that of the AMCAS.

\(^2\)Available at [https://aacomasaacom.org](https://aacomasaacom.org)

\(^3\)the AACOMAS uses a tiered charging system that gets cheaper with the more universities you designate.

\(^4\)Available at [www.utsystem.edu/tmdas](http://www.utsystem.edu/tmdas)
• Stay away from controversial topics such as religion or abortion. First, you don’t want to say that you’re a fundamentalist Christian only to have your reader be a staunch atheist. You put him in a bad position by forcing him to make a decision on your personal religious beliefs, rather than your ability to become a doctor.

Example Personal Statement

The best way to learn how to write a personal statement is by example. Several of the books for sale online have real essays written by past medical students. Below is my own personal statement:

I was a junior in a Memphis, Tennessee, high school when I started developing chest pains. Thinking the cause to be heartburn, I went to a physician’s office in the nearby city of Bartlett. When I told the doctor I had severe heartburn, he immediately responded with a high-priced prescription to Prilosec.

Weeks went by and still the pain lingered. More doctors, more expensive drugs, still no results. Eventually I went to MIDTOWN Memphis, certainly not the poorest district of town, but not the nicest, either. When I told Dr. Michael I was suffering from chest pain, he did something no one else had tried—he started asking questions. He asked me about school and about my family life. After a while he informed me that my problems were not due to acid reflux disease, but anxiety. He stepped out for a few minutes only to return with a paper bag—not for breathing, but one filled with numerous sample packets of the drug Buspar. He said, “I don’t want you to pay for something unless we know it works.” After this meeting I realized I wanted to be just like him. I had always entertained the idea of becoming a doctor, but like most childhood attractions, my interest with medicine came and went as the years passed. However, I now want nothing more than to be a physician; and my short life and experiences prepared me for the challenges ahead.

I arrived at college wanting to major in physics because its equations describe an order to the world. Though the subject does a great job of answering “how?” it cannot give us “why?” Therefore, during my junior year I decided to take on a double major in religion to gain a deeper understanding of people and their faith as an important component of their lives. The two fields strikingly resemble modern health care: while pharmaceutical medicines can provide a mild push in the right direction, a patient’s positive attitude is a
nology. Already my work with aerogels has earned some recognition: I won my school’s Engineering Fair by making a fluorescent aerogel fountain and was featured on the College of Engineering highlight video. My research will hopefully continue after graduation. This exciting field will produce results which can promote industrial advancement and enhance the quality of the environment.

Whether in the classroom, the lab, or the clinical setting, I have had many extraordinary experiences over the past five years. I hope that these skills will make me a better medical student and hopefully even better doctor. I think that Dr. Michael would be proud.

List of Commonly Misspelled Words

As much as I would like to think that the future doctors of America are great communicators, I’ve come to realize that people still make careless mistakes when spelling common words. Below is a list of the most frequently misspelled words that I often come across on personal statements, essays, and emails. Don’t think that your word processor’s spell checker is going to catch every mistake that you make. You still need to check your own work to make sure that you correctly used the words “their,” “there,” and “they’re.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>accept</td>
<td>To take ownership. Contrast with “except.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>affect</td>
<td>A verb: to cause or bring about. Contrast with “effect.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a lot</td>
<td>Two words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>definite</td>
<td>There is no letter ‘a’ in definite.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>effect</td>
<td>A noun that denotes a result. Contrast with “affect.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>except</td>
<td>An exclusion. Contrast with “accept.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fulfill</td>
<td>Start with one ‘l,’ end with two.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>independent</td>
<td>There is no ‘a’ in this word, either.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>its</td>
<td>Ownership. Example: the dog is wagging its tail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it’s</td>
<td>Contraction of “it is.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>principal</td>
<td>Foremost importance, such as principal investigator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>principle</td>
<td>Noun: a rule.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relevant</td>
<td>Now we have an ‘a.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>their</td>
<td>Plural possessive. Example: I visited my parents at their house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>there</td>
<td>Reference to an object or place. Also may lead a sentence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they’re</td>
<td>Contraction of “they are.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Application Process

schools that you designate. I have no experience with InterFolio and therefore cannot comment on its efficacy.

The second half of the application, the essays, can be quite time-consuming. Every school will ask unique questions with little redundancy between universities. Most colleges ask, “Tell us something unique about you,” “Why do you want to come here?” or “Where do you see yourself in ten years?” When I applied to medical school, some of the more interesting questions I received were

- Describe your most memorable travel experience (375 character limit)
- For both mother and father, give the following: a) Where they were raised, b) 4-5 traits that would describe him/her to a stranger, c) Traits you get from him/her, d) Your rapport with him/her, e) His/her hobbies or interests
- Outside of the classroom, (i.e., encounters with academic dishonesty, etc.) describe a difficult moral or ethical situation that you have encountered and how you dealt with it. What personal strengths, values, and beliefs helped you deal with or meet this challenge? (1000 character limit)
- The scientific and popular news media have heralded several “life-extending” and “life-altering” technologies—among which are embryonic stem-cell research, cloning, genetic intervention, and organ transplantation. While such technologies represent remarkable developments and applications of our emerging scientific understanding, these technologies raise critical issues with respect to the ethics, morality and economics of these technologies. Identify some of the critical issues evoked by such technologies and address what potential moral, theological, and ethical questions might arise from the decisions made regarding developing and using these technologies in the care of patients. (1000 character limit)
- Autobiography: Write a brief autobiography. As completely and precisely as possible, give a picture of yourself, your family, and events you consider important to you. In doing so, identify the values that are of greatest importance to you. If you have completed your undergraduate education, please comment on what you have done or have been doing since graduation. (2000 word limit)
- Hand-write an essay on any topic.

Just as there are numerous essay topics, there are just as many ways
tips to get a good portrait:

- Avoid trying to come off cute or medical-looking (i.e., no scrubs and no Glamour Shots' feather boas).
- If you want to get a hair cut, do so at least one week before taking your pictures so that you can settle into your new hair style.
- Choose a white background with good lighting—a wall in your house will work, as will a foam poster board.
- Make sure that any lights are positioned in front or nearly in front of you. Backlight, caused by standing with your back to a lamp or the sun, will cause a lens flare.
- Use a camera with a zoom lens. Have your photographer stand 5–10 feet and zoom in to take your picture. In doing so, you will minimize the size of your nose.
- Edit the results in your favorite picture editing software and crop the photograph to the required size.
- Print your picture on high quality glossy paper and mail it off.

3.3 Interviews

The last step in the admissions process is the interview. An invitation to interview is very exciting because so few people get to this stage. At most schools, 1/3 of interviewees get accepted. While this final part is important, do not be deluded into thinking that the interview is the be all and end all. In fact, many schools already have their minds made up whether to accept you or waitlist you. As one interviewer said, "We just want to make sure you speak in complete sentences and don't drool." If anything, the interview only helps people who are borderline and can do a phenomenal enough job to get onto the acceptance list.

All medical schools require a site visit for the interview.\(^8\) Visiting the campus is beneficial so that you can see exactly what to look forward to over the next four years. While the reviews posted on the Student Doctor Network give an idea of what to expect, the best way to get a feel for the university is by taking a tour and seeing first hand what is available.

\(^8\)Mayo does a phone interview. If you pass this stage, then you must do a site visit and a second interview.
3.3.2 The Interview Day

Since every school has a different setup, I cannot tell you what to expect everywhere. Some universities have one interview scheduled with a faculty member, others give additional interviews with current 4th-year students. Sometimes the interviewer sits on the admissions committee and wields a lot of power. Other times the interviewer is a volunteer who writes another letter of recommendation. At some schools, you will be interviewed with a group of two other students; or you may even face a panel of interviewers. Whatever happens, when you meet your interviewers, you should shake hands with your thumb pointed towards the ceiling, shaking firmly but not bone-crushingly hard. You should sit straight up in your chair with your hands on your lap and feet flat on the floor, make eye contact the whole time, and match the mood and speaking rate of your interviewer. If he/she is serious, you should be serious, too. If he/she is funny, feel free to tell jokes.

Some schools are open-file, meaning that the interviewer has access to your application and, in some cases, even your letters of recommendation. Open-file interviews typically focus on clarifying questions about your AMCAS. Closed-file interviews—where the interviewer knows nothing but your name—can be frustrating because many of the questions are already answered in the AMCAS and secondary; the day gets lost on information that can be checked before your arrival. During a closed-file interview, students usually repeat the material that they have already supplied to the university.

The timing of interviews is also not standard: some are 30 minutes long—barely enough time to scratch the surface—while others are a full hour, giving the interviewer ample time to learn enough about you to make an informed decision about your personality.

Interview questions cover a wide range of topics. In the United States, companies cannot ask potential employees any questions that are not directly related to job function. For instance, no manager can ask about marital status, religious leanings, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ethical dilemmas, etc.... Medical schools, on the other hand, are not your future employers. They are not bound by labor laws regarding the appropriateness of certain questions. You might get some pretty intense questions. Women especially have had to endure questions such as, “Do you plan to have children? Do you think that you can balance a family and running a medical practice at the same time?” If you are a minority, you might be asked about your feelings of affirmative action and racism. Despite the multitude of possible scenarios, I can
The Application Process

- How would you describe a typical entering class (backgrounds, ages)?
- How much flexibility is there in the coursework and in the timing of
  the courses?
- What kind of representation do students have on school committees?
- What kinds of clinical opportunities are available during the first two
  years?
- Can you describe the patient population that I will have exposure to?
- What do you wish you had known prior to coming to this school?
- Have any students left this university (transferred, dropped out)? And
  if so, for what reason?
- How can students evaluate the faculty? How responsive is the admin-
  istration to student feedback?
- How prepared are students for away rotations? What do program di-
  rectors at other hospitals say?

Attire

When you go to your interview you should be properly dressed. The two
things to keep in mind are (1) the medical profession is one of the most
conservative groups in existence. You should dress conservatively, no matter
what your religious or political beliefs are. (2) You want to be remembered
for what you say, not what you wear. You should feel like a penguin—every
one looks the same—when you go to your interview.

Men should wear a navy blue, brown, grey, or black suit. All clothes
should be pressed. Your tie should be either a solid color or have stripes—no
cartoon characters here. Please wear an undershirt under your dress shirt;
no one wants to see your nipples. And make sure that the undershirt is
plain white; any logos might show through a white dress shirt. Do not wear
earrings, flashy jewelry, or heavy cologne—leave the Axe body spray at home!
You should be clean-shaven or, if you have a beard, make sure that everything
is neatly trimmed. Also, as much as you would hate to start dressing like
your father, you’re going to have to buy old man socks (black or brown dress
socks) and avoid wearing white athletic socks with your suit.

For women, wear a business suit. While a skirt is preferred, a pants suit
is fine. If you do wear a skirt, it should be long enough to hang down to (or
extend past) your knees. Also avoid flashy jewelry, heavy makeup, or heavy
perfume. You should wear panty hose, as uncomfortable as they are. And,
realizing that you will have to do a lot of walking, wear comfortable pumps
Appendix B

Workbook

When you apply to medical school, filling out the primary application will become difficult as you struggle to remember every activity that you ever participated in—especially if you are a non-traditional applicant and you volunteered years ago as a freshman in college. The following pages represent a workbook that you can begin filling out now. Whenever you join or leave an extracurricular organization, make an addition to the workbook to keep for your records. You can then reference these sheets as the time to apply approaches. Think of it as a mini-diary.
## Research

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Examples of Leadership

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Teaching Opportunities

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Description:
Awards and Honors

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Publications

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Possible Themes for the Personal Statement