

So you didn't get into medical school ... now what?

1. Regroup

Finding oneself without an offer after a grueling (and expensive!) application process can generate a host of feelings: exhaustion, frustration, anger, hurt, and self-doubt, among many others. Allow yourself to take some time to process your feelings. Recognize that every year, approximately 60% of applicants are not offered seats—also note that reapplicants constitute over 25% of every applicant pool¹. This means that medical schools are not rejecting you outright but instead saying they want to see more growth in your application before saying yes. So, see a rejection as a “not yet,” and focus on building a stronger application towards success. Yes, the mountain is steep. But it is not unscalable.

2. Reflect

When you have had time to recover and are able to direct a critical eye to your application, you are ready to self-assess. The first step is to take a long hard look at all aspects of your candidacy. What were the weaknesses in your applications? Here are some areas to improve that advisors have seen in their past advisees as they considered lack of success in this process and suggestions for improvement:

GPA

Consider your overall and BCPM GPA, your course choices, the number of advanced sciences you took, the trajectory of your grades. Use the [AAMC Medical School Admissions Requirements database](#), [AAMC FACTS](#) and [AACOM data reports](#), and information provided by individual schools to compare your overall and science GPA to the metrics of accepted/matriculated students. If your GPA is not aligned with your schools of interest, engaging in additional coursework—full-time in a post-baccalaureate or master's degree program or part-time while working—would be a good step. Your end goal should be to present improved transcripts with advanced science courses that provide evidence of your readiness for the medical school curriculum. Thirty to forty-five credits in science at a high level of achievement is often recommended. Consult with an advisor to devise a strategy for taking classes.

MCAT

If your grades were competitive but your MCAT overall or section score(s) need improvement, consider changing how you prepare for your next MCAT. The AAMC “[How I Prepared for the MCAT Exam](#)” stories showcase many different types of students and many different preparation strategies. Exhaustion can be a factor in MCAT performance as well. Be sure to incorporate full-length exams into your practice to build up your stamina. Finally, allow enough preparation time: spending at least a few months studying with ample practice problems and practice full-length exams to gauge your progress is recommended.

Health Care Experience

The admissions dean of a large medical school on the west coast often says she wants candidates to have seen “the good, the bad, and the ugly” of American health care. This means going beyond shadowing to gain hands-on patient care experience, or spending time in environments where you see the consequences of health care disparities. If your grades and MCAT can get you to the interview stage but you can't convince the admissions committee that your pursuit of medicine as a career is grounded in first-hand learning experiences, you will

¹ <https://www.aamc.org/data-reports/students-residents/interactive-data/2020-facts-applicants-and-matriculants-data>

not stand out compared to other interviewees who have taken the time to build a robust portfolio of experiences and the anecdotes and lessons learned from them. Consider reaching beyond hospitals to low-income and free clinics, hospice centers, residential care facilities, shelters, soup kitchens, to deepen your understanding. Discuss ideas with an advisor.

Life experience

Have you spent your entire young adult life to date in school, with little opportunity to interact meaningfully with people from different walks of life? Remember that as a health care professional you will be working closely with and caring for people from all races, ethnicities, faiths, sexual orientations, gender identities, political points of view, etc. What have you done to expand your experience and understanding? This, too, could be an area of fruitful growth for you during your time before you reapply.

Finding a premed advisor

Many colleges and universities will work with their alumni, but if you don't have access to an advisor, the NAAHP has a volunteer corps ready to work with you!

Learn more:

www.naahp.org/student-resources/find-an-advisor

AAMC Core Competencies for Entering Medical Students & AACOM's Qualities of a Successful DO Students

As you look at your previous application, consider the ways in which you showed admissions committees that you demonstrated the [AAMC core competencies for entering medical students](#) and/or [AACOM's qualities of a successful DO student](#). You may have known a cocurricular helped you develop your teamwork skills, but did you make that clear in how you presented that activity? Did your choice of endeavors teach you how to engage with people with diverse perspectives (and why that's important)? Are there certain competencies or qualities that you could not show that you had developed in your application? Focus on ways to develop in these areas as you prepare for a future application. Review the [AAMC Anatomy of an Applicant Bios](#) for examples of real medical students (including some reapplicants!) and the ways that they demonstrated the competencies and were accepted to medical school.

Written components of the application

Beyond gaining health care and life experiences, you must have something to say about them through the personal comments essay and the work/activities section on the primary applications (AMCAS/ AACOMAS), the secondary application essays, and correspondence with the schools throughout the process. In each component, you want your voice to come through—present yourself thoughtfully and authentically and provide the most comprehensive picture of who you are as a future doctor (and as a person!) to the admissions committee.

Your personal comments essay is your opportunity to discuss your motivation for medicine and your growth since your last application. We recommend you run your draft by a prehealth advisor and at least one friend who knows you well. The advisor can provide feedback on content and help you avoid clichés or other common pitfalls that they've seen in their past experience; the friend can tell you whether the essay sounds like your voice. You may also check to see if you have access to your institution's writing center for checks on grammar, usage, and style.

The "work/activities" section of the application is often an under-used opportunity. Go beyond job descriptions to address your learning from the experiences. Job titles may be familiar to admissions committees, but how you describe your experiences within those jobs will be individual to you. Use this opportunity to demonstrate your powers of observation and reflection. Note that as a reapplicant, the activities should also reflect your growth during the time between applications.

Secondaries are the opportunity to personalize your responses to the specific school to which you're applying. They are also a place where many applicants are starting to feel writing fatigue and it can be tempting to skip optional questions or copy and paste a previously used response. With rare exceptions, leave no questions blank and cater your answers to each specific school. Work quickly, but also be ready to submit secondary responses in a timely manner (ideally no longer than two weeks)—this can be seen as a sign of your professionalism and enthusiasm about a school. Note that this is a good reason to select schools carefully, so you are not applying to too many!

Continued communication with schools via letters of interest (to schools who accept them), thank you notes after interviews, and other correspondence should also be taken seriously and used to convey your interest in and fit for a school in a professional manner.

Timing of application

Early primary application verification, completion of secondary applications, availability of MCAT scores, and file completion at medical schools plays a role in your chances of admission. As a reapplicant, there will also be more of an expectation that you know how the system works and how to present yourself professionally in the application cycle—which includes having your materials in order in a timely manner.

School choice: Explore all of your options!

Be sure to review your list of institutions applied to with your advisor, both for length and for appropriateness of match. Have well-grounded reasons for including every school on your list; don't skimp on the research! Dive into the schools' webpages, connect with people who have attended the program, listen to [webinars](#) and [podcasts](#), and read [blog posts](#) that help you differentiate between schools. Consider visiting the schools on your list through their open houses (online or in person). Use the [MSAR](#) and the [Choose DO Explorer](#) to verify that schools are likely to consider you based on your GPA, MCAT scores, and state residency.

If you only applied to MD programs in your most recent application cycle, have you considered osteopathic and podiatric medical schools? If not, why not? If a career as a physician is a passion for you, why are you ruling out thousands of seats? Is your reason based on knowledge or are you basing it on hearsay? Maybe you should gather more information.

3. Respond

Once you have taken the time to consider potential areas of weakness in your candidacy (ideally verified or considered with the guidance of advisors or mentors, or even medical school admissions offices that offer counseling for potential reapplicants), it's time to devise a plan that will allow you to address them. Be as specific as you can. Know that it will probably take more than a few months to make these changes. Jumping into a reapplication too quickly may lead to another round of financial and emotional investment without seeing the desired result. Rushing to reapply can also be a signal of impatience, unwillingness to address areas of concern, or lack of self-awareness, whereas taking your time can be a sign to admissions committees of maturity, growth, and capacity for improvement—all qualities that they want to see in future physicians.

4. Reapply

By the time that you're ready to reapply, you should be confident that you are a better candidate than the first time around, you should have the evidence to back up that confidence, and you should be *absolutely* sure this is right for you! The application process and the educational process are both huge investments of time,

emotion, and money. Also know that some schools limit the total number of times you can apply. Consult your advisor! Plan strategically! And then go in knowing you're giving it your best shot—good luck!

Partnering with your advisor

A prehealth advisor can be an invaluable resource as you navigate the reapplication process. They have worked with other applicants in your shoes in the past and can provide their perspectives based on this history. Here are some tips for working with a prehealth advisor:

1. Plan in advance: most advising offices work with a high volume of students. Be ready to schedule an appointment that may be a few weeks in the future.
2. Help you advisor get to know you: in advance of your appointment, provide a copy of your resume, a brief narrative of what you've been doing since your last meeting, and outline some of the questions that you have in advance so your advisor can be more prepared for your meeting.
3. Do some of your self-reflection first: don't go into a meeting expecting your advisor to tell you what you need to change before a potential next application. Spend some time thinking through the points in this handout and be ready to share your ideas of what may have hindered your success and how you plan to move forward.
4. Advisors don't want you to do things just because they tell you to—they want you to understand why they recommend the things that they do. If you aren't clear on the reasoning behind their advice, don't be afraid to ask (politely)!
5. Be ready with questions. Here are a few ideas:
 - What's the most important aspect of my candidacy to improve before I reapply?
 - Do you think, based on what I've done this past year and what I can accomplish between now and June, that my candidacy will be strong enough to reapply and reach my goals?
 - Can you help me develop a month by month plan of what to do between now and when I submit my application?
 - Are there any past students whom you could connect me with who may have had similar experiences?

Resources

This handout was developed based on feedback from prehealth advisors and other resources, including:

- Cummings, G., et. al. (2017 March). Considerations for the Medical School Reapplicant, *The Advisor*, 37 (1).
- University of North Carolina School of Medicine, Advice for Reapplicants: www.med.unc.edu/admit/requirements/reapplicants/
- University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, Advice for Reapplicants: admissions.med.miami.edu/md-programs/general-md/reapplicants

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