

# THE ULTIMATE GUIDE

*Applying to Medical School*



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

PRE-MED REQUIREMENTS.....	4
TAKING THE MCAT.....	5
PREPPING YOUR RESUME.....	6
RECOMMENDATION LETTERS.....	7
APPLICATION ESSAYS.....	8
ACING YOUR INTERVIEW.....	10



# PRE-MED REQUIREMENTS

---

So you want to be a doctor. At least you know you're ready to start applying to medical school. Awesome. Now what?

Here's the first step: relax. While getting a degree in any medical field is no joke, don't stress too much over it yet. Applying is a complex process on its own, so take it one step at a time. Next, before worrying about which specialty you'll want to practice, setting your heart on a med school, or even studying your life away for the MCAT, focus on the pre-medical requirements: math, science, and physics. You'll need a strong foundation in all the basic math and science elements (and were not just talking about the periodic table).

Although a lot of pre-med students choose undergraduate majors like Biology and Chemistry, don't panic if you didn't. The important thing is that you complete the pre-requisite classes necessary for the medical schools you apply to. In general, these classes include: General Biology, Anatomy and Physiology, Molecular and Cellular Biology, Microbiology, General Chemistry, Organic Chemistry, and/or Biochemistry, as well as Physics, Pre-Calculus, Calculus, and/or Statistics.

Be sure to check the exact course load required by each school, though, because these can vary.

Here at AUA, we require General Biology (I&II), General Biology Lab (I&II), General Chemistry (I&II), General Chemistry Lab (I&II), Organic Chemistry (I&II), Organic Chemistry Lab (I&II), Physics I, Physics Lab I, English I, and Mathematics (either Calculus or Statistics). Any advanced courses in biochemistry, anatomy and physiology, genetics, and microbiology will definitely develop a strong application.

Lastly, if you've gotten your pre-reqs taken care of, the most important thing you can do is maintain your grades throughout your undergrad years. A high GPA is crucial to landing a place in the medical school of your choice, and keep in mind—a competitive GPA will be around a 3.7-3.8.

In 2012, 636,309 students applied to medical schools in the United States. That only led to 19,517 matriculations. The numbers are daunting, and the application process won't be easy, but like we said: take it one step at a time.

# TAKING THE MCAT

---

It's time to face the notorious Medical College Admission Test. The MCAT is required by almost every medical institute to be considered for admission. Needless to say, it is not your average college exam.

The Association of American Medical Colleges designed the test to gauge medical school applicants' knowledge of basic science concepts, as well as their skills in problem-solving, critical thinking, and writing. There are four scored sections: physical sciences (physics and general chemistry), verbal reasoning, biological sciences (biology and organic chemistry), and writing samples.

Because testing sometimes assesses test-taking skills over actual knowledge, we here at American University of Antigua don't believe MCAT scores should be a determining factor in accepting a med school candidate. However, in order to comply with governmental regulations, starting in February 2013, MCAT scores will be required prior to registration for the second semester from accepted students.

So how should you prepare for the impending challenge? One of the best ways to practice is to take any of the practice provided online. You can also purchase books with practice exams and find updated versions of actual, retired

MCAT exams that are available for order through the AAMC. Take a practice test once a week, preferably on a Saturday morning like the actual test, to get in the swing of things. Once you have taken a few of these, you'll be able to assess the areas that you need to improve on.

The suggested amount of time to spend on preparing for the MCAT is about three months. If that timeframe feels overwhelming, start by drawing up a study plan. Break down the process by text section to keep yourself on track and organized. Schedule study sessions and group practice. Most importantly, stick with your plan and stay on track!

Spend time reviewing old class notes and tests, but don't focus on memorizing facts or formulas. More often than not, the test will present you with information and expect you to use the information in answering questions, much like old reading comprehension tests. That's why humanities students actually score better on the biological section of the MCAT than biology majors.

Did you bomb the exam? You're not doomed, and your medical career isn't over. If you're applying to AUA, don't be discouraged if your scores aren't top notch yet, but keep working at it!

# PREPPING YOUR RESUME

---

Finding the perfect way to showcase your individual talents to each university you apply to can be challenging. A current resume is just one of the application materials American University of Antigua requires, so we'll set you up with a few essential tips.

Start with a strong bold heading of your name and contact information. After that, it should follow this general guideline:

- *Education*
- *Include your earned degrees (associates, bachelors, etc.), name of universities, dates conferred, and any advanced degrees or other educational accomplishments.*
- *Professional/Teaching Experience*  
*Include any internship, shadowing, or residencies you may have completed prior to applying to medical school. Demonstrating leadership will be crucial here.*
- *Licenses, Certifications, and Accreditations*
- *Awards and Honors*
- *Don't be afraid to brag! Set yourself apart if you can.*
- *Publications/Presentations*
- *If you have enough of each for two separate sections, that's a good sign.*
- *Pre-Med Societies*

- *Are you a member of Alpha Epsilon Delta? To the top with you!*
- *Volunteer Service*
- *Extracurricular Activities*

This is your chance to show you're as well-rounded as you claim. Be human, but consider including anything that will make you stand out (like software knowledge, etc.)

Of course, there are many ways you can construct and design your resume using this information, just always make sure the information is clear, concise, and current. Johns Hopkins has an example of what a good med school resume template would look like. Every program will have different requirements and different things they're looking for, so tailor each resume to each school's needs.

Once you have a draft, try to take an objective look at your resume. Are there gaps? Was everything included done so with a distinct purpose? Go back to your personal statement if you're stuck and add in anything else if necessary to make your resume tell your story.

**Remember: when applying for medical school, your resume is the first writing sample they will see so make it flawless.**

# RECOMMENDATION LETTERS

---

Recommendations can make or break you in the application process. Having a strong set of recommendations to back up a stellar resume and killer grades is essential to landing the medical school of your dreams.

At American University of Antigua, we require two letters of recommendation. One of these should be from an academic professional like a professor or advisor and the second should be a professional reference like an employer or medical colleague who you know will be able to give you a great recommendation.

When you look for bad recommendations, there are several mistakes medical school applicants make when seeking out recs that can be just as harmful as a bad recommendation. One of the most common mistakes is choosing a recommendation from someone you don't know well, but who has a prestigious title so it will still "look good." It's better to get a letter from someone who knows your personality and understands what motivates you to pursue a career in medicine. Choose a professor who taught a small seminar course, or a mentor who saw you work in a research or clinical volunteer setting.

Another unfortunately common mistake is selecting recommenders who can't relevantly answer the questions about your candidacy as a student. Dr. Tim Wu, who served on the SUNY Downstate College of Medicine admissions committee, says this: "The recommenders who can help you get a job are not the same recommenders who can help you get into medical school." While you want to have a career in medicine eventually this isn't a job application. Find someone who can really speak to your academic strength and commitment.

The last one walks a fine line. While you want a recommender who knows you well, you also don't want to choose someone who knows you so well they're not able to be objective. Perhaps a family friend is the Chief of Medicine at a local hospital. People like these can be great character references; however, in a professional letter, if you haven't worked with them in a professional context, it might not do you any good. Just because they've known you since you were in diapers doesn't necessarily show an admissions board anything.

Focus on creating a well-rounded set of recommendations. Use them strategically to show your assets and diversity across the board.

# APPLICATION ESSAYS

You might have dominated math and science courses, but composing a well-written personal statement could be the most challenging part of the medical school application process. If writing isn't your strong suit, think about it as a formula.

**Here are a few simple tips to make your essay stand out:**

**1** Make it unique. That may seem easier said than done, but your essay will be one of thousands. Don't use clichés. While "I want to be a doctor because I like helping people" might be true for you, it brings nothing to the table about who you are and what makes you unique. Instead, find ways to show your desire to help others through anecdotes, whether it's describing a philanthropic event you attended or a community project you've worked on.

**2** Don't ignore your weaknesses, address them. While you don't want to elaborate them in great detail, confront them head on and spin them into positives. For example, you received poor grades your first quarter, explain what you did to become a better student. If you ignore these deficiencies, admissions officers will dwell on why you did and it could adversely affect your chances of earning an acceptance letter.

**3** Don't be afraid to change up your sentence structure. Good writing feels natural, nothing should be forced. By using good transitions, you will progress your argument organically. The best writing uses varieties of sentence length and style throughout the paragraphs. See this paragraph for example. There are numerous ways to create a diverse sentence: using a colon, a semicolon, or a comma can do wonders to a basic paragraph. To find out how your essay flows, read it aloud.

**4** Have others read it. After proofreading your work for hours, you're bound to lose perspective. Ask your friends, family, and peers to help you evaluate your work and make sure you're staying on track. Ask your proofreaders the following: does the essay have a central theme, are there any clichés, is it repetitious, and what about the essay is memorable. Don't feel limited by these questions. Look at your work and see if there are any problems you're having a difficulty overcoming.

**5** Most importantly: revise, revise, and revise some more. No one creates a perfect first draft. The key to creating a great essay is to polish the writing until it shines. That means reading it over, making corrections, having a peer edit it, and repeat. Sending in a rough first draft will show. EssayEdge.com offers free help throughout your entire essay writing process and can provide step-by-step guides if you need extra support.

At AUA, we require a personal statement from all applicants. If you've followed all of the steps above, it shouldn't be too daunting! While you write, ask yourself this: why do you want to become a physician?

# ACING YOUR INTERVIEW

---

It should be obvious but an interview at a medical school is just like interviewing for a job. You have to impress your interviewer enough for them to recommend you to be accepted. As opposed to U.S. medical schools, American University of Antigua does not have a limited number of spaces available. However, it does base its admissions decisions heavily on how an applicant conducts himself or herself during and after the interview.

*Here are some tips to help you when you interview:*

- **DRESS PROFESSIONALLY**

In life, you make only one first impression. Before you say hello, the interviewer will already size you up based on what you're wearing. You may look good in a t-shirt and shorts but professional dress will make you look better to your interviewer. Dress business professional (i.e. suit and tie for men). It shows to the interviewer that you're willing to take medical school seriously. Also, make sure that whatever you are wearing has been cleaned. Wearing something riddled with stains and wrinkles makes it look like you don't care.

- **SHOW UP ON TIME**

As Woody Allen once stated, 90% of life is showing up. This may seem relatively simple but it's important. Plan so you'll be able to show up ready and on time. Use Google Maps to give you an approximate time frame between leaving your front door and entering the school's offices. There may be factors that make you late that you cannot prevent such as traffic or a last-minute emergency. In case that happens, make sure to call or email your interviewer ahead of time to inform them you will be late. Most of the time, they will try to accommodate you.

- **SELL YOURSELF**

You have to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that, with the proper training, you can be an exceptional, compassionate physician. You should

feel confident that you made it this far. There are thousands of applicants but only a select few are chosen to be interviewed. Yes, the interview could be the difference between being accepted or rejected but don't let that hang over you. Instead, focus on why you would be a great physician. Have a story prepared about what made you interested in becoming a physician in the first place. Dwelling on anything that could be potentially negative about yourself will only make matters worse.

- **WHAT TO ASK**

When it comes for your time to ask questions instead of answer them, it's best to have a few prepared. If you have no questions ready, it may look bad to your interviewer. You can generate questions by doing simple research. Look at the school's website and find some things you are not clear on. Look at other medical schools too and ask how we differentiate from the rest. Some of these questions should also be about what the interviewer has specifically talked about during the interview. There's no harm in asking about something you are not completely sure of. In fact, it can help. It shows that you are engaged with the interview and aren't just asking generic questions.

- **SEND A THANK YOU NOTE**

A simple post-interview thank you note is vital to remain a candidate. Besides showing you are still interested in that school, it's proper post-interview etiquette. Interviewers will more likely remember a candidate who sent a note than didn't. Like your questions, your note shouldn't be completely generic. Mention things you discussed in the interview or didn't get to. Ask any lingering questions you have. Just make sure not to go on too long. Keep it to two paragraphs max.