

# Preparing for Medical School: Factors Considered for Admission

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Medical schools evaluate applicants in three areas: GPA, MCAT scores, and other non-academic factors. Because each school places different weight on each area, be sure to research specific schools. To research specific schools, consult individual school websites, participate when visiting schools visit campus, consult the AAMC and AACOM guides to medical schools, and utilize the services available at the Preprofessional Advisement Center.

## ACADEMIC FACTORS FOR MEDICAL SCHOOL ADMISSION

- **GPA:** Both your cumulative GPA and science GPA (Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Math) are an important part of your application.
- **MCAT Scores:** The Medical College Admission Test, “MCAT,” is a standardized test required for all students seeking admission to U.S. medical schools. On the exam, you will be asked to demonstrate scientific reasoning and problem solving skills by applying your knowledge of scientific principles to answer passage-based and discrete questions. Ideally, the MCAT should be taken approximately 2-4 weeks prior to your medical school application.
- **Workload:** It is important to take full course loads (about 14+ credit hours) each semester, while working hard to perform as well as possible. Spacing out more difficult classes while continuing to take a full course load may work, but consistently light loads raise questions about an applicant’s ability to handle the heavy loads required in medical school. Generally, work, MCAT study or research may not be a satisfying justification for taking fewer hours each semester.

## PICKING A MAJOR

There is no premedical major. Choose a major you are interested in and that may provide other options in addition to medical school. Factors to consider when choosing a major include your interests, how well the major fits with prerequisite requirements, and what kinds of alternatives are available if you choose to pursue another career.

## NON-ACADEMIC FACTORS FOR MEDICAL SCHOOL ADMISSION

Medical schools generally encourage applicants to be well-rounded individuals that have experiences in many different areas. However, the requirements and the relative weight of these factors often vary between schools. Be sure to consult the AAMC and AACOM guides to medical schools and with individual school websites for specific requirements.

- **Shadowing:** Specific recommendations vary, but most schools recommend a total of 50-100 hours with observation occurring in a variety of medical specialties. If applying to osteopathic medical schools, be sure to shadow at least one DO physician.
- **Community Service:** Emphasis on service varies, but many schools recommend 200+ hours. Service activities should demonstrate consistent and long term commitment to helping others, but do not need to be medically related. Community service (English classes, service projects, etc.) done on a mission is a start, but consistent engagement in your own community can be seen as more valuable.
- **Research:** Recommendations vary greatly, but many schools encourage research experience in a hypothesis-based setting. Check with individual schools for specific recommendations. There are many opportunities to do research either on or off campus, depending upon your interests. Research can be in any field, but does have to follow the scientific method.
- **Patient Exposure:** Some schools specifically encourage experiences that allow you to interact directly with patients in a professional healthcare setting. You can get good patient exposure by becoming a phlebotomist, a CNA, or by volunteering in a clinic, hospital, rehab facility or hospice that allows you to influence the physical and/or emotional well-being of patients.
- **Extracurricular Activities:** Most schools have no specific requirements but like applicants to demonstrate well-roundedness. Any kind of club, activity, or organization that you show genuine commitment to usually is seen as interesting if it is interesting to you.
- **Leadership:** Experiences that exhibit leadership qualities can be accrued in conjunction with research, service, employment, extracurricular activities and/or church service.
- **Letters of Recommendation:** Requirements vary by school. Generally, students need 2-3 letters from professors (usually science professors), a personal reference (employer, advisor, etc.), and a physician in order to meet the requirements for most schools. Research individual schools websites for specific requirements.



## GENERAL TIMELINE

