

GUIDE THREE

Applying to Health Professions School

Johns Hopkins University



Office of Pre-Professional Programs and Advising
<http://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/preprofadvising/>

Overview of Guide Three

In *Guide Three: Applying to Health Professions School*, we introduce important details, timelines, and jargon for Johns Hopkins University students and alumni who intend to apply medical and dental schools.

In this guide, reference to “medical school” refers to allopathic (MD), osteopathic (DO), physician-scientist (MD-PhD or DO-PhD), and dental (DDS, DMD) schools and programs. Details of the services we provide to applicants to other health professions schools, including veterinary medicine, nursing, optometry, pharmacy, and others, are explained on the Pre-Professional Office website.

Advice for successfully navigating the medical or dental school application process *after* the submission of your primary application is covered in ***Guide Four: The Ongoing Application Process***.

Overview of Applying to Health Professions School

The Office of Pre-Professional Programs and Advising offers advice, support, and feedback throughout the application process. The majority of medical and dental school applicants from Johns Hopkins University participate in the **Health Professions Committee Process**. Our goal as an office is to assist you throughout the application process.

→**Please note: The Johns Hopkins University Health Professions Committee Process and the ensuing steps are subject to change.**

What Can I Expect of My Pre-Professional Advisors?

The primary role of a Pre-Professional advisor is to advise and support you throughout the application process. Part of this responsibility, however, requires us to provide a realistic assessment of your readiness as an applicant. Our goal is to help you become the strongest applicant possible and, for some of you, that might mean slowing down the process by delaying your application to a future cycle. It is important that you be flexible about your timeline and we will encourage you to do so. Ultimately, however, the final decision of when you apply is all yours.

We will support you as an applicant by providing up-to-date and relevant information, assisting you with presenting the strongest application possible, and guiding you throughout the process.

Introduction: What Medical/Dental Schools Seek in Applicants

It is essential that you realistically assess your grades and test scores, the depth and relevance of your experiences, and evidence of the [competencies](#) necessary to succeed in the medical profession. You must also be able to articulate specific reasons why you want to be a doctor. As you review the components of an effective application, it is important that you critically assess your strengths and weaknesses so that you are applying from a position of relative strength. For these reasons, it is vital that you reflect upon what makes you a unique or compelling applicant. As a reminder, schools consider several factors, including **academic achievement, performance on standardized tests, research and/or scholarly inquiry, medically-related experience with direct patient interaction, community service, extra-curricular activities, letters of evaluation, and evidence of competencies (see below).**

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| Competencies | <p>Competencies are the skills, knowledge, and abilities medical schools seek in applicants. The competencies outlined by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) are as follows:</p> <p>Interpersonal Competencies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service Orientation • Social Skills • Cultural Competence • Teamwork • Oral Communication <p>Intrapersonal Competencies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethical Responsibility to Self and Others • Reliability and Dependability • Resilience and Adaptability • Capacity for Improvement <p>Thinking and Reasoning Competencies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical Thinking • Quantitative Reasoning • Scientific Inquiry • Written Communication <p>Science Competencies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Living Systems • Human Behavior |
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For Dental Applicants: The field of dentistry requires a high degree of dedication and social consciousness. A good way to help you decide whether dentistry is right for you is to spend time visiting different dental offices. This will provide you an opportunity to observe the work of a dentist as well as discuss what a career in dentistry involves. In addition, it is helpful to attend an information session at a dental school or to take the initiative to visit as a prospective student. A dentist must be able to communicate effectively, develop rapport with others, and demonstrate similar personal competencies as outlined above. Dental applicants are advised to also be concerned with community issues and demonstrate a record of sustained service to underserved populations.

Application Timeline

There are several possible timeframes for applying to medical school, and each of them depends on the strength of your candidacy at the time of your application.

- Applying at the end of your third year of college. For many applicants, this means applying without a bridge year.
- Applying at the end of your fourth year of college. For many applicants, this means applying with one bridge year.
- Applying as an alumnus. For many applicants, this means applying after one or more years of work/other experiences post college.

Regardless of when you apply to medical or dental school, the general timeline is as follows:

In the fall semester before you apply:

- Begin thinking about a potential list of recommenders.
- Attend the Pre-Professional Advising “Applicant Information Session” (typically held in November).

Late fall to early winter:

- Complete and submit the Health Professions Application (HPA) through Survey Monkey Apply, along with all required relevant documents requested.

Spring:

- Draft your personal statement.
- Begin asking recommenders for letters of recommendation.
- Start building school list.
- Attend Pre-Professional Advising applicant programming.
- Take the MCAT/DAT if you have not yet done so.

Early May:

- Primary applications open; begin completing your AMCAS, AACOMAS, TMDSAS and/or AADSAS application(s).
- Complete and submit your primary application as soon as possible.

Early June:

- Complete and submit your primary application as soon as possible.
- Letters of evaluation are due by mid-June.

June through early August:

- The Pre-Professional Office submits Committee Letters and individual letters of evaluation to primary application services (AMCAS, AACOMAS, AADSAS, TMDSAS).

- Complete secondary applications. Try to return them as soon as possible. The sooner you submit your secondary applications, the better your chance of securing earlier interviews.

Early September:

- Interviews at medical and dental schools begin.

Mid-October:

- **October 1:** The Johns Hopkins University Health Professions Process and application cycle closes. This is the last day we submit Committee Letters and individual letters of evaluation to primary application services (AMCAS, AACOMAS, AADSAS, TMDSAS).
- First acceptance decisions for schools with rolling admissions are released.

Late February/early March of the following year:

- Interviews end.

March through May of the following year:

- Applicants must narrow down acceptances; follow each medical or dental school's guidelines for choosing the school to which you plan to matriculate.

Standardized Tests

Medical and dental schools expect applicants to take standardized tests relevant to their professions. We suggest you aim to take the MCAT or DAT **once**, after you have allowed for ample study time.



The Medical College Admission Test (MCAT)

MCAT information can be found at the [Association of American Medical Colleges](http://www.aamc.org) website.

The Dental Admission Test (DAT)

DAT information can be found at the [American Dental Association](http://www.aada.org) website.

Fee waivers are available for both the MCAT and DAT and each of the centralized application services. Any applicant who qualifies for fee assistance automatically qualifies for a Health Professions Application fee waiver through the Pre-Professional Advising office.

To learn more about FAP, go to: <http://www.aamc.org/students/applying/fap/>

When should I take the MCAT or DAT?

Ideally, you should have your MCAT or DAT score *prior* to applying to medical or dental school. If you do not plan to take a bridge year, optimal timing can be late in the summer between

sophomore and junior year. If you plan to take a bridge year, optimal timing can be late in the summer between junior and senior year. Some applicants choose to take the January test the year that they are applying. In any case, we recommend you take the MCAT no later than **April** of the year you plan to submit your application to medical school.

If you are taking an MCAT/DAT in May, June, or July, we recommend you submit your primary application *before* receiving your test scores. You should indicate the date of your future MCAT/DAT, but AMCAS and AADSAS will still verify and process your primary application without an MCAT/DAT score. This way, your secondary applications will not be delayed; however, schools will not review your application until your test scores, secondary applications, and letters of evaluation are received. **Please follow the AMCAS/AADSAS instruction manual regarding any changes to your MCAT/DAT test dates** (e.g., if you decide NOT to take the MCAT/DAT at the date you designated).

What is the best way to prepare for the MCAT?

Both self-study and preparation courses are effective, though each has pros and cons. A test prep course provides you with copious review materials and practice exams, as well as a structured classroom and study schedule. However, the monetary price can be quite costly. Self-study is less expensive, and many good review books and practice exams are available at bookstores and through online booksellers. You may also acquire study materials and practice exams through [AAMC MCAT Prep-Online Only Bundle](#). Note that the self-study approach requires a tremendous amount of self-discipline. If you opt for self-study, consider forming a study group, making sure your study partners are self-motivated, reliable, and dedicated. For more information about study resources, please refer to the Pre-Professional [website](#).

How/when are my MCAT or DAT scores sent to schools?

For the MCAT, scores are automatically released to AMCAS. You may release your scores to non-AMCAS schools via the MCAT Testing History (THx) System. Scores generally are processed and sent within 30 days of your test date. For dental schools, AADSAS will obtain your official DAT scores from the American Dental Association's Testing Services Center and import them directly into your application. If you take the DAT after your AADSAS application has been sent to your designated dental schools, an updated application reflecting your DAT scores will be forwarded to schools as soon as the scores are received. At the time that you register for the DAT, you should opt to have your DAT score forwarded to as many dental schools as you select, at no cost. If you do not, you will be charged a fee for reports requested and forwarded at a later date.

When is it appropriate to retake the MCAT or the DAT?

It is in your best interest to take the MCAT or DAT **once**. However, if your score is below average for medical or dental schools of interest to you, then you should consider retaking the test. If you have a solid overall score but one section is significantly lower than the others, speak with a Pre-Professional advisor about whether it makes sense to retake the exam and strategies to improve in that section.

Schools vary in how they consider multiple test scores; regardless, you can assume they will see every score from all tests you have taken. Only retake the test when you have truly assessed what you need to improve, have spent time on additional preparation, and have proven to yourself in practice tests that you can earn a higher score. This means that, in most cases, you do not want to immediately repeat the test, and you may be in a position that requires you to postpone your application.

If I have a very high MCAT or DAT score but average grades at Hopkins, will the medical or dental schools place less weight on my grades?

An applicant should never assume that a high MCAT or DAT score offsets average or poor grades. Standardized test scores are only one metric that health professions schools evaluate. Remember that your academic record and MCAT or DAT score are just one of many components necessary for a strong and competitive medical or dental school application.

What are the Implications of a Gap/Bridge Year?

There are several reasons to delay your application until senior year or beyond. In fact, more than 80% of JHU applicants to medical and dental programs take at least one bridge year. Many Hopkins alumni choose to pursue research, earn a master's degree, or engage in opportunities such as AmeriCorps, Teach for America, City Year, a Fulbright, etc. **Medical schools value the maturity and life experience gained after graduation**, and choosing a bridge year may ultimately make you a more successful applicant.

You should also consider meeting with a [Life Design Educator](#) for ideas on how to spend a bridge year.



No matter when you choose to apply, you will be able to use the advising services of our office. However, please be mindful of our [alumni policy](#), which outlines the term limits for receiving a Committee Letter.

When Should You Apply?

You should apply to medical or dental school when your application is strong and competitive and you have a reasonable chance to be invited for interviews. All applicants are encouraged to apply only once to medical or other health professions school, so it is important to think carefully about the timing of your application. Here are qualities to consider for a successful application:

- **Your MCAT or DAT scores are competitive.** Consult the [*Medical School Admissions Requirements \(MSAR\)*](#) to review MCAT score ranges for your schools of interest. If your overall MCAT score falls below the 10th percentile for a majority of your schools of interest, we strongly encourage you to retake the MCAT and, for most of you, this means delaying your application for at least one year. Pre-dental applicants should consult the [*ADEA Official Guide to Dental School*](#) to reference DAT score ranges for individual dental schools.
- **Your cumulative and/or BCPM GPAs are competitive.** Consult the *MSAR* to reference the cumulative GPA and BCPM GPA ranges for your schools of interest. If your overall cumulative or BCPM GPA falls below the 10th percentile for a majority of your schools of interest, you should delay applying, taking the time to enhance your academic record. Applying as a senior allows your senior year grades to be included in your application, and academic record enhancer post-bac programs may help strengthen your academic profile before applying to medical school.
- **Your letters of evaluation (LOEs) are strong.** It is critical you secure LOEs that are strong and are an asset to your overall application. This is no easy task at Johns Hopkins; with large lecture classes and team-taught courses, it can be difficult to get to know your professors. Classes during the junior and senior year are often smaller, and if you put your mind to it, you will certainly be able to develop the type of rapport with your professors and others that will result in strong evaluations.
- **You have exposure to clinical medicine or patient interaction.** If you have participated in activities that allow you to serve the community and build the interpersonal skills you need to be a physician, you are demonstrating to schools that you have a realistic understanding of what you're about to undertake. If you would like to develop a plan for obtaining significant clinical and/or volunteer experiences, please consult a Pre-Professional Advisor.
- **You can answer the basic question "Why do you want to be a doctor (or dentist)?"** Articulating an answer to this question often means that you have had exposure to the medical profession, meaningful work, and volunteer experience, and have challenged yourself to reflect upon those experiences. You will be asked this question repeatedly



throughout the application process. Take the time to practice articulating your motivations for pursuing a career in medicine and be prepared to provide *specific* reasons why you have chosen this path.

- **You are able to balance competing priorities.** You have to balance writing essays, gathering letters of evaluations, studying for standardized tests, researching schools, as well as facing the rest of the challenges of real life. Make sure that you are able to dedicate sufficient time to preparing your application now and to writing secondary essays over the summer.

The JHU Committee Process

The **Committee Process** refers to the procedures required by Johns Hopkins University and the Office of Pre-Professional Programs and Advising for applicants to obtain a Committee Letter.

Applicant Responsibilities

In one word, **professionalism** is required through every stage of the application process. In order to do our work as professionally as possible, we rely on you to uphold the following responsibilities:

- **Stay organized.** Create electronic and paper files for your application materials.
- **Meet deadlines.** Missing a deadline could mean you have to delay your application for a whole year. Set up your calendar now. Use the tools or devices at your disposal to help you remember the timelines and deadlines related to applying for your target schools.
- **Read and save emails.** You will receive a good number of emails from the Pre-Professional Advising office during this time. It is important to read them carefully and save them for future reference.
- **Address all involved in the application process in a professional manner.** Pay special attention to how you introduce yourself, acknowledge others, and follow-up on a correspondence or interaction.
- **Establish good verbal and non-verbal communication.** Make sure you establish eye contact, shake hands, verbally express your gratitude, and send thank you notes when appropriate.

Overview of Health Professions Committee Process

The Health Professions Committee Process refers to the steps required for obtaining a Committee Letter from Johns Hopkins University. Applicants to medical or dental school must complete the Health Professions Application (HPA), providing information that is vital to the writing of the Committee Letter. The individual letters of evaluation collected from faculty, supervisors, research PIs, etc., are attached to the Committee Letter and that entire packet is uploaded to the medical and dental schools of your choosing.

There are some key aspects to the Committee Process that are helpful for you to know:

Health Professions Application (HPA): The first step in the Committee Process is the completion of the Health Professions Application (HPA). The HPA is the online application to obtain a Johns Hopkins Committee Letter. It collects demographic information, academic record, and co-curricular experiences (research, clinical experience, community service, employment, etc.). The HPA mirrors the AMCAS application in that much of the information you are asked to provide is very similar to the information you will enter into the AMCAS/AACOMAS/AADSAS/TMDSAS applications.



Survey Monkey Apply (SMA) : The Pre-Professional Advising Office utilizes a Survey Monkey Apply application for students to submit the HPA and all relevant application materials throughout the process. Specific information about Survey Monkey Apply will be sent in November via email to juniors, seniors, and alumni.

Committee Letter: The information collected in the HPA is referenced in the writing of your Johns Hopkins Committee Letter. The Committee Letter introduces you as an applicant, shares what makes you a compelling applicant, discusses what has shaped your interest in medicine/dentistry, and highlights your competencies. It is not a letter of recommendation, nor is it a rating or ranking of you as an applicant.

Letters of Recommendation: Medical and dental schools value the perspectives of people who have observed your work and can speak to your abilities and personality. An overview of how to obtain letters of rec is reviewed in [Guide Two: Letters of Recommendation](#) on the Pre-Professional Advising website.

→Please note: The Johns Hopkins University Health Professions Committee Process and the aforementioned steps are subject to change.

The Medical/Dental School Application Process

Two important steps of the medical school admissions process are submission of primary (AMCAS, AACOMAS, AADSAS) and secondary (school-specific) applications.

Primary Application Services

There are four primary centralized application services for medical and dental school:

- 1) American Medical College Application Service (AMCAS)
- 2) American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine Application Service (AACOMAS)
- 3) Associated American Dental Schools Application Service (AADSAS)
- 4) Texas Medical and Dental Schools Application Services (TMDSAS)



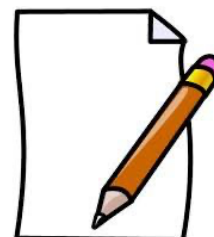
It's imperative to submit your primary applications as early as possible, rather than later in the application cycle.

Does it really matter when I submit my primary application?

Yes. Pre-Professional advisors often talk about the benefits of applying early in the application school cycle. We define “early” as submitting a primary application in late May or early June; this allows you to receive secondary applications by July with the goal of finishing those applications by early or mid-August, which in turn increases your chances for a fall interview. Each school has its own application deadline, but we hope that you submit your materials well before those dates.

Personal Statement

Please refer to the Pre-Professional [website](#) for information and resources to help you write an effective personal statement. When applying, Pre-Professional Advising will provide additional resources to applicants.



Resources

- The [*Medical School Admission Requirements \(MSAR\)*](#) is the primary resource for students applying to allopathic medical schools and includes information on application procedures and deadlines, MCAT and GPA data, medical school class profiles, costs and financial aid packages, and MD-PhD and other combined degrees.
- Prospective applicants and students interested in learning about osteopathic medical schools should review the [*Choose DO Explorer*](#) and the *Student Guide to Osteopathic Medical Colleges*, which are supplied by AACOM.
- Dental applicants are encouraged to buy the [*ADEA Official Guide to Dental Schools*](#). Prospective applicants will learn general information about each school's entrance requirements, application and selection processes, dental curriculum, special programs and services, costs, and financial aid.

In Closing

If you are completing pre-medical or pre-dental requirements, the planning process requires precision, adaptability, and flexibility. Each student's path is unique, and the one you set for yourself should take into account your ability to succeed in multiple science courses, engage in robust experiences, build upon skills, and choose a timeline that is yours alone. Most of all, we encourage you to seek input from your Pre-Professional Advisor to devise a plan that is appropriate for your emerging professional goals.

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