

FIRST EDITION

By Alexander Takshyn

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HOW TO

GET INTO DENTAL SCHOOL

A DENTAL SCHOOL ADMISSIONS GUIDE

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Introduction

I designed this guide to give you everything I have learned before, during, and after the application process for dental school. I have included all the information I wish I had known in the beginning that would have made me a stronger and more competitive applicant. My goal is to strengthen your application and allow you to put your best foot forward in pursuing dentistry. This guide is designed to make you a competitive applicant at the top-tier and Ivy League level, allowing you to get accepted across the board and into your top choice. Remember to take my advice with a grain of salt, as a one size fits all approach does not work for every situation. There are many exceptions, and I will do my best to cover as many variables as possible. As this is the first edition of this guide, I will try to revise it where needed, as well as update the information. Without further ado, I want to wish you the best of luck going forward—though there is very little luck involved in the process. A strong work ethic and determination is what will get you into your dream dental school.





Pre-Application

Now that you have made the ambitious decision of choosing to pursue dentistry, there are several things you need to know moving forward. The application process involves assessing the individual as a whole. This means the admissions committee will be assessing your academics, extra-curricular activities, volunteering, shadowing, research, work experience, etc. when choosing candidates for interviews and making final acceptance decisions. The point I’m trying to make is that dental school admissions follow a holistic approach, and many factors are taken into consideration. Therefore, it is important to begin preparing to apply early in your undergrad years if not sooner, because this will give you time to build up your portfolio and make you a stronger candidate.

ACADEMICS

I will begin my discussion of the pre-application process with academics. The average first-year enrollee into dental school in 2017 had a mean cumulative GPA of 3.54 and a mean science GPA of 3.52. As you can tell, these are well above average GPAs at your institution and will take a lot of effort to attain. The key is to figure out what study habits work for you and then stick to them. Personally, I preferred to either read the textbook or listen to lecture recordings on a multiplied speed. This saved me a ton of time, and I was able to move on to other classes as I found lectures to be slow paced. A few bad marks here and there won’t affect your application greatly. However, there is an exception: most dental schools want to see at least a letter grade of C or higher in the prerequisite courses and oftentimes a minimum grade of a B is recommended—meaning get at least a B. Also, it is important to keep in mind your GPA trends: an upward trend in GPA is very favorable, especially if you take upper level science courses and do well in them. This will show the admissions committee that you can handle a heavy course load and that you learn from your shortcomings.

The general prerequisite courses dental schools require are:

- Full year of general chemistry with lab
- Full year of introductory biology with lab
- Full year of introductory physics with lab
- Full year of organic chemistry with lab
- Full year of introductory English

In addition to the general prerequisites each school may have additional requirements; however, each individual dental school may have its own set of requirements*. The following are some of the additional required courses at certain dental schools, and I recommend that you take them regardless of school requirements.

- 1 semester of biochemistry
- 1 semester of microbiology
- 1 semester of anatomy
- 1 semester of physiology

*The AADSAS portal will have the necessary prerequisite information for each school when you begin applying to specific programs.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

When you begin your post-secondary education, take advantage of all the valuable resources you have available to you. Join some clubs, take part in athletics, and attend events which can build your social network. Building valuable connections is extremely important; you never know who knows who, and what they can offer you in the future. Participating in extracurricular activities (ECs) will not only allow you to have a more enjoyable experience at university but they will enhance your application. You want to show the admissions committee that you’re more than just an educated individual, and you have commitments outside of academics. If you join a club in your freshman year and then become the vice president or president later on, this would be a very favorable EC to add to your application. One of the worst things you can do as an aspiring dental student is having excellent academics and nothing else; you want to be a complete applicant. ECs are a great way to strengthen your application. For example, if you have a sub-par GPA, but stellar ECs, this will work in your favor. I have seen many students who had average or below average stats get into some top schools because they were heavily involved in many ECs.

VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering is a must on your application. It shows that you are a humanitarian and the type of candidate dental schools want. Every dental school stresses their community involvement and expects their students to be a part of the community. Ideally, you want to have several hundred hours of volunteer experience. You can volunteer at the dental office, the homeless shelter, food bank or even tutor your classmates. It’s a great way to build your character and demonstrate a commitment to helping others.

SHADOWING

Shadowing is also an essential part of your application. How do you know you want to be a dentist if you haven’t observed their work? Shadowing will allow you to get a first person view of a dentist’s role and work environment. Each school has their own minimum requirement of shadowing hours. However, I recommend that you have at least 120 hours to cover almost every school’s requirement. There are a couple of schools who have larger requirements such as Augusta which requires 200 hours of dental shadowing—keep that in mind. Also, try to shadow at a few different dental clinics to gain a better understanding of how different offices operate and the different specialties within dentistry. Most people shadow a general dentist and 1-2 specialists. However, shadowing for a long period of time at a single office is not a deal breaker—just be ready to explain your reasoning if asked during an interview. As a side note, the majority of your shadowing should be done with a general dentist.

RESEARCH

Having research will greatly improve your chances of getting into an Ivy League or a top tier school. It is looked upon highly at these schools because they are heavily focused on research. Start talking with some of your professors and try to gain at least some research experience, as it is a great addition to your application. Although I personally didn’t do any research, I feel if I had, I would have been a more competitive applicant. Research is becoming more expected of dental school applicants these days.

WORK EXPERIENCE

This is another valuable experience to have. When dental schools see that you maintained a strong GPA, volunteered, shadowed, and participated in school clubs, having work experience will show responsibility and let the admissions committee know that you are a mature applicant with real-world experience.

COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. How many experiences should I have on my AADSAS application?

Quality over quantity, However, I would say aim for 8-10 different experiences. Ideally you should be diverse but quite involved in whatever you're putting down.

2. How do I enter my hours?

On the AADSAS portal page they ask you the average weekly hours and the number of weeks that you participated in the experience. For example, let's say you completed 48 hours of dental shadowing over 12 weeks. This will yield 4 hours of shadowing a week. Does it matter if you did 8 hours of shadowing 1 week and none the next? No, as long as the total is correct. Just be sure to explain this if asked during an interview. Also, be sure you remind every person you use a reference on your application of what you're putting down, so all records match.

3. Can I combine my dental volunteer and dental shadowing hours?

Generally speaking, yes. Oftentimes volunteering and shadowing will entail the same roles. However, if your shadowing experience was different from volunteering, you should separate your hours. Be sure to always let the dentist you shadow know the amount of hours you're putting to what experience.



Writing the Dental Admissions Test

ABOUT THE DAT

Writing the DAT will probably be unlike any exam you have taken so far. It is a roughly 5 hour and 15-minute multiple choice exam, including tutorial and survey. The American DAT* is composed of a series of subjects, including Biology (Bio), General Chemistry (GC), Organic Chemistry (OC), Reading Comprehension (RC), Quantitative Reasoning (QR), and Perceptual Ability (PAT). The science section will last 90 minutes and contains 40 biology, 30 general chemistry, and 30 organic chemistry questions, which will comprise your Total Science (TS) score on the DAT. The Quantitative Reasoning section will contain 40 questions and last 45 minutes, the Reading Comprehension section will contain 50 questions and last 60 minutes, and finally the Perceptual Ability section will contain 90 questions and last for 60 minutes. Your Academic Average (AA) is calculated using your Bio, GC, OC, QR, and RC scores and will be your most important mark. The Perceptual Ability score is not counted towards your academic average and is generally regarded as one of the least viewed sections by the admissions committee. However, do not ignore it; it is still a part of your score.

Traditionally it has been said that you want to aim for a 21+ AA on the DAT to be a very competitive applicant. However, the stats are changing and a 22+ AA is what you should aim for to be a competitive applicant across the spectrum of schools. This doesn't mean that you won't get in with a 19 AA; just understand that you're not as competitive in this aspect of your application compared to the other applicants. (The average DAT score in 2017 for a first time enrollee was a 20 AA). Moreover, a high score doesn't necessarily mean you will receive an interview or an acceptance from a particular school and vice versa. This is because dental schools take a holistic approach and consider your whole application.

That being said, you want to set aside a significant amount of time to prepare for the DAT. I can't give you a definitive answer to exactly how much time you need, as each person is different. However, based upon my research, most people would study for around 1.5-2 months before taking the test. It is important to book your test date at least 3-4 weeks in advance to ensure you have a convenient location and time. Also, account for the sign up

time which can take a week to get processed. The ADEA allows for you to take the DAT 3 times in total and any additional tries need to be petitioned. It is recommended that you score high on the test the first time. Don't write the test just to get a feel for it, that is what the 2007 and 2009 ADEA tests are for.

*A side note to my Canadian colleagues: Academic performance holds a heavier weight in Canadian schools. Canadian Schools usually overlook a year or two of your undergrad performance, thus only your best 3 years or 2 years are calculated in the GPA. For example, the University of Toronto excludes your lowest year and the University of Western Ontario only factors in your two best years, provided you had a 100% course load over 4 years. Hence, you will see their GPAs hover between a 3.8-3.9.

RESOURCES FOR THE DAT

There are quite a few resources out there to help you prepare. I will give you my thoughts on some that I used and ones many others recommend. [The Student Doctor Network Forums](#) are another great source of information. You can find many people's test breakdowns and see which resources they used in preparation.

DAT Bootcamp (DBC): This resource is great. It gives you the most value for your dollar—I strongly recommend it. Their practice tests are as similar to the actual DAT as one can get. Several questions appeared on my DAT that were pretty much identical to the ones on DBC practice tests. They also have a trial version available for free. DAT Bootcamp also runs promotions from time to time which you can inquire about through their website. This subscription alone will go over all the sections on the DAT, including the PAT.

Destroyer Books: These are also very helpful for studying. There are several books available. I used the regular DAT Destroyer from 2016, and it contains practice questions to all the academic sections on the DAT except reading. You can also purchase subject-specific books such as the Math Destroyer if you're weaker in that section. (Save money and buy an older or used version, I recommend a 2016 or newer edition to make it easier for you to resell it once you're done using it.)

Ferralis/Bootcamp Bio Notes: These are a PDF file of biology notes, I personally didn’t use them however, those who did said if you memorize them completely you will score very high on the biology section. (You can find the PDF on SDN Forums, DAT Bootcamp subscription or in the Facebook group: Dental School Interview Bootcamp. Just message one of the admins).

Cliff’sAPBio: This is a biology textbook and is an additional resource for the biology section. The biology section is notorious for being very broad in the scope of questions, and this book will give you a better understanding of all the topics. (Can be found on Amazon, usually around \$10).

Kaplan Blue Book: I used this resource as mainly as a supplement however, it wasn’t very thorough, and I felt that it was missing a lot of information. I wouldn’t recommend depending on it solely.

Chad Videos: Chad videos are known for organic chemistry review, but he has videos on other subjects too. As a first-time member, I was able to get the videos for 30 days at \$27 USD for organic chemistry only. I hadn’t taken Organic Chemistry II for my DAT and Chad videos got me a 22 in that section. (They can be found at [coursesaver.com](https://www.coursesaver.com), [chemistryprep.com](https://www.chemistryprep.com).)

Anki’s Flashcards: This is an app that you can download on your phone and put DAT material on. Most people use it for the bio section and put information from Ferralis/Bootcamp Bio notes on it.

Anatomy and Physiology Crash Course: This is a playlist of YouTube videos on anatomy and physiology. Several people have mentioned it’s a great supplemental resource. It can be found [here](#).

These days there are many great resources available for every style of learning and quite a few that are very low budget or free. Some more notable resources include Khan Academy videos (YouTube), Bozeman Science (YouTube) and the DAT Mastery app.



MAKING A SCHEDULE

Making a schedule can be quite challenging. If you are like me, you are probably unsure of where to begin. When I started review, I focused on 1-2 subjects at a time until I finished the subject and then I did a few practice tests. Every week I would have a review day on Sunday to ensure I retain the information. Ideally, you want to finish the core of your review in 1 month, assuming a 2-month study plan with around 6-8 hours of study each day. Moving forward from here, you can find your weaknesses through practice tests and tailor your study approach. You will notice that my second month study schedule isn’t as rigid as the first. I would recommend sticking to 1-2 subjects per day, as it will be easier to learn the material, instead of bouncing around 5 subjects.

Here is roughly what my schedule looked like:

Month 1

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
1) Bio Review	2) Bio Review	3) Bio Review	4) GC Review	5) GC Review	6) GC Review	7) Bio + GC Review
8) Bio Review	9) Bio Review	10) Bio Review + Questions	11) GC Review	12) GC Review	13) GC Review + Questions	14) Bio + GC Review + Tests
15) OC Review	16) OC Review	17) OC Review	18) QR Review	19) QR Review	20) QR Review	21) OC + QR Review + Tests
22) Bio + GC Review + Questions	23) OC Review	24) OC Review	25) OC Review + Questions	26) QR Review	27) QR Review	28) OC + QR Review + Tests
29) Bio + GC Review + Questions	30) PAT (Keyhole + TFE)	31) PAT (Pattern Folding + Hole Punch + Cube Counting)				

By this point you should have completed the bulk of your science and math review. Also, I recommend that from day one you spend 15 minutes a day reading journal or scholarly articles to help you with the Reading Comprehension section on the DAT. When reading, try to be active and ask yourself questions after each paragraph: What was the purpose of this paragraph? What important information was given? What was the tone of the author? And try to think of a 1-sentence summary of the paragraph. Doing this will help you better understand passages and help you answer RC questions in the future.

Month 2

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
			1) RC	2) Bio review + Tests	3) GC Review + Tests	4) OC Review + Tests
5) QR Review + Tests	6) RC	7) PAT	8) Bio Review + Tests	9) Bio Review + Tests	10) GC Review + Tests	11) GC Review + Tests
12) OC Review + Tests	13) OC Review + Tests	14) RC + PAT	15) RC + PAT	16) QR + PAT	17) QR + PAT	18) Full Review
19) This week: Focus on weaknesses	20) Tailor studying to weaknesses	21) Tailor studying to weaknesses	22) Tailor studying to weaknesses	23) Tailor studying to weaknesses	24) Tailor studying to weaknesses	25) 2009 ADEA Practice Test
26) 2007 ADEA Practice Test	27) Tailor studying to weaknesses	28) Last Review	29) REST DAY	30) TEST DAY		

My second month schedule isn't as rigid as the first month. This is because I would use the time to tailor towards my weaknesses. Make sure to take the 2009 ADEA exam first. This is the best predictor of how well you will do on the actual DAT. Next, you should take the 2007 DAT test for a confidence boost, as it is generally accepted as an easier test. (However, the math section is hard). You should review the 2007 exam quite thoroughly—the 2009 will only give you a score. (Purchase online from the ADEA website—\$100). Also, the day before the test should be saved as a rest day. You can review some quick concepts for a couple hours in the morning but it is critical for you to take the rest of the day off. There is also a 10-week study schedule made by Ari on DAT Bootcamp which is much more detailed than mine, [I recommend you have a look at it](#).

TIPS FOR DAT SECTIONS

I used DAT Bootcamp for my DAT preparation and I completed every test from each section. I highly recommend it.

Biology: Most people will tell you to use more than one source for this section. I recommend that you use a combination of Cliff's AP Bio Book plus some sort of review book, such as Kaplan's blue book. You can supplement it with Ferralis/Bootcamp Bio notes. Create flash cards for subjects like taxonomy. [Cram.com](#) has a lot of flash card practice available. I used DAT bootcamp's tests and then supplemented with DAT destroyer.

General Chemistry: You can use a review book such as the Kaplan blue book and then use Chad's Videos for GC or Mike's videos on DAT Bootcamp. Both are excellent resources. I would then supplement with DAT Destroyer.

Organic Chemistry: I used Chad's Videos for this section and he was on point with what was tested on the DAT. I hadn't taken Organic Chemistry 2 at that point, but reviewing Chad's Videos and doing his quizzes got me a 22, and I was quite pleased with that. I also recall a couple questions showing up on my DAT straight from Chad's quizzes. I used DAT bootcamp's tests and then supplemented with DAT destroyer.

Reading Comprehension: I would recommend reading some scholarly articles daily to get familiar with the language they will use. DAT Bootcamp is a great resource to use. There are several strategies to tackle this section. On the actual DAT I used search and destroy* which is essentially going straight to the questions and then finding the answer in the passage. You can also use the traditional method of reading each paragraph and writing down a short summary on paper. Once you finish the whole passage, use that as a guide to answer the questions. Try different methods out and see what works best for you – some people have mentioned that recently search and destroy wasn't an effective method on their actual DAT since the questions weren't in order.

Quantitative Reasoning: I haven't done math in many years, so this section was quite intimidating. However, I reviewed some probability using my calculus textbook and also used the Kaplan blue book for some additional

practice. I then went on to do questions in DAT Destroyer and on DAT Bootcamp.

Perceptual Ability: I used DAT Bootcamp video lessons and PAT generators. As I mentioned in my schedule, I would stick to two PAT sections per day and try to really nail it.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Some important things to note: If you don't score within one point of where you want to be on the 2009 ADEA practice test, I would re-schedule the test. Very few people make the miracle jump from an AA of 19 to a 22. Do not make the mistake thinking you will be that one person who does. The DAT is also an endurance test, as it is quite long, and it is important for you to be prepared to test for long time periods during your practice. You may also have noticed that I didn't include any breaks during the study schedule. Breaks will be important to ensure that you don't burn out; insert them into your schedule appropriately after achieving certain weekly goals. When you first begin studying, don't be alarmed if you can't productively study for longer than 3-4 hours. You will gain momentum and motivation as you progress. I used to watch motivation videos and read other students' breakdowns to help me get through this time. While it can be a daunting period in your life, picture yourself wearing that white coat in the upcoming year. I can't tell you how happy I was when I received the acceptance call from the University of Pennsylvania School of Dental Medicine—it made it all worth it. One last important thing: The night before the test, consider take some sort of a sleeping aid to ensure you get a full nights rest.

TEST DAY

On test day, you will be required to bring your ID. You will be scanned with a metal detector and won't be allowed to bring anything with you to the exam room (except for earbuds which are still packaged). You will be fingerprinted and have your photo taken. There is no note taking during the tutorial time or the scheduled break, this is a violation of the terms set by the ADA. You will be given two pieces of paper and a marker for calculations/notes which can be exchanged anytime you want. You will be given an optional 30-minute break, which I highly suggest you use; it will help you clear your mind. You should pack a small snack, such as an energy bar or some comfort food to get you through this period.

The DAT is about time management as much as it is about knowledge. You want to stay aware of how much time is left during each section. (There will be a timer on the screen.) If you are running out of time, just guess the rest of the questions. My last piece of advice would be to not get stuck on a question or keep thinking back to a section. If you found it hard, so did many other people. The good thing about the DAT is that it is a scaled test. A scaled test essentially accounts for difficulties between different test versions and your raw score doesn't reflect your overall result.

Scores are released to you right away if you write the American DAT, and you are given a print out of them. Getting your scores verified takes roughly 2-4 weeks by the ADEA, and I recommend you call the ADEA after 2 weeks to see where you stand. The Canadian DAT takes roughly 8 weeks to verify and release your score.





The Application

APPLICATION CYCLE

The AADSAS application cycle traditionally opens in early June. By this time I recommend that you have your letters of recommendation, personal statement, DAT scores, transcript verification and experiences (ECs, research, etc) submitted. Applying early in the cycle is essential to receiving multiple pre-December interviews. This is because dental schools are based on rolling admissions. They will give out interview spots as applications get submitted for review and will also provide a decision to those candidates on December 1st (if interviewed). (Interviews close to December 1st may automatically be put on waitlist/kept under review for several weeks). The application cycle has different deadlines for each school, with some ending in October and some in February. Therefore, it is important to look up these dates for each individual school where you plan to apply. The application cycle for acceptances can continue until the first day of class in some instances.

A general timeframe for the submission of your application is as follows: June & July is considered early, August is the average time for submission, and September or later is considered a late submission. I once again urge you to submit your application as close to the opening date as possible, especially if you are an international applicant. International applicants (including Canadians) who submit in August or later are putting themselves at an even higher disadvantage than they already are.

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

A letter of recommendation (LOR) is essentially a reference letter which supports your decision to pursue dentistry. The AADSAS portal will allow you to upload four letters of recommendation, and any additional letters can be sent directly to the schools at their discretion. To send additional letters of recommendation you would need

to contact the school directly and inform them that you would like to submit another LOR, and they will advise you how to get the letter to them.

Each school has different LOR requirements, and you can find this information either from the AADSAS portal when you add the program to your list or you can contact the school directly and ask what kind of LORs they require. A general package of letters you should aim for would include: two science professors (ideally from one chemistry and one biology), one non-science professor (ideally a liberal arts professor), and a dentist. These four letters would cover the bases of most universities however, some programs may require three science letters and therefore it is once again essential to check what requirements each program needs. If your university has the committee letter option available, then you should go with that. Something that more savvy applicants do is mark the committee letter as a single letter, that way it only takes up one slot on the AADSAS portal. This will allow you to upload additional reference letters if you wish.

You also want to ensure you are getting strong letters of recommendation. Ideally, you spoke with your professor over the term of the course. You want to get to know them on a more personal level and engage in their material. This will also allow them to get to know you better as well. You want to stand out so you can get a strong letter of reference and give your professor something interesting to write about. Ask interesting questions and show up to office hours. You don't have to go over the top and go every week, but be sure they remember your name. There are many ways to stand out and be unique. A trick I used before was being active on the course website (if offered with the course). Students would ask questions and you could answer people's questions before the professor or anyone else gets the chance. This way even though the professor may not know you personally, they will recognize your name and see that you were engaged and helped many students out. There are many ways to stand out to a professor and this is the key to getting a strong letter of recommendation from them (not sure if I mentioned STRONG enough). On top of this, you want to make sure you are doing well in their course. Keep in mind who is writing your reference letter; some professors' letters are worth more than others. For example, one of my professors is the chairman of the chemistry department at my university. His recommendation was brought up numerous times in my interviews. The strongest letter will come from a professor who knows you on a deeper level and has a high standing in the academic hierarchy. These are the small details that can give you the edge and help you get into the top programs.

The best way to ask your professor for a letter of recommendation would be to first set up a meeting

through e-mail or in person. Here is an e-mail I sent to one of my professors:

Good afternoon Dr. X,

It's Alexander Takshyn (student number) from your chemistry course. I was hoping to meet with you next week to discuss my future plans. Would you be on campus between Tuesday and Friday? And what time would work best for you?

Thank you,

-Alex

From here, once you meet with them, you can explain how you want to pursue dentistry, and ask them if they would be willing to write a strong reference letter for you. Key word is strong. You don't want to have a neutral reference letter from a professor unless it's your last option. When they accept, be sure to hand them your curriculum vitae (resume), grade report, and any additional documents that they may ask for. This will give them additional context to include in the letter and get to know you better. Understand that professors want to help their students, and writing reference letters is part of their job. Most would be happy to write you one, provided you are courteous and professional. In the odd case that they refuse, thank them for their time and ask a different professor.

Some things to keep in mind: Give your letter writer plenty of time, at least a month and a half. When they accept, be sure to follow up with an e-mail thanking them again and attach any documents they asked for. Also, be sure to include a time frame for them and follow-up 1-2 weeks before the deadline you set. Once they have uploaded the LOR on the AADSAS portal, you will be notified. Also remember to send them a thank you card. Your reputation as a professional is very important. Being grateful for their help is the least you can do.

PERSONAL STATEMENT

The personal statement is a crucial portion of your application. In a nutshell your personal statement will give insight into you as a person and answer that important question—why dentistry? You can focus on a defining moment or the journey that led you to the decision. It should read more like a story than an essay. The ADEA website gives some more guidelines. Once you have written your personal statement, get feedback from many people. You can ask the dentist you shadowed, professors, friends, writing committee, etc. The more feedback you receive the better. Your personal statement may change quite significantly. Mine had over 20 versions until I finalized it.

DAT SCORE

The verification process for DAT scores will normally take between 2-4 weeks and it may be worthwhile to call them after two weeks to ensure everything is in order.

TRANSCRIPT VERIFICATION

The transcript verification process can also take several weeks—4-6 weeks on average. You can call after about three weeks, as I heard several times they were able to verify the grades over the phone and expedite the process. The ADEA has their own set of grade conversions. As of 2017, the ADEA revised their GPA conversion charts, as follows:

If your institution uses letter grades, use Figure 1.

GRADE	GPA CONVERSION (4.0 SCALE)
A+/A	4.0
A-	3.7
AB	3.5
B+	3.3
B	3.0
B-	2.7
BC	2.5
C+	2.3
C	2.0
C-	1.7
CD	1.5
D+	1.3
D	1
D-	0.7
F	0.0

Figure 1: Letter grade to 4.0 scale GPA conversion.

If your institution uses percent grades, use Figure 2.

PERCENT GRADE	LETTER GRADE
100 – 90	A
89 – 80	B
79 – 70	C
69 – 60	D
59 AND BELOW	F

Figure 2: Percent grade to letter grade conversion chart. (Side note: you would use this scale to convert to a letter grade and then use the above chart to get a GPA on the

4.0 scale. *Canadians, if your university uses a percent grading scheme then be sure that when your transcript is sent, the university sends the letter grade conversion chart for the ADEA to use with it. This should be done automatically, but it’s good to verify.

It is important to complete the GPA calculation yourself to verify. I heard of a few instances where the ADEA calculated an applicant’s GPA incorrectly.

EXPERIENCES

The experiences section of your application will include volunteer work, shadowing, extracurricular activities, employment, etc. It’s good to include at least eight different experiences as part of your application. When you discuss the experience, it is important to explain what it is, what your role was, and what skills the experience built. Here is an example of an extracurricular activity experience of tutoring:

I tutor students in the subjects of chemistry, physics and physiology. I review key concepts of the curriculum, answer questions, and go over practice problems. Many of my students are freshmen in university and are going through the same challenges that I went through during my freshman year. My responsibility is to guide my students and put them on the right path to achieve their academic goals. This experience gave me a chance to share my knowledge and study habits with other students, as well as point out their strengths and weaknesses so they can set appropriate goals.

WHAT DO ADMISSIONS COMMITTEES LOOK FOR?

When you ask someone what the admissions committee looks for, the typical answer you will receive is “a well-rounded applicant.” However, this is not necessarily true. What admissions committees want is a well-rounded class, which aims to further their school’s mission statement. A dental school doesn’t want to have a uniform class with equal qualifications; they want to enroll individuals who contribute to their school’s mission and offer a unique perspective. They want to have a mixture of those who show a commitment to community service, those dedicated to research, those who offer a unique perspective, etc. Think of the process as a coach building a sports team. Take soccer for example. In order for the team to be successful, there will need to be a few strikers, a few mid-fielders, a few defenders, etc. You can’t have a team if everyone is playing striker. The advantage of being well-rounded applicant means that you can maximize your chances of being a “good” fit for a school since you offer different skillsets, like being able to play both striker and mid-fielder.

WHERE TO APPLY

There are several factors that you should consider when picking how many and which schools to apply to. This varies based on your stats and your place of residence/citizenship. If you are the ideal dental candidate with a 22+AA DAT, 3.8 GPA with a good all-around application, you can safely apply to around 8-10 schools. Someone who has more average matriculating stats such as a 20AA and 3.55 GPA should apply to 10-12 schools, and someone who is below average should apply to 12 or more schools. The point is to apply to enough schools that you will get accepted somewhere, not feel stressed out during the application cycle and not over-spend. It is important to note that just because you have excellent stats, doesn’t mean you’re guaranteed a spot at a certain school. Personally, I would spend a few hundred dollars more for peace of mind. *(Canadians and international applicants should apply to more schools: An ideal applicant should apply to 10+ schools, while a more average candidate should apply to 14+ schools). Most people would agree that applying to over 20 schools is unnecessary.

There are many factors that you want to consider when choosing which schools you apply to. I recommend that you purchase the [ADEA Official Guide to Dental Schools](#); it has all the statistics for the incoming class in the previous cycle, including the average stats, class seats, amount of In-State and Out-of-State applicants admitted, etc. for each dental school in the United States and Canada (Costs \$40 + shipping or \$25 for online version.) Your school list should consist of a few schools that require higher stats than yours, mainly schools that are within you stats range, and a few “safety” schools that have stats below yours. Keep in mind though, having higher stats than a school’s average never guarantees an interview or acceptance. However, stats are only one variable when it comes to choosing schools. You need to consider whether the schools are out-of-state (OOS) friendly, the costs of attendance, location, clinical experience, etc. For example, while Texas schools may seem ideal by having a low cost of attendance, they take very few OOS or international applicants. If you’re a Canadian/international applicant, you will mostly be applying to private schools as they generally are more open to these types of applicants. A draw back with private schools is the tuition + living expenses, which will oftentimes exceed 400k USD. For your reference I have complied a list of all dental schools in North America and included some key characteristics of each school.

SCHOOL	DAT (AA)	AVERAGE cGPA/ sGPA	INTERNATIONAL FRIENDLY	INSTATE TUITION AFTER 1ST YEAR
U OF ALABAMA	21.3	3.60/3.60	*YES	No
A.T. STILL (AZ)	19.3	3.41/3.31	*YES	No
MWU-AZ	19	3.50/3.5	YES	No
USC	20.4	3.52/3.45	YES	No
LOMA LINDA (RELIGIOUS)	20	3.51/3.39	YES	No
UCLA	22	3.74/3.70	YES	YES
UCSF	21.4	3.64/3.57	YES	YES
UOP (3 YEAR PROGRAM)	22	3.58/3.45	YES	No
WESTERN U	19	3.32/3.21	YES	No
COLORADO	19	NR/NR	No	No
UCONN	20	3.60/3.60	*YES	YES
HOWARD (MINORITY FRIENDLY)	NR	NR	YES	No
LECOM	NR	NR	No	No
NOVA	21	3.70/3.70	YES	No
UF	21	3.74/3.68	No	YES
AUGUSTA	20	3.57/ 3.47	No	No
MWU-IL	18.5	3.46/3.35	YES	No
SOUTHERN ILLINOIS	19.8	3.60/3.50	No	No
ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO	21	3.58/3.50	No	No
INDIANA	19.7	3.51/3.41	YES	No

SCHOOL	DAT (AA)	AVERAGE cGPA/ sGPA	INTERNATIONAL FRIENDLY	INSTATE TUITION AFTER 1ST YEAR
IOWA	20.5	3.72/3.63	*YES	No
KENTUCKY	19	3.60/NR	YES	No
LOUISVILLE	20	3.56/3.44	YES	No
LOUISIANA STATE	20	3.60/NR	No	No
NEW ENGLAND	NR	NR	YES	No
MARYLAND	20	3.60/3.50	YES	YES
BOSTONU	NR	NR	YES	No
HARVARD (IVY)	23	3.85/ 3.85	YES	No
TUFTS	20	3.41/3.30	YES	No
UDM	20	3.50/3.50	YES	No
MICHIGAN	21	3.65/ 3.58	YES	No
MINNESOTA	20.2	3.59/3.51	YES	No
MISSISSIPPI	18.6	3.56/3.45	No	No
A.T. STILL (MISSOURI)	19	3.50/3.40	No	No
UoMISSOURI	19.3	NR/3.70	No	No
CREIGHTON	19	3.60/3.47	YES	No
NEBRASKA	20	3.73/3.61	YES	No
UNLV	20	3.50/3.40	YES	YES
RUTGERS	21	3.50/NR	YES	YES
COLUMBIA (IVY)	23	3.60/3.60	YES	No
NYU	21	3.50/3.40	YES	No
STONY BROOK	21.4	3.70/NR	YES	No
TOURO	21	3.50/3.50	*YES	No
BUFFALO	19.5	3.60/3.50	YES	YES
EAST CAROLINA	19.6	3.44/3.34	No	No
UNC	21	3.59/3.50	*YES	YES
CASE WESTERN	20.3	3.57/3.51	YES	No
OHIO STATE	20.6	3.61/3.52	*YES	YES
OKLAHOMA	NR	NR	*YES	No
OREGON	20.5	3.66/3.59	YES	No
TEMPLE	20.6	3.52/3.41	YES	No
UPENN (IVY)	21.9	3.70/3.65	YES	No
PITTS	21.6	3.74/3.67	YES	No
PUERTO RICO (SPANISH)	NR	NR	*YES	No
(SC) JAMES B. EDWARDS	20	3.64/3.57	*YES	No
MEHARRY (MINORITY FRIENDLY)	18	3.20/NR	YES	No
TENNESSEE	19	3.50/NR	No	No
TEXAS A&M	21	3.61/3.51	*YES	YES
TEXAS – SAN ANTONIO	20	3.60/3.60	*YES	YES

SCHOOL	DAT (AA)	AVERAGE cGPA/ sGPA	INTERNATIONAL FRIENDLY	INSTATE TUITION AFTER 1ST YEAR
TEXAS –HOUSTON	21	3.81/3.75	No	YES
ROSEMAN	20	3.55/3.21	No	No
UTAH	21	3.74/3.69	No	No
VCU	20	3.60/3.60	YES	No
WASHINGTON	20.5	NR/3.60	No	YES
WEST VIRGINIA	19	3.70/3.60	YES	No
MARQUETTE	20.3	3.63/3.56	*CANADIAN ONLY	No
ALBERTA	22.4	3.87/NR	*YES	No
UBC	22.1	85.83	*CANADIAN ONLY	No
MANITOBA	21.6	4.09/3.99	*CANADIAN ONLY	No
DALHOUSIE	21	3.70/ 3.70	NR	No
UoFT	21	3.93/NR	*YES	No
WESTERN (UWO – CANADA)	21	89.16/NR	*YES	No
MCGILL	NR	3.85/NR	*YES	No
MONTREAL (FRENCH)	NR	NR/ NR	No	No
LAVAL (FRENCH)	NR	NR/ NR	No	No
SASKATCHEWAN	20.6	88.82/NR	No	No

Figure 3: Exhibits the average DAT score (AA) as well as, the average cumulative and science GPAs for the first time enrollees into a North American dental school for the entering year of 2017, with a few exceptions providing data for the entering year of 2016 and 2018. The following data was gathered individually from each dental school’s website or directly from their admissions office.

There are a few points I need to make regarding Figure 3. Firstly, the above stats are for the entering class of 2017 and they tend to increase marginally every year. Therefore, by your application submission date you should expect to see the average DAT and GPA higher than shown. Secondly, pay attention to the schools that offer in-state tuition after 1st year; this can save you a lot of money. Thirdly, some schools say they will accept international applicants, but didn’t have any enrolled international applicants the previous year. These are labeled as “*Yes” in Figure 3. Also, it is important to note that even though I marked some schools as internationally friendly, they may have only one enrolled international candidate—keep that in mind. Fourthly, Texas schools are known for being notoriously unfriendly towards OOS and international applicants. Moreover, Canadian schools tend to be very unfriendly towards out of province and international applicants. Lastly, some schools are unique to admitting more minorities, teaching in Spanish, French or being religious; these are marked in the table.

There aren’t any official rankings for dental schools, and each school offers its own unique experience and advantages to students. Keep an open mind to your end goals when applying. If you are dead set on becoming the best general dentist, then look into schools that have a heavy focus on clinical skills. If you want to specialize, then look into the Ivy League schools, or top tier schools that produce a lot of specialists. While this doesn’t mean you can’t specialize from a school that has a focus on general dentistry, some schools offer more opportunities for certain applicants. Research every school thoroughly to understand what they are all about. It is also important to consider other aspects of the program such as the curriculum and grading scheme of schools. Each school is different and offers unique opportunities for students to grow. Figure 4 contains some unique characteristics to consider regarding each school. Keep in mind that when I made this chart, I noted down what I felt were some of the unique characteristics based on their website and the SDN Forums—I couldn’t include everything. Every school has community outreach and research opportunities. However, some schools are more focused in certain areas, so I marked it as a unique characteristic.

Figure 4: The following information outlines some unique features about each school in North America. The information was gathered from each school’s website, their social media platforms, and SDN forums.

University of Alabama School of Dentistry (UAB)

- Focus on community
- DMD/PhD program

Arizona School of Dentistry and Oral Health (A.T. Still)

- Emphasis on community service
- Integrated curriculum (with mandatory 4th year externships)
- New facilities

Midwestern University College of Dental Medicine (MWU-AZ)

- Focus on general dentistry
- Private practice model oriented
- Great clinical curriculum
- Great facilities and technology
- New school

Herman Ostrow School of Dentistry of USC

- Focus on community service
- Problem-based learning style curriculum
- Summer dental research program
- Dual-degree options (DDS/MBA, DDS/MS)

Loma Linda University School of Dentistry

- Religious university
- International externships
- Master’s degree tracks available

University of California, Los Angeles School of Denistry (UCLA)

- High specialization match rates
- Numerous research opportunities
- Pass/no pass grading

University of California, San Francisco School of Dentistry (UCSF)

- Pass/fail grading
- High specialization rates
- Numerous research opportunities

University of the Pacific Arthur A. Dugoni School of Dentistry (UOP)

- 3-year program
- Humanistic model approach
- Pacific helix curriculum (focus on integration)
- Portfolio exam for licensing available
- Great clinical curriculum
- Great facilities and technology

Western University of Health Sciences College of Dental Medicine (California)

- Focus on general dentistry
- Simodont virtual reality trainer
- Focus on community service

University of Colorado School of Dental Medicine

- Service learning (ACTS program)
- Inter-professional education programs
- Numerous research opportunities

University of Connecticut School of Dental Medicine (UCONN)

- Pass/fail grading
- Medical school integrated curriculum
- High specialization rates

Howard University School of Dentistry

- Very URM friendly
- Focus on community outreach
- Offer combined education BS/DDS, DDS/MBA

LECOM School of Dental Medicine

- Focus on general dentistry
- Focus on community service
- Problem-based learning curriculum

Nova Southeastern University College of Dental Medicine

- Great facilities and technology
- DO/DMD dual degree option

University of Florida College of Dentistry

- Community outreach rotations
- Numerous research opportunities
- New technology

Dental College of Georgia at Augusta University

- Great facilities and technology
- Early clinical exposure (From 2nd year)

Midwestern University College of Dental Medicine (MWU-IL)

- Focus on general dentistry
- Integrated curriculum
- New school

Southern Illinois University School of Dental Medicine (SIU)

- State of the art facilities and technology
- Community outreach opportunities
- Summer research program

University of Illinois at Chicago College of Dentistry (UIC)

- Great facilities and technology
- Diverse patient pool
- Service learning curriculum
- Dual-degree options
- Innovative curriculum

Indiana University School of Dentistry

- Newly-constructed clinic
- Focus on community service
- Numerous research opportunities
- Cast gold crowns

University of Iowa College of Dentistry and Dental Clinics

- Early clinical exposure (2nd year)
- Clinical rotations in all specialties
- Offers all speciality programs
- Great facilities and technology

University of Kentucky College of Dentistry

- Focus on community outreach
- Research track program
- Early clinical exposure

University of Louisville School of Dentistry

- Humanistic environment
- Great facilities and technology
- ULEAD program (For high schoolers)
- Strong clinical program
- Dual-degree programs (DMD/PhD, DMD/MBA, DMD/MS)

Louisiana State University Health Science Center School of Dentistry

- Most speciality programs
- Numerous research opportunities

University of New England College of Dental Medicine (UNE)

- Integrated and interdisciplinary curriculum
- State-of-the-art facilities and technology
- Early patient exposure
- New school

University of Maryland School of Dentistry

- Integrated curriculum
- Dual-degree programs DDS/PhD, DDS/MS
- D4 externship program
- Great facilities and technology
- Community outreach

Boston University Henry M. Goldman School of Dental Medicine (BU)

- Numerous community outreach opportunities
- Research
- State-of-the-art facilities and technology
- Externships
- APEX program

Harvard School of Dental Medicine

- Medical school integrated curriculum
- Numerous research opportunities
- Pass/fail grading
- Pathways curriculum
- Small class size

Tufts University School of Dental Medicine

- Integrated curriculum
- Dual-degree programs (DMD/MPH, DMD/MS, DMD/BS)
- Research project
- Externships

University of Detroit Mercy School of Dentistry

- Diverse patient population
- Strong clinical program
- Focus on community outreach

University of Michigan School of Dentistry

- Numerous research opportunities
- Dual-degree options (DDS/ PhD, DDS/ MBA)
- Global initiatives program
- Pathways curriculum

University of Minnesota School of Dentistry

- Numerous research opportunities
- Dual-degree options (DDS/PhD, DDS/MPH)
- Community outreach rotations

University of Mississippi Medical Center School of Dentistry

- Focus on community service
- Small class size

Missouri School of Dentistry & Oral Health at ATSU

- Integrated curriculum
- Small class size
- Great facilities
- Focus on community (integrated into curriculum)

University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Dentistry

- Early clinical exposure (1st year)
- State-of-the-art facilities
- Research opportunities

Creighton University School of Dentistry

- Interview not required to matriculate
- Numerous community outreach opportunities
- Group research part of integrated curriculum
- State-of-the-art facilities (completion in 2018)

University of Nebraska Medical Center College of Dentistry

- State-of-the-art facilities and technology
- Small class size (50)

University of Nevada, Las Vegas School of Dental Medicine

- Large patient pool
- Early clinical experience (1st year)
- Integrated curriculum (of the sciences)

Rutgers School of Dental Medicine

- Focus on community service
- State-of-the-art facilities and technology
- Research

Columbia University College of Dental Medicine

- Pass/fail grading
- Medical school integrated curriculum
- Research
- High specialization match rates
- Externships

New York University College of Dentistry (NYU)

- Large class size (375)
- Very international and Canadian friendly
- Research
- State-of-the-art facilities and technology
- Numerous global and local community outreach opportunities

Stony Brook University School of Dental Medicine

- Small class size
- Integrated curriculum with the medical school
- Selective courses
- 4th year general practice model

Touro College of Dental Medicine at New York Medical College

- New school
- State-of-the-art facilities and technology
- Pre-clinical curriculum integrated with medical education

University at Buffalo School of Dental Medicine

- Early clinical exposure
- Focus on community involvement
- Diverse patient pool

East Carolina University School of Dental Medicine

- Focus on community involvement
- State-of-the-art facilities and technology
- Small class size (52)

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Dentistry

- Research
- DISC program
- State-of-the-art facilities and technology
- Community service

Case Western Reserve University School of Dental Medicine (CWRU)

- “REAL” curriculum
- New clinic (Opening 2019)
- Dual-degree options (DMD/MPH, DMD/MCRT)
- Early clinical exposure via (HSSP) initiative (1st year)

Ohio State University College of Dentistry (OSU)

- Focus on community service (4th year OHIO project)
- Dual-degree options available (DDS/PhD)
- Early clinical exposure (from 1st year)

Universty of Oklahoma College of Dentistry

- Focus on community service
- Small class size (56)
- State-of-the-art facilities and technology

Oregon Health Sciences University School of Dentistry

- State-of-the-art facilities and technology
- Early clinical exposure (1st year)

Temple University Kornberg School of Dentistry

- Strong clinical curriculum
- Community service oriented
- Mandatory research project

University of Pennsylvania School of Dental Medicine

- Simodont virtual reality trainer
- 4th year hospital externship
- Tailor your education via selectives
- High specialization match rate
- State-of-the-art facilities and technology
- Clinical rotations from first year

University of Pittsburgh School of Dental Medicine

- Cheapest tuition for internationals (excluding Puerto Rico)
- Competency based curriculum
- Selectives
- Dual-degree programs available

University of Puerto Rico, School of Dental Medicine

- Spanish school
- Small class size
- Low cost of attendance

Medical University of South Carolina College of Dental Medicine

- State-of-the-art facilities and technology
- Focus on community service
- Dual-degree options (DMD/PhD)

Meharry Medical College School of Dentistry

- Very URM friendly
- Small class size (60)
- Focus on community outreach
- Integrated curriculum with medical school

University of Tennessee Health Science Center College of Dentistry

- State-of-the-art facilities
- Early clinical exposure (2nd year)

Texas A&M University College of Dentistry

- Strong clinical program
- Contains all dental specialties
- Focus on community service

University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio School of Dentistry

- 4th year externships around Texas
- Tailor your education via selectives
- Numerous research opportunities
- Ability to learn in Spanish

University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston School of Dentistry

- State-of-the-art facilities and technology
- Dual-degree options (DDS/MPH)
- Integrated curriculum

Roseman University of Health Sciences College of Dental Medicine

- Block curriculum
- State-of-the-art facilities and technology
- Dual-degree option (DMD/MBA)
- New school (Opened 2007)

University of Utah School of Dentistry

- New school
- 3+1 curriculum
- State-of-the-art facilities and technology
- Small class size (50)
- Early clinical experience

Virginia Commonwealth University School of Dentistry

- Focus on community service
- Virtual reality simulator

University of Washington School of Dentistry

- Ride program
- Emphasis on research
- Unique pediatric division

West Virginia University School of Dentistry

- Small class size (48)
- Great technology
- Mandatory research project (3rd year)

Marquette University School of Dentistry

- General practice model
- Integrated curriculum
- Focus on community outreach

University of Alberta School of Dentistry

- State-of-the-art facilities and technology
- Comprehensive care delivery model

University of British Columbia, Faculty of Dentistry (UBC)

- Numerous research opportunities
- State-of-the-art facilities and technology
- Innovative inquiry-based curriculum (Includes PBL)

University of Manitoba, Faculty of Dentistry

- Early clinical exposure (1st year)
- Focus on community service
- Evidenced-based approach

Dalhousie University, Faculty of Dentistry

- Numerous research opportunities
- Integrated curriculum

University of Toronto, Faculty of Dentistry

- Numerous research opportunities
- Service learning initiatives
- Interpersonal Education Curriculum

Western University School of Dentistry

- Integrated curriculum
- Early clinical experience
- Numerous research opportunities

McGill University, Faculty of Dentistry

- Integrated curriculum with medical school
- State-of-the-art facilities and technology
- Numerous research opportunities

Université de Montréal, Faculté de médecine dentaire

- French program
- Numerous research opportunities

Université Laval, Faculté de médecine dentaire

- French program

University of Saskatchewan College of Dentistry

- Small class size (28)
- Focus on community service

Once again, I recommend purchasing the ADEA Official Guide to Dental Schools and constructing a list of 20 schools that you are interested in. Afterwards, you can narrow down the list as you learn more about each school. You can ask for the advice of the SDN community, your professors, and personal network to determine which schools are the right fit for you.

POST SUBMISSION

After you have submitted your application, you should continue volunteering or getting involved in events and learning from new experiences. This will not only be valuable for you as a person, but will help you during the application process. Admissions committees want to know that you are continually growing as a person. It is important to keep the schools you applied to up to date on your application throughout the cycle. You can always add new experiences to your file (the AADSAS portal page has an update button for when you add new experiences). If you get waitlisted at a school and are able to provide them with new experiences, new grades, etc, this may tip the scales in your favour. It is important to note, the application cycle doesn't end until you have actually started dental school, and applicants are known to be admitted up to the first day of class! Also, don't slack in your classes because failing or doing poorly can cause your acceptance to be withdrawn. When you receive your acceptance package the school will expect you to meet minimum academic criteria—usually a “C” or “B.”

SECONDARY APPLICATIONS

The secondary application is another vital step toward your dental school acceptance. Some schools have their secondary application on the AADSAS portal and you would complete the questions and submit your responses to the program that way. (Not all schools have a secondary application.) I recommend you spend a good chunk of time writing your response. Many schools place a great emphasis on the secondary application, and some even begin reviewing you application by first looking at the secondary. If possible, use the secondary application to include new information that the admissions committee doesn't already know about you. Also, keep in mind the length of your answer—a one sentence response usually means you're not very interested, while a page long response could mean you can't arrive at the point. There needs to be a balance. Also, when writing responses, you want to think of experiences that build on your skills and character.

INTERVIEW TYPES

There are many different types of interview styles, and it is important to know what you're going into. The best way to find out what kind of interview the particular dental school is conducting is by contacting them directly via telephone or email. I will describe the different types of interviews you may encounter.

Open File: An open file interview means the interviewer(s) have access to your whole application, including academics, experiences, personal statement, etc.

Closed File: A closed file interview means the interviewer(s) doesn't have access to your application.

Semi-Closed File: A semi-closed file or partially closed file interview usually means the interviewer(s) have access to your experiences, personal statement, and letters of recommendation. However, they don't have access to your academics.

Traditional Interview: A traditional interview is a one-on-one interview.

Panel Interview: A panel interview consists of at least 2 interviewers. One advantage of a panel interview is that it can limit any negative bias against you.

Multiple-Mini-Interview (MMI): An MMI-style interview consists of multiple stations with many different interviewers. They are usually one-on-one and last for a short period of time (5-10 minutes). Usually each station will have a scenario prompt that you must read first and then come up with an answer. An advantage of the MMI style is that if you perform poorly at one station, there are other stations to make up for a bad mark. Your overall score from each station will be totaled at the end by the admissions committee.

Group Interview: This will consist of other candidates and usually several interviewers in a room. You will engage in open conversation with either the interviewers or the other candidates.

Online/Video interview: I only know of one school that conducts a video interview prior to the actually interview: University of Detroit Mercy (UDM). You are asked a question, given a minute or so to think of an answer and then it will record your response.

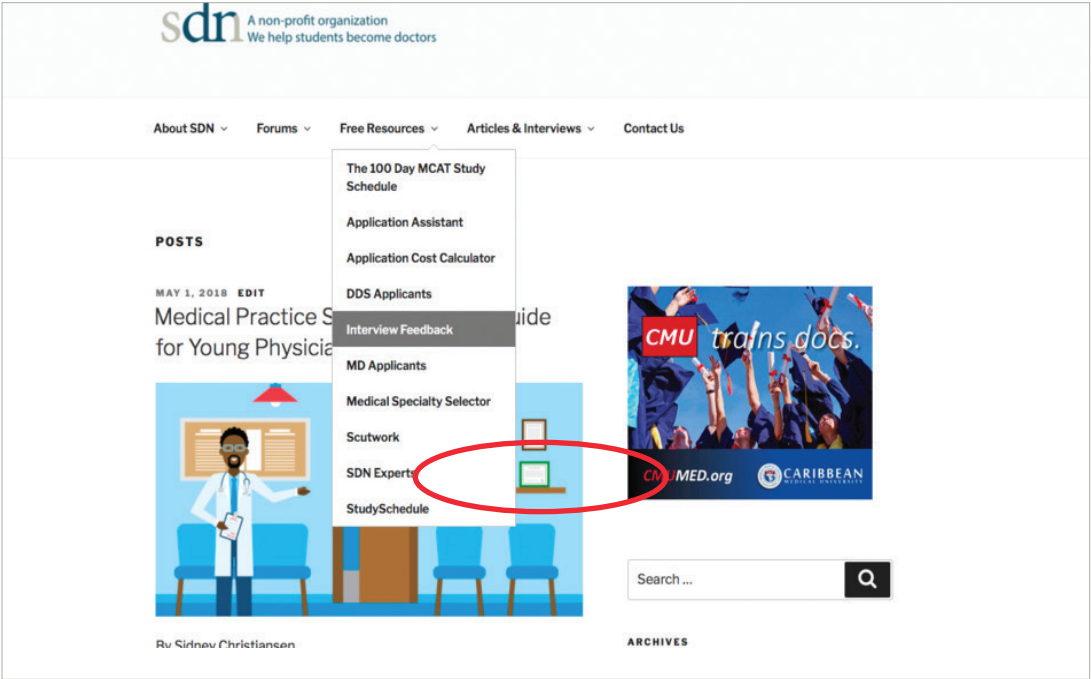


Interviews

As I mentioned earlier, submitting your application early will give you the best chance at maximizing the number of interviews you receive. Generally, the first interview invites begin around late June. However, they drastically vary between schools. Some schools may wait until October to send out the first round of interview invites, so don't panic if you haven't gotten an interview from a certain school. The Student Doctor Network Forums, under school specific discussions, is a good place to see if anyone else has gotten an interview invite to the school you're interested in. The interview cycle usually lasts until April. However, each school has different timelines and some finish by December 1st. If you haven't already done so, be sure to join the Facebook group called: [Dental School Interview Bootcamp](#). This will give you access to many dental students and applicants. It's a great place to ask any questions about the application process, share resources, and get interview tips.

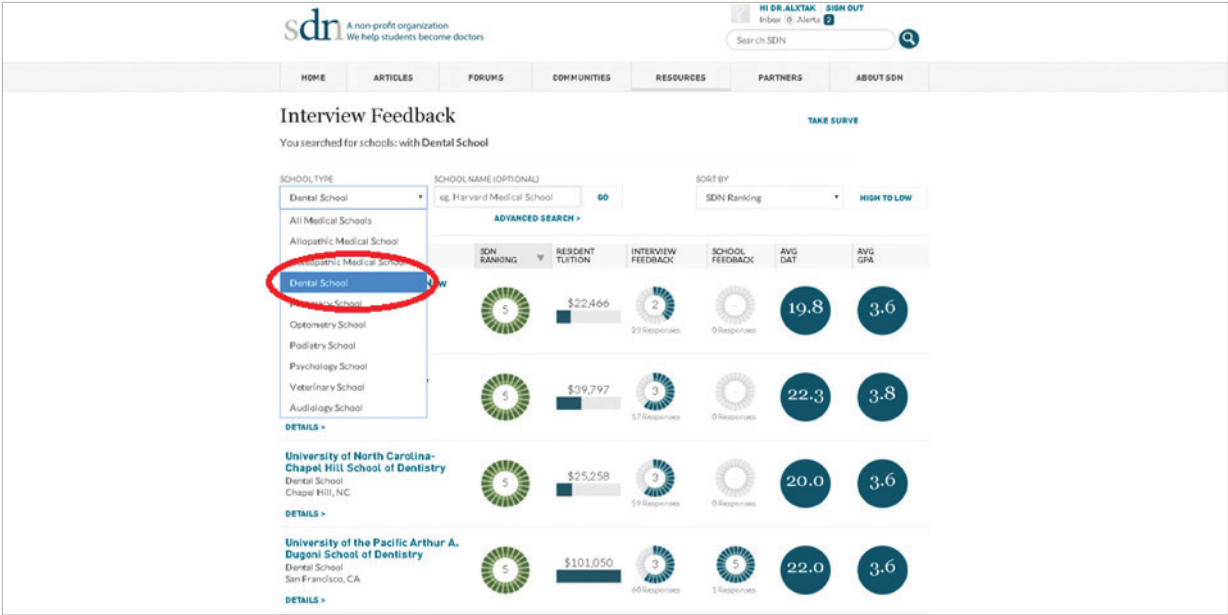


After you have established the type of interview you are dealing with, you can now direct your efforts to prepare effectively. First thing you want to do is go to www.studentdoctor.net and it will take you to the following screen below. Click the Resources tab.



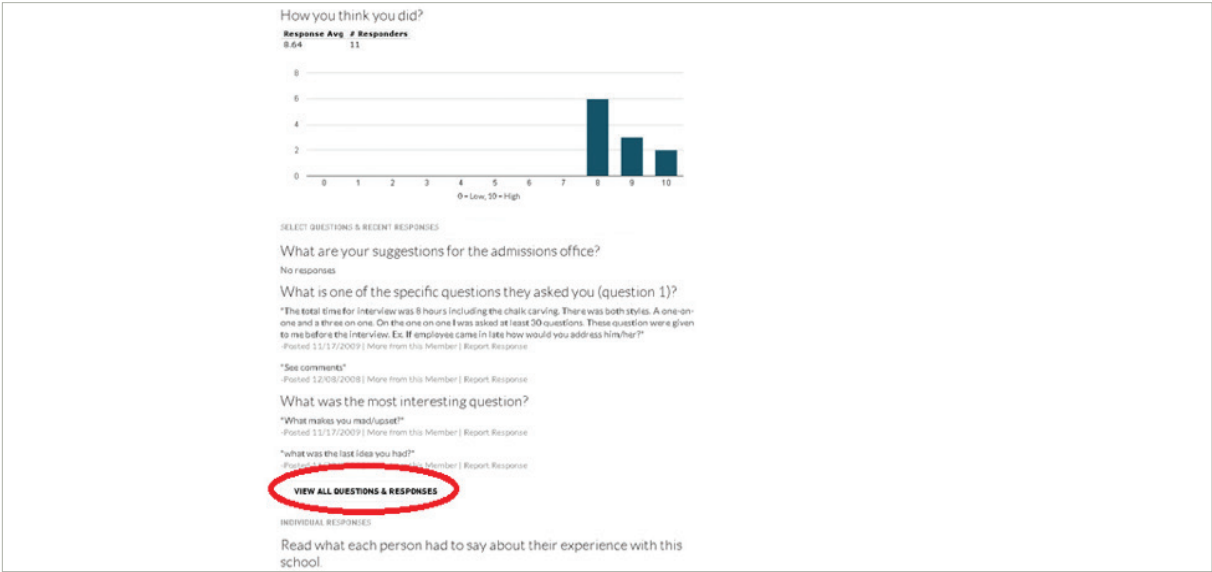
(Takshyn, A. Jan 23, 2018. Interview Feedback Image 1 (Screen capture). Retrieved from <http://www.studentdoctor.net>)

From here, you want to click the section that says: “Interview Feedback.” This will take you to the following screen, where you will select the school type as Dental school:



(Takshyn,A. Jan 23, 2018. Interview Feedback Image 2 (Screen capture). Retrieved from <http://www.studentdoctor.net>)

From here you can find the school that you are interviewing at and find a lot of very important information such as what other interviewed candidates experiences were at this school. If you scroll down you will be able to see “[View all questions and responses](#)” which is a collection of past questions asked during the interview posted by interviewees.



(Takshyn, A. Jan 23, 2018. Interview Feedback Image 3 (Screen capture). Retrieved from <http://www.studentdoctor.net>)

After each interview you have, you will add questions to the document. By the end you will have a booklet that has a ton of questions and all your responses to them. Before every interview I would read my booklet and recall what I would say for each type of question. You will find that many schools recycle the same questions over and over. Here is the protocol I used when preparing my question bank:

1. Construct an interview question bank
2. Understand what the interviewer is looking for
3. Write your response or framework
4. Get feedback on your answer
5. Rehearse your responses out loud

Your responses should include personal anecdotes, so it is important to have a few interesting stories to tell your interviewer if needed. Also, if applicable, your answer should tell the interviewer what you learned, how you grew and/ or what skills you expanded on.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Below I have written a few common questions that could be asked during your interviews. I have written a sample answer or framework of how to answer each question.

Tell me about yourself.

This is usually asked at the beginning of the interview. Although it may appear as a very simple question, it's important to practice and construct a good response. Remember, every question has a purpose and how you respond will dictate the direction of the interview. You want to be chronological if possible while at the same time staying relevant. The interviewer generally wants you to focus on the last 4 years or so however, including some of your background information is okay. Your answer can be something along the lines of:

Answer: "I was originally born in Ukraine but grew up in Toronto, Canada. Growing up in Toronto allowed me to build relationships with people from all over the world, and I enjoyed learning about other people's cultures... Currently I'm attending York University and will be completing my major in kinesiology. The reason I chose kinesiology instead of following the traditional biomedical sciences route is because of my involvement in sports... During my undergraduate years, I have received multiple academic scholarships while balancing numerous other commitments. I enjoy helping others and sharing my passion for science, which is the reason I tutor and continue to volunteer." (You may want to go into a little more detail and provide examples/stories.)

As you can see, my answer highlights a few important characteristics. For example, I indirectly told the interviewer that I have good time management and prioritization skills. Also, I directed them to ask me questions about certain experiences I wanted them to take note of.

Why dentistry?

This is probably the question that was asked the most at my interviews. Everyone has their reasons and answers will vary. However, a general framework to think about is:

Answer:

- Working with and helping others
- Large manual dexterity involvement
- Science based
- Business aspect
- Professional and personal work-life balance

What got you interested in dentistry?

Although this question should be answered in our personal statement, it is still important to be able to recap exactly how it happened. For me it was a unique experience with an orthodontist that fueled my interest in healthcare in general. From there I explored various career paths and after seeing the great benefits of dentistry, I decided that it was the ideal for me.

Why not become a physician?

There are many parallels between the healthcare fields, and it is important to show the admissions committee that you have dug further into other career paths within healthcare when arriving at your final decision. I knew that dentistry was right for me after I shadowed and volunteered at a physiotherapy clinic, primary physician's clinic, and a dental office. When answering, you can point out the similarities between the fields and then segue into what makes dentistry unique.

Answer: Although both professions have many similarities, such as helping people and getting to know them on a more personal level, the reason I choose dentistry over medicine is because of the great manual skill involvement, flexibility to balance my professional and personal life, as well as being a business owner and having the autonomy to practice where I choose to.

What are your weaknesses?

I personally believe this question is asked to see if you understand that there are areas in your application and life that can be improved upon. Answering this question the correct way is very important because it will show honesty and the desire to improve—very important qualities to have in life. Firstly, never tell someone you don't have any weaknesses; we all have weaknesses. Secondly, don't take a strength and make it look like a weakness. Your interviewers are very intelligent people and thinking that they won't see through that "BS" can be insulting. When you're thinking of a response to this question, you want to find weaknesses that don't really relate to the profession, or weaknesses that are obvious on your application. And then end the answer on a positive note of what you're doing to address these weaknesses. For example, one weakness that I used was public speaking. This is a very common weakness that many people have and can relate to.

Answer: One of my weaknesses is public speaking. I tend to get very nervous in front of large crowds. However, I have been actively working and trying to improve my public speaking skills by taking public speaking lessons. I have also taken a "X" course which has several presentation components. I feel I have come a long way since I began working on this skill and I find myself much more comfortable in these situations.

What sets you apart from other applicants?

This is a great question to highlight some of your key strengths and abilities. Be sure to be able to explain each skill/quality. Here are a few that I used:

Answer:

- Leadership skills
- Time management and prioritization skills
- Team player
- Entrepreneurship

Tell me about your volunteer and/or shadowing experiences.

Essentially for this question you want to explain your role and what skills you learned or improved upon. Also, be sure you can explain your shadowing experience: what you liked and what you didn't like. Perhaps you saw some interesting cases or simply became familiar with some of the technology. As a side note, if you mention something, be prepared to talk about it. During one of my interviews they asked me about the kind of machines I became more familiar with and I named a few and explained what their function was. My interviewer was quite impressed with that. I suggest that you Google some of the machines you saw while shadowing and learn a little more about their function and how they work. Moreover, if you have a lot of shadowing hours, I would make sure that you know some basic outlines and reasons for procedures such as fillings, root canals, implants, wisdom tooth removal, etc., especially if you mentioned them anywhere on your application. Several of my colleagues mentioned that they were asked how they would go about doing "X" procedure.

Tell me about "X" experience.

This is probably going to be the most common type of question. I would look back on all the experiences on my application and come up with some sort of framework of an answer to each; this will help you be articulate and stay organized in your answer.

Why our school?

This question will come up at a large majority of your interviews, and you should be able to answer it very well. Firstly, what attracted you to this school? Secondly, look at their vision and mission statements and see what they're trying to accomplish as a school. Do they have an emphasis on research? Community service? These are all important to consider. You want to go beyond what you see in the ADEA Official Guide. You want to give your answer in a way that shows the interviewer that the school and you are a great fit. Be sure to check out Figure 4 starting on page 26, as it highlights some unique characteristics regarding each school.

What questions do you have for me?

This is a very important question that you should be thoroughly prepared for. Asking the interviewer intelligent questions demonstrates interest in the program. If you don't have any questions, you will seem disinterested and you will more than likely be at the bottom of the list. During your research of the school, you should highlight important aspects of their curriculum and student involvement opportunities. I recommend that you ask questions about the type of research opportunities they have available, to expand on the community outreach opportunities, and clarify any interesting aspects of their curriculum. I would prepare for this by first looking at the school's website and take notes of the important details. Then I would go on YouTube and see what content is available about that school. Lastly, I would go on the SDN Forums and read what people said about that particular school. You should have at least 7-10 good questions to ask. On page 41, I have attached a document I made when I interviewed at University of the Pacific. You should be doing this for every school you interview at. It's okay to open your binder and read the questions you have prepared for the interviewer.

There are some questions that you shouldn't ask. Avoid asking questions that can be answered with a simple search or ones that make the school look bad. For example: What are the pass rates for the boards? Don't ask this; the pass rate is high for every school. A better question to ask would be: When do students prepare for the boards, and what resources do students have from the school to ensure they do well? Also, don't ask: "What are some negative things about the school?" This isn't comfortable for the interviewer, and you should have figured that out from current students on the SDN Forums. It can also show them that you aren't socially calibrated. Try to come up with intelligent questions that can start a dialogue between you and the interviewer.

UOP NOTES

Pacific Dental Helix Curriculum, which places a strong focus on active learning and critical thinking by integrating across multiple disciplinary areas and using small-group case-based learning as signature pedagogy.

Integrated Clinical Sciences Curriculum

- Foundation sciences (Anatomy, Physiology, and Biochem) integrated with clinical education

Integrated Preclinical Technique

- Closer simulation of clinical practice
- Learning integrated around patient case

Integrated Medical Sciences

- Integration of medical sciences to patient care via case discussion & faculty instruction

Clinical Practice

- Closely resembles private practice

Personal Instruction Program (PIP)

- Students choose one area in dentistry to gain focused experience
- Academia, research, community service, global missions.

Students begin working with patients in their second year

At Pacific we grow people, and along the way, they become doctors.

Our view of humanism is based upon honest communication of clear expectations along with positive support for diligent effort.

Questions:

Can you elaborate on the personal instruction program? How does it work?

Can you tell me more about the comprehensive patient care program? (It mentions that it replaces the traditional system of clinical requirements).

- Based on private practice model, student assumes responsibility for assigned patients’ treatment, consultation and referral for specialty care.

What is the portfolio exam process for licensing?

Do students place implants?

Other than Give Kids a Smile Day and Project Homeless Connect, can you tell me about some of the community outreach opportunities?

When do students usually start getting involved?

Are you aware of any new changes coming to the curriculum or school in the near future?

OTHER COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Below I’m including several other questions that commonly come up during interviews for you to practice with. Include them in your interview booklet along with the other questions you find off SDN’s Interview Feedback. Forming responses to them will give you the upper edge in the interview seat.

- What has been the most rewarding or challenging experience in your life?
- What accomplishment are you most proud of?
- Tell me about a disappointment you have experienced
- How do you handle criticism?
- How do your friends describe you?
- What are some problems in dentistry?
- What qualities make for a good dentist?
- What do you do for fun?
- Where do you see yourself in 5-10 years?
- How do you handle stress? Tell me about a time you were stressed out?
- What was the last book you read?
- Tell me about a time you faced an ethical decision?
- What was one event that changed your life?
- What is one decision you regret?
- Why healthcare?
- What can you contribute to the school?
- What was an obstacle you overcame?

ETHICAL SCENARIOS

Everyone dreads these, but they aren’t too difficult to answer once you practice a few and increase your knowledge of medical ethics. Here are a few basic concepts of ethics that you should be aware of:

TERM	DEFINITION
AUTONOMY	RESPECT FOR PATIENT AUTONOMY REFERS TO RESPECTING THE PATIENT’S DECISION AND THEIR CAPACITY TO MAKE THEIR OWN DECISIONS.
BENEFICENCE	ACTING IN THE PATIENT’S BEST INTEREST, ALSO KNOWN AS “DOING GOOD.”
NON-MALEFICENCE	KNOWN AS “DO NO HARM.”
JUSTICE	REFERS TO THE AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES; ALLOCATING CARE.
INFORMED CONSENT	REFERS TO THE ABILITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL TO MAKE DECISIONS.
CONFIDENTIALITY	IT REFERS TO HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS RESPECTING THE PATIENT’S PRIVACY.
EMANCIPATED MINOR	REFERS TO INDIVIDUALS YOUNGER THAN 18 WHO ARE TREATED AS ADULTS AND HAVE THE ABILITY TO MAKE THEIR OWN DECISIONS. MUST MEET CERTAIN CRITERIA SUCH AS FINANCIAL STABILITY, LIVING ALONE, ETC. – LAWS VARY BETWEEN STATES.

Source: uOttawa (2017, Sept, 20). Ethics & the Law. Retrieved from https://www.med.uottawa.ca/sim/Data/Serv_Ethics_e.htm#4_pillars

I highly advise that you reference the source I have used as they go into further details regarding medical ethics. Although you aren’t expected to be an expert on medical ethics, you should be able to reasonably answer simple ethical questions and identify what conflicts between principles are involved.

MMI PRACTICE

Practicing for the MMI is a little different, as the range of questions varies tremendously. When you are first given the prompt, you will normally be given a minute or so to read it over. Be sure to take the time and read it carefully a couple times. When the timer to read is over, you will be introduced to your interviewer, where you will shake their hand and say hello, as with a traditional interview. I recommend that you first start off by saying: “I would like to summarize the scenario to ensure that I understand it.” This is perfectly fine. The purpose of summarizing is it gives you a little more time to digest the information and then proceed to your answer.

If there are two sides to the scenario, it is important to recognize both sides and acknowledge them to your interviewer. MMI scenarios usually involve ethical scenarios, and therefore it is important to brush up on ethics. There isn’t necessarily always a right or wrong answer in an MMI-style interview. What the interviewer is looking for is this: Can you logically think through a problem and provide a solution? [Here is a link to a few practice scenarios.](#) (All credit is given to Astroff Consultants Inc for the creation of the scenarios.)



INTERVIEW ATTIRE

What you wear can be an important signal of how socially calibrated you are, as well as your maturity level. The first impression is extremely important, and it’s been cited in many studies that your interviewer knows whether they will hire/accept you within a couple of minutes. Therefore, it is important to gain every advantage possible. Remember you are interviewing for a professional school, and you are expected to dress accordingly. This isn’t the time to be a fashionista. Men, try to stick to the more traditional colors of black, grey, and navy with nice dress shoes. The basic rule to follow is this: when in doubt go with the more conservative outfit.

Women are a little trickier as they have more options. Wear something that is comfortable. A knee-length skirt or dress pants are appropriate. Also, be sure to wear comfortable shoes, as there will usually be quite a bit of walking during the school tours. Stick to low/moderate heels, and flats are also a great option. Wearing different colors for women is okay, just avoid flashy colors.

For men:



Image taken from: <https://blacklapel.com/thecompass/interview-suits-for-grads/>

For Women:



Image taken from: <http://diaiz.co/women-interview-attire/blazers-women-interview-attire-coloring-as-the-suits-very-rarely-go-on-sale-and-because-you-may-need-to-account-for-an-extra-week-tailoring-more-that-in-upcoming-post-13f/>

WHAT TO BRING

First thing you want to do is double check your interview email to ensure you have all the appropriate documents, such as your picture and signed forms (if applicable). Then you want to have your personal statement, experiences (from AADSAS portal), and your interview practice questions printed out. If they misplace your file, you will look very well prepared when you hand them a copy of your personal statement and experiences. (This happened to a friend of mine.) Lastly, I recommend that you invest in a pad-folio. It is a professional-looking leather binder where you can keep all your documents and things. It costs under \$30, is simple, and gets the job done— just be sure to bring a pen.

BOOKING YOUR INTERVIEW

When you get an interview invitation, try to get back to them as soon as possible, as certain days fill up quickly. For pre-December interviews, the dates aren’t as important because schools can only send acceptances after Dec 1st. Nonetheless, don’t choose a very late interview date. For post-December interviews, you want to schedule them as soon as possible (no later than 2 weeks), because fewer seats are available as the cycle continues. The interview process is expensive, so it’s important to try and save money wherever possible. When booking hotels, I used Hotwire.com’s secret rates. When booking flights, I used redtag.ca. I found them to be the cheapest. Purchasing through Orbitz.com or directly from the airline website can be good options in the US. Also, look into Airbnb for accommodations and Uber/Lyft for your transportation.

NIGHT BEFORE

The night before your interview, you want to ensure that you have everything ready for the next day: outfit, breakfast plan, pad-folio, documents, etc. Also, you want to see how much time it will take to get to the school from your hotel so you can plan accordingly. Plan to sleep a regular night (8 hours) and it can be helpful to take a sleeping aid.

INTERVIEW DAY

On interview day plan to arrive at the interview location at least 15-20 minutes prior to the time of your interview. From here, take a quick walk up and down the block. This will help you relax a little bit. Don’t go in right away, some ADCOMS mentioned that they don’t like students coming in too early. I would normally enter the building about 10 minutes early. Expect to be watched the moment you step onto campus. Be courteous and polite to everyone, not because your future is on the line, but because it’s right. Hold the door for people; say please and thank you. You never know who is who and what bearing they can have on your outcome. When you enter the school you will be signed in by program coordinators and oftentimes walked to a room where the other candidates are sitting. Be social and interact with others. After all, interpersonal skills are important qualities for successful dentists. I always enjoyed getting to know the other candidates; many people hold very impressive resumes and have a very interesting story—and they could be your future classmates! Also, don’t be fazed by the other candidates. While they may seem very impressive, we all have strengths and weaknesses. The school invited YOU for an interview because they like your file. Now you just have to walk them through it and show your awesome personality. Focus on yourself and presenting the best YOU possible.

OTHER TIPS

You don’t want to say “I’m set on “X” path,” such as specializing or general dentistry. You never know where life will take you, and you haven’t even gotten into dental school at this point. It’s okay to say you want to explore certain specialties of interest, but definitively saying you’re going into Ortho or OMFS is not looked well upon. Also, remember schools are there to serve their community and favorably look upon students who wish to remain and practice in their surrounding area. While you may almost certainly move back to your hometown, also keep an open mind should it come up in an interview and articulate your answer neutrally.

Body language is also an important aspect of interviews. You want to display to the admissions committee that you’re confident. Maintain good posture, good eye contact, smile (but not too much), and also shake their hand with equal pressure that they shake yours. In fact, I recommend that you stick your hand out first, smile, and say it’s a pleasure to meet you. Remember, the interview is about managing perceptions. Your interviewer has very little time to make a judgement on your abilities, skills and your character. Therefore, if you can give off all the right signals to them in this short period of time, you will move to the top of the list.

During the interview, it’s important to remember your interviewer’s name and thank them at the end using their name; this makes you more memorable. Also, you should get the names of your interviewers to send them a thank you letter. However, should you forget, their contact information is usually given to you in your interview package the day of. Otherwise you can phone the school, and the secretary should have the names available for you.



Following Up

You should always follow up with your interviewers and thank them for interviewing you. Your thank you email should also include a statement of what you liked about the school and the program. I know that some schools attach your thank you note to your file, so put some thought into it. I personally sent an email, but some people do send a written thank you note; both are fine.

FILE UPDATES

I recommend that you send an experiences update to every school sometime around early November and reiterate your interest in their program. Give the program an update of what you have been doing since the completion of your application, regardless if you interviewed already or not. It is important to continue volunteering, shadowing, and gaining new experiences; schools will look at it very favorably. Should you have not been accepted into your top choice by January/February, you should also send the schools an academic update (if you did well) and another update of your experiences to once again reiterate your interest in an interview or attending that particular school. I got an interview at a top school following a letter of interest I submitted to them—it can work!

WAITLIST

Being put on the waitlist/alternate candidate doesn't mean you're out of the race. Waitlists do move and seats free up. Your first move should be to send a letter of intent to the school. You want to first thank the admission's committee for continuing to consider you as a candidate for their class. Then you want to tell them why you want to go to this school and why you're a great fit for each other. The letter should be a couple paragraphs at most; get to the point, but at the same time speak highly of their program. When you send the letter of intent, I would advise that you send it to the director of admissions, the dean, your interviewers, and the school's general admissions email. They all play an important part in the final decisions. The next day, you can call the school directly and follow up with them. You want to follow up with the school every few weeks and try to have new information for them at every contact point. Let's take the following scenario for example:

You have been waitlisted at "X" school December 1st, and it also happens to be at the top of your list.

1. Within a week you should write a letter of intent stating your interest in their program.
2. Call the school and confirm they have received the letter and express your interest again.
3. Around January 1st or just before the due date of the first deposit, call or email the school again.
4. Towards the end of January, provide the school with an academic (if you did well) and/or experience update letter—be sure to also send your updated transcript to AADSAS for verification (if you did well or if they request it).
5. Call the school again to verify they have received your documents and express your interest.
6. Continually provide the school updates on any new experiences and make contact before the next wave of acceptances (if applicable). You can use the SDN Forums to see when they traditionally send out acceptances. These usually occur after deposit dates.

While I know being waitlisted is very stressful, try to stay optimistic and persevere. Schools are interested in candidates who want to be at their school and by showing interest, they would much rather admit you into the program over a person with similar qualifications who hasn't shown interest. Waitlists do move, and some schools dig quite deep into their waitlists. Admissions personnel at certain schools mentioned movement of 50+ people who eventually get accepted into their program off the waitlist. At the back of the ADEA Official Guide to Dental Schools there is a table showing the number of interviews and acceptance offers given out from each school. (A few schools don't release the complete results).

NEXT CYCLE

Preparing for the next cycle is also a smart move on your part if you aren't admitted by spring. Many students go through the application cycle more than once, and the ones who improve their application are oftentimes successful. The first thing you want to do is figure out your weaknesses and what parts of your application need to be improved. Most schools are willing to tell you your weaknesses, but you have to be the one to make contact and ask for it. From here you can look back on your application and make improvements where necessary. Remember to apply early as well. If you can fix your

application and improve it, you will have a much higher chance of admittance the second time around. Don't submit the same application with minor changes and expect a different outcome. Remember what I mentioned earlier—schools want applicants who can fulfill their mission, continually grow, and expand their skills and knowledge.

Conclusion

The application cycle is a very exciting time, but it can also be quite stressful. Some of you will have ups and downs the whole way through just like I did. You will get frustrated at times, and that's okay. You must learn to accept, adapt and move on; all of this is just part of the process. Remember to stay confident in yourself, and don't be afraid to ask people for help when you need it! I now leave you with my very best wishes and regards, I look forward to seeing you in that white coat.

-Alexander Takshyn

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