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The Pre-Med Inc. Guide to Getting Into Medical School

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**The foundations of a medical school application:**

**Completion of prerequisite courses:**

Most medical schools require, at minimum, the following:

1 year of English, 1 year of physics, 1 year of bio, 2 years of Chem (gen Chem + OChem)

Note: pre-med course requirements vary to some extent by school, which is why it’s so important to purchase online access to the MSAR: [https://apps.aamc.org/msar-ui/#/landing](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.google.com/url?q%3Dhttps://apps.aamc.org/msar-ui/%2523/landing%26amp;sa%3DD%26amp;ust%3D1537488497786000&sa=D&ust=1537488497832000&usg=AFQjCNFfSyOgS39Kd89xmbwHfc194904EA)

Note that one’s major is irrelevant in the medical school application process, so long as the prerequisite courses have been completed. One should major in what will yield the most enjoyment and the highest GPA.

**GPA:**

Relative importance: Science GPA>Cumulative GPA>Non-science GPA.

Upward GPA trends are viewed favorably.

2017-2018 data from the AAMC on matriculates to MD schools:

Mean Cumulative GPA: 3.71

**Mean Science GPA: 3.64**

Mean Non-Science GPA: 3.79

**MCAT:**

The MCAT is weighted roughly equally with GPA. Total score is most important.

2017-2018 data from the AAMC on matriculates to MD schools:

Mean CPBS Score: 127.6

Mean CARS Score: 126.9

Mean BBLS Score: 127.9

Mean PSBB Score: 128.0

**Mean Total MCAT Score: 510.4**

**Volunteering/Community Service:**

Clinical/Medical volunteering is equally as important as non-clinical volunteering. Longevity is viewed favorably. There are diminishing returns for accumulating thousands of hours. 100-300 hours will suffice. Clinical volunteering doesn’t necessarily have to be in a hospital. Hospice, camps for sick children, and other examples will also work.

**Shadowing:**

Shadow 1-3 physicians for at least 50 hours total. Applicants must prove to adcoms that they know what they’re getting themselves into. Try to shadow at least one physician who is not ultra-specialized (i.e. a family medicine doc will be higher-yield than a cataract surgery office).

**Data from the AAMC:**

This chart shows the relative importance of various aspects of a med school application according to 130 admissions committees:



No surprises here. GPA, MCAT are king along with volunteering and shadowing. Jumping through these hoops gets you **to** the door.

Then, you rely on the following to get **through** the door:

-Personal statement/essays/secondaries

-Depth/impressiveness of ECs

-Interview

-LORs

-Uniqueness as an applicant

-Absence of red flags/application blunders

With few exceptions, no single item on an application makes or breaks one’s chances. The application must be considered as a whole. For example- when presented alone, a 3.4 affords one meager chances at an MD acceptance. When that 504 is paired with a 520 MCAT score, however, the situation becomes more hopeful.

There are limits to this compensation game. If one has a 2.4 GPA, even a 525 MCAT will likely fail to revive their application. And if one lacks volunteering, shadowing, or has a red flag on their app, a 4.0 and 528 are probably meaningless.

Occasionally, one will hear stories about someone getting into Harvard Medical School with a 3.0. Counting on this happening to you is foolish. Unless you are a major outlier in some way, it is generally considered unwise to apply for a school for which your GPA and MCAT are <10th percentile of matriculated applicants. These numbers can be found on the MSAR: [https://apps.aamc.org/msar-ui/#/landing](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.google.com/url?q%3Dhttps://apps.aamc.org/msar-ui/%2523/landing%26amp;sa%3DD%26amp;ust%3D1537488497790000&sa=D&ust=1537488497834000&usg=AFQjCNEyt52-FAYx-b88Omq8RKwSnSf-xA).

**Extracurricular advice**

Your ECs should each fit at least one of these 4 criteria:

1) Helps other people/animals

2) Allows for clinical experience

3) Contributes in some way to science/medicine

4) Demonstrates an obvious interest/passion for something productive

Ideally your ECs will satisfy many or all of these criteria simultaneously.

A few of your EC choices will be obvious: Shadowing, Research, and Volunteering. In fact, shadowing and volunteering are *essential* for one’s med school application. It is important for one to take away at least one story or salient experience from each activity. When writing an application or giving an interview, **telling stories** will allow you to come across compellingly and passionately. Throughout the application process, you need to keep the phrase “show, don’t tell” on replay in your mind.

**Advice for Shadowing, Research, and Volunteering:**

When shadowing a physician, always be 5 minutes early, appear interested, ask intelligent questions, and write down interesting cases so you’ll have them when you write your application. Your questions do not have to be ultra-technical. If shadowing an oncologist, for example, ask things like “What do you like most about your job?” While not at all necessary, securing a first author publication is significantly more impressive than presenting a poster. Similarly, logging thousands of volunteer hours over several years and earning humanitarian award looks better than cramming 150 hours of volunteering into a couple months.

There are endless options for non-clinical volunteering. Here are some examples:

1) Habitat for Humanity
2) Meals on wheels
3) Big brother/big sister programs
4) Teach a free local GED class
5) Homeless shelter/soup kitchen
6) Animal shelter
7) Youth groups/Youth sports coaching
8) Food banks/food pantries

The most important thing is to do what you like and are actually interested in. If you truly care about what you do, it will shine through in your application and interview.

Ultimately, the highest-yield way to differentiate yourself is to go after #4 on my list of EC guidelines. *Demonstrate an obvious interest/passion for something productive.* It is imperative to remain interesting as a person during college. As a pre-med, it is quite easy to turn into a GPA/MCAT/volunteering robot. Adcoms can sniff this out rather easily. If you appear as though you’re not passionate about your hobbies, either in your writing or during your interview, it will show.

Try to focus less on what medical schools want to see. What are your passions? Pursue them aggressively throughout college and let them show in your ECs. Perhaps you’re interested in mental health and cosmetics. Maybe you could found a club which studies the mental impact of disfiguring conditions (congenital, trauma, burns, etc.). You could then try to raise money for burn hospitals and mental health organizations. The aforementioned activities demonstrate leadership, altruism, passion and quite frankly look outrageously good on an application.

When adcoms read your ECs, they are attempting to paint a mental picture of how you spend 168 hours every week. If your ECs are all over the place, they won’t point to a unified interest or passion. Consequently, adcoms may get the impression that you're checking boxes. If you're interested in something, try to do many things that reflect it. This way, your application has a theme of some sort. It’s easier to make a lasting impression if the adcoms can look back at your file months later and think “Oh yeah, that’s the global health girl.”

Finally, your ECs don't all have to fit the traditional academic or altruistic mold. Suppose you happen to be immensely interested in rubix cubes. You may be surprised at how this hobby could be used as a powerful tool for medical school admissions. If you were to start a rubix cube club at your college and use it to raise money for charity, it would simultaneously demonstrate leadership, ingenuity, passion, altruism and uniqueness.

**Interview advice**

Firstly, if you’ve received an interview invitation, congratulate yourself. Schools usually only interview ~15% of applicants, so you've already successfully passed a massive screening barrier. However, it's certainly possible to sink one's application during the interview. Be confident, but not complacent or arrogant.

Before interview invitations go out, medical schools already have a rough idea of each applicant’s standing relative to all other interviewees. This initial ranking, so to speak, is largely determined by one’s GPA and MCAT score. A great interview may shift an applicant forward in ranking to some extent, while a train wreck interview could plummet one all the way to the bottom of the list. A neutral interview will likely result in no movement. Once a school begins accepting applicants, they will simply start from the top and work their way down the list.

During an interview, it’s important to speak slowly, clearly and deliberately. Don't mumble or speak too softly. You should seem personable, relaxed, friendly and enthusiastic. Give a firm handshake and maintain appropriate levels of eye contact. When interviewers look at you, a lot of them think "could I imagine this person in a white coat touching patients?"

Try not to ramble, and craft your sentences carefully. Interviewers pay attention to your vocabulary and your nonverbal communication. Being well-spoken is a significant plus. A given question should not take you more than 1-2 minutes to answer. If they ask you about your volunteer experience at the soup kitchen, talk about your volunteer experience at the soup kitchen. Don't use it as an opportunity to spin into why you want to be a doctor.

Demonstrate your awareness of the current healthcare system, and some curiosity about the possible ways to improve it. When you discuss your ECs, it’s very easy for an interviewer to tell if you actually care about what you did. If you don’t sound passionate, you may be assumed to be a box-checker.

Take advantage of all opportunities to demonstrate your resilience, your humility, your ability to work well on a team, and your ability to lead others.

If you're putting research experience on your application, make sure you review the research and know it cold before going into the interview. You may be interviewed by a PhD who will only be interested in the minutiae of your science. This goes for really anything on your application. You need to memorize your entire file. If they ask you about something in it and you struggle to recall what they're talking about, it will not look good.

Have questions prepared for the interviewer. At the end of the interview, they'll ask you "What questions do you have for me?" Here are some examples: "What is the culture like among the students here?" "What are the research opportunities like at this school? I noticed the public health department is quite large here.”

Try to make sure you’ve used the restroom and have had food and water before an interview. Interviews can last up to 45 minutes. You don't want to be squirming in your seat or be overly thirsty/hungry. Interviews are stressful and your mouth can dry out easily. Try to have a water bottle with you but don't fidget with it.

Practice answering these questions at baseline:

1) Tell me about yourself.

2) Why medicine?

3) What are your biggest strengths & weaknesses?

4) What is, in your opinion, the biggest problem in healthcare/medicine? How would you solve it?

5) Why should we give you a spot here/Why this school?

6) What do you do for fun/relaxation?

7) What's the hardest thing you've ever had to do?

8) Tell us about a time you had to question authority.

9) Tell us about a time you had to use teamwork.

10) What's your biggest accomplishment/proudest moment?

One of the greatest "cheat codes" for interviews is **storytelling**. If they ask about your volunteer experience at the hospital, have a compelling story ready about a specific patient that illustrates how you decided medicine is the career for you. Even if your entire volunteering experience consisted of getting in the way, bringing patients blankets and fetching water, you should be able to recall at least one significant encounter that helped convince you to pursue medicine.

This is an invaluable resource for school-specific interview information and includes actual questions reported by student interviewees: [https://schools.studentdoctor.net/schools/12/allopathic-medical-school-interview-feedback/1](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.google.com/url?q%3Dhttps://schools.studentdoctor.net/schools/12/allopathic-medical-school-interview-feedback/1%26amp;sa%3DD%26amp;ust%3D1537488497795000&sa=D&ust=1537488497837000&usg=AFQjCNHbEEZOMVAx435TbIeRna-Dx4JP6Q)

Keep in mind that some interviewers may actually purposely stress you out to see how you react. I’ll never forget my scariest medical school interview. When I walked in, the interviewer had printed out my transcript and circled every B I had ever received in red ink. He asked me to explain them.

I was pretty taken aback, but I remained calm. I explained that I use every B (or C) I got as a learning opportunity and a reminder to stay humble and realize that there is always much more to learn and master.

You have to remain calm, poised and confident at all times during interviews!

\*Disclaimer: Most interviews will **not** be like this, but be ready for situations like these.

You could also be asked your opinion on a medical ethical dilemma in an interview.

Here's an example of one I was given:

"You are an Emergency Room doctor. A mother and her daughter arrive to the ER after an accident and are dying of blood loss. The father arrives and demands that you do not give them blood because they are Jehovah's witnesses. What do you do?"

I had no idea. The "correct" answer is to transfuse the daughter, but not the mother. This is because in cases of emergency/life-saving care, the father can serve as a healthcare proxy for his adult wife. We can also reasonably assume his wife would not want to be transfused based on her presumed beliefs. However, minors can never be refused care by a healthcare proxy.

They don't expect you to know the answer, only to think things out carefully and consider the consequences of both sides of the dilemma. I just think it's useful to think about these situations at least a bit so you're not totally blindsided.

**A good outline for answering ethical questions/MMI interviewing:**

**D**ilemma - State your understanding of the dilemma

**R**esponsibilities - Outline your responsibilities

**M**y opinion - Explain your opinion and plan of action

**O**pposing opinion - Explain an opposing opinion

**EXAMPLE:**

Your friend asks if she can use your local swimming pool membership because she can’t afford one and her health is suffering.

Dilemma - “I understand that my friend has asked for me to grant her unauthorized access to a swimming pool in order to improve her health.”

Responsibilities - “I have an obligation to help my friend, and she is in a tough situation. One’s health is of paramount importance, and I may be her only method of accessing a method of low-impact exercise. However, I also have a responsibility to follow the swimming pool’s rules. It is not fair to the owner of a pool for me to secretly lend out my membership. If everyone did this, the pool would end up overflowing with swimmers.”

My opinion - “Ultimately, it is not fair to the pool owner and the other swimmers for me to break the rules for my friend. I will attempt to help her in other ways such as inviting her on walks, offering to drive her to buy healthy groceries, etc.”

Other opinion - “I can see why one would allow their friend to break the rules, as the benefits likely outweigh the negative consequences. However, if everyone broke the rules, it would create an unsustainable and unfair environment.”

**Personal Statement advice**

The personal statement isn’t an opportunity to regurgitate one’s resume. It is about one’s unique path to medicine. Allow adcoms to peer inside of your mind through your words. You have already listed your activities and accomplishments elsewhere.

Almost everyone applying to medical school is smart and has top grades. Medical schools could easily fill their entire classes with 3.8/518 students many times over, so they can be ultra-selective based on non-academic factors. Interestingly, 40% of applicants with GPA 3.8 or higher do not receive an acceptance. The personal statement is one of the tools they use to filter through the thousands upon thousands of 4.0 automatons.

Your personal statement must not be rushed. It must flow well, and it must have absolutely zero grammatical errors. The personal statement allows the admissions committee to paint a mental picture of you as a person. It allows them to visualize your personal path to medicine through your own experiences. If your writing exudes genuine passion, it will be a huge benefit to your application. You need to write about what makes you and your journey unique. Avoid writing about how you think you’ll make a great physician. Do not explain how your experiences have prepared you for medical school/being a doctor. Most importantly, you must have a stranger read over your writing and give you the cold, hard truth.

Your personal statement should roughly follow this outline:

-Introduction

-Thesis for why you want to be a doctor

-Supporting paragraphs (preferably stories) showing why you want to be a doctor

-Address any **major** gaps/issues in education or application (do not make excuses, show what you learned from your mistakes)

-Conclusion

Do not simply list your extracurricular and explain what they mean to you in your personal statement. While it’s fine to mention them, your ECs should not serve as an outline for your personal statement. There is already an entire section of the application dedicated to them.

You don’t need a unique, never-heard-of-before reason for wanting to be a doctor. Almost everyone is drawn to this field for some of the same reasons. We get it, you love science, love helping people and think being a doctor is the coolest job in the world. Show them, rather than tell them through your own experiences why this is true for you.

Brevity is always preferred in a personal statement. Most of us are not award-winning writers, myself included. Simply deliver your message in a coherent manner with college-level writing and move on.

In the same vein, don’t make your personal statement overly dramatic. While you need to sound passionate, adcoms know your experience shadowing in a clinic was not “life changing.” Also, try to avoid over-using certain words. Keep in mind that adcoms read hundreds if not thousands of personal statements, and reading the word “fascinating” for the 10,000th time gets old.

Other tips:

-Make your writing come to life. The reader should have a vivid picture is his/her head.

-Do not sell yourself short, but avoid exaggerating your accomplishments. You should demonstrate humility in some way in your application or interview.

-If you write about a sad story, don’t use it to hold the reader’s emotions hostage. Write about how it affected you.

**Letters of Recommendation advice**

If you think you may end up asking a professor to write you a letter of recommendation, do your best to make sure they know your face. This is particularly difficult at a large university, but here are some tips:

-Try to take multiple classes with the same professor (a small one if possible)

-Sit at the front and occasionally try to ask appropriate, thoughtful questions

-Visit office hours frequently

-Try to do research in this professor’s lab

-Become a TA or SI leader for this professor

Most schools require a minimum of 2 letters from science professors, and 1 letter from a non-science professor. These requirements vary by school, which is why it’s so important to buy an MSAR [https://apps.aamc.org/msar-ui/#/landing](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.google.com/url?q%3Dhttps://apps.aamc.org/msar-ui/%2523/landing%26amp;sa%3DD%26amp;ust%3D1537488497801000&sa=D&ust=1537488497840000&usg=AFQjCNECNMmdNrBzMfEkOlN0JbQkUuYmnA) and check each school’s individual websites. You can also ask for letters from an employer, research PI, or physician who has worked with you closely.

Ask for your LOR in person. Schedule a meeting with your professor via email. Show up ready with the following materials: Your transcript, a resume, a rough draft of your personal statement, a reminder that the letter must be written on official letterhead, and an outline for writing medical school LORs found here: [https://www.staging.aamc.org/download/351978/data/letters-printfriendly.pdf](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.google.com/url?q%3Dhttps://www.staging.aamc.org/download/351978/data/letters-printfriendly.pdf%26amp;sa%3DD%26amp;ust%3D1537488497802000&sa=D&ust=1537488497840000&usg=AFQjCNEL0Ew3CZoZFV4IRiR6O0c3JsYqow)  Have the materials ready in your backpack, and ask them directly- “Do you think you know me well enough to write me a strong letter of recommendation for my med school app?” if they are anything but enthusiastic, find someone else to write your letter. Trust me, you don’t want that letter.

The status/importance of your letter writer is less important than the content of your letter. It would be better to get a glowing letter from a low-ranking assistant professor in English who knows you well than a stale letter from a well-known dean of science.

Give your letter writer a strict deadline. Tell them it is due 3 weeks after asking them to write it, even if it's not. You don't want to end up in a situation where they've procrastinated on writing your letter for months and then you're stuck scrambling at application time. If you do happen to be in that situation, a trick that works well is sending them an "early" thank you card with a token of appreciation. That should expedite things.

A common question is: “What if I really want a letter from my freshman year professor? Surely they’ll forget me by the time I apply to med school.” Don’t worry, there is a way around this. Simply use a secure letter storing service like Interfolio. Your letter writer will submit the letter to Interfolio, and it will be held there securely until you’re ready to submit to AMCAS. [https://support.interfolio.com/m/62586/l/646844-how-can-i-use-interfolio-s-dossier-deliver-for-my-medical-or-dental-school-application](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.google.com/url?q%3Dhttps://support.interfolio.com/m/62586/l/646844-how-can-i-use-interfolio-s-dossier-deliver-for-my-medical-or-dental-school-application%26amp;sa%3DD%26amp;ust%3D1537488497803000&sa=D&ust=1537488497841000&usg=AFQjCNEWltC7v29w0r5aUtf1kx99YgtPrQ)

Helpful link: [https://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/faq/amcas-faq/](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.google.com/url?q%3Dhttps://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/faq/amcas-faq/%26amp;sa%3DD%26amp;ust%3D1537488497803000&sa=D&ust=1537488497841000&usg=AFQjCNE8ydDuf12GtR0tXdIRjbZLZ0ydag)

**MCAT advice**

Pay very close attention in your prerequisite classes and build a solid base of knowledge. Ideally, your MCAT preparation is more reviewing than it is studying. Do your best to complete the following courses before taking the MCAT:

-Gen Chem 1&2

-Introductory biology 1&2

-Molecular/cell biology

-Physics 1&2

-Biochemistry

-Sociology

-Psychology

-Organic chemistry.

While it could benefit you to take a fancy preparation course, I don’t think it’s necessary to spend more than $500 preparing for the MCAT. Personally, I recommend the Kaplan review books: [https://www.amazon.com/Complete-7-Book-Subject-Review-2018-2019/dp/1506223958](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.google.com/url?q%3Dhttps://www.amazon.com/Complete-7-Book-Subject-Review-2018-2019/dp/1506223958%26amp;sa%3DD%26amp;ust%3D1537488497804000&sa=D&ust=1537488497841000&usg=AFQjCNH6R55rrUZe9SPmpnJI4_3WD5Edjw)

Watch Khan Academy and YouTube videos for any of your weak subjects. Khan academy has an entire free MCAT video review series which you should definitely take advantage of: [https://www.khanacademy.org/test-prep/mcat](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.google.com/url?q%3Dhttps://www.khanacademy.org/test-prep/mcat%26amp;sa%3DD%26amp;ust%3D1537488497805000&sa=D&ust=1537488497842000&usg=AFQjCNGAwZo03HUgTH8bQwHimdLsJyKe0w)

Take the official AAMC Practice MCAT Exams: [https://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/article/online-practice-mcat-exam/](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.google.com/url?q%3Dhttps://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/article/online-practice-mcat-exam/%26amp;sa%3DD%26amp;ust%3D1537488497805000&sa=D&ust=1537488497842000&usg=AFQjCNHzd3SoukSe92ApPEIyC2H2GNnqYg) They will give you the best idea of the format, timing and questioning style for test day. Try to simulate a full-length test at least once. This way, you’ll be able to gauge your need for bathroom breaks, snacks, etc.

The MCAT is like herpes, it stays with you forever. Please treat it as such. Give yourself the equivalent of 5-7 credit hours worth of studying just for this exam. The MCAT is weighted roughly equally with GPA. The average score for 2018 MD matriculates was a 510.4. You'll need a 517+ for Harvard, Stanford, etc.

**General Pre-Med Advice:**

-Don’t compare yourself to other pre-meds.

-Most college courses are graded on a curve. Don’t panic if you get a 70% on a test if the average was a 50%. To get an A, you often only have to out-perform a certain percentage of your classmates.

-Give your laboratory courses the same attention as your lecture courses. While they may be worth less credit hours, this does not mean they are easier.

-Plenty of people get into medical school without doing research, with a C or with average letters of recommendation. You don’t have to be an absolute superstar to get into medical school.

-If you think it may benefit you, ask your professor if you can record their lectures for personal study use. They may say no, but some will say yes. This works particularly well for those who are auditory learners or poor note takers.

-Figure out if you study best in a group or solo. If you study more effectively alone, there is nothing wrong with never joining a study group.

-Think about how you are different from other people and maximize it. Unique applicants win at the game of medical school admissions.

-Don’t be afraid to skip class if it helps your productivity. This is potentially dangerous advice for certain students, so implement it cautiously. Firstly, ensure that there is no penalty for skipping class. Secondly, make sure that you are not missing any information you’d only obtain from attending class in person. Thirdly, be honest with yourself about your ability to focus at home and self-teach. If these three conditions are met, most people can save up to an hour each day by avoiding commutes and inefficient lectures.

\*I will add that if you think you may end up asking for a letter of recommendation from a professor, do not skip their class. Ideally you would be at the front of every lecture asking good questions and regularly attending office hours of a class from which you’re getting a LOR.

-Be productive during your commute. If you are sitting on the bus, walking to class, walking to the gym, or anywhere you can easily listen to an educational podcast, lecture, and YouTube video. If you have a 15 minute walk to and from class, don’t just stare at the ground. That could potentially be 30 minutes of studying.

-Being a well-rounded applicant, while important, is often overrated. It’s better to be pointy. Do one thing really well, and it will help you stand out.

-The medical school application asks a lot of intimidating questions like “What was your greatest challenge?” and “What is your greatest accomplishment to date?” As you go through college, give some thought to how you will answer these questions.

-Do not assume an interview went well just because the interviewer seemed enthusiastic. Interviewers are trained to act this way even if the interview was a train wreck.

- If your school has a free academic support center, use it if needed. Your tuition has already paid their salaries, so make them work for you.

-Medical schools care about which college their students come from. Take this into consideration when applying, and don’t load your AMCAS up with medical schools that have never accepted someone from your undergraduate institution. School name still matters far less than GPA and MCAT.

-Leadership positions look particularly good on a medical school application. As a physician, you will be the leader of a medical team, so adcoms like to see that you have this potential.

-Employment experience looks great on an application. It demonstrates that you have life experience outside of academics.

-Longevity in extracurricular activities is viewed favorably. If you spend a few years on something, it demonstrates dedication, commitment, and true interest.

-Your school’s advisors are a valuable resource, but are sometimes misinformed. Be sure to fact check their advice with older students, the internet and your peers.

-Generally I recommend not accepting AP/IB credit for prerequisite courses. I suggest retaking them. This is for a couple reasons:

1) You already know the material fairly well, and retaking the course will solidify it completely. This will set you up very well for upper level courses, the MCAT and beyond. Also, it should be a nice GPA booster as long as you don't get cocky and assume you already know everything

2) Some schools actually don't accept AP/IB credit for prerequisite courses

\*If you 1) feel you already know the material cold and retaking the course would bore you to death and 2) know for a fact that your medical schools will accept AP/IB credit, then I consider using your AP/IB credit.

-Don’t forget to enjoy yourself in college. Many people make the mistake of completely postponing their life until they become attending physicians. Life is short, and you really have to find a way to enjoy yourself during training.

**5 Application Blunders That Weed Out Applicants:**

**1) Answering the diversity essay prompt with something meaningless.**

This is not the place to talk about your ethnicity. Do not talk about having a lot of Indian friends. This essay should discuss your unique personality traits, interest, passions, hobbies, habits, etc.

**2) Answering the “biggest challenge” or “greatest obstacle” essay with something insignificant.**

If your greatest obstacle in life was failing a class, adcoms will get the impression that you’re shallow. Talk about something more substantial. It doesn’t have to be a sad, dramatic story, but make sure it challenged the core of your being/beliefs/values in some way.

**3) Spelling or grammar mistakes.**

Have several people spell-check and grammar-check your application before submitting. While a mistake of this sort probably won’t sink your application, adcoms will favor applications with the fewest mistakes.

**4) Copying and pasting school X’s secondary essay into school Y’s prompt.**

This looks particularly bad. It doesn’t mean you’re auto-rejected, but it will likely hurt your chances to some extent.

**5) Filling out the disadvantaged area on the application when you’re not actually disadvantaged.**

Claiming disadvantaged can harm one’s application if it is not justified. The period during which you were disadvantaged must be ages 0-18. Generally, you want to mention things that prevented you from accessing basic needs and getting an education. There will be records of what you say (i.e. where you lived, what schools you went to, your family’s income, etc.) Many people who could report themselves as disadvantaged choose not to do so.

**Email templates:**

**ASKING FOR SHADOWING:**

Dear Dr. X,

My name is X, and I am currently a [freshman/soph/jun/sen] at the University of X. I am considering a career in medicine, and I am interested in the field of X. I found your email through the\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ website (Or I was given your email address by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_). I would like to learn more about what it's like to be a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_. I would be very grateful for the opportunity to shadow your work. I understand that you are busy and that your time is valuable. You can reach me by email or phone [contact info]

Thank you for your time,

[Name]

**ASKING FOR MENTORSHIP:**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and I am a fresh/soph/jun/sen at X University. We met while I was an intern at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ last summer. I had an excellent experience, and learned a lot from our conversations. I am in the process of carving out my own career path, and I’m hoping we can remain in contact. I would be very grateful for any mentorship or opportunities you could offer me in the future. You can reach me by email \_\_\_\_\_ or phone \_\_\_\_\_.

Thank you,

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Valuable Resources:**

-Filling out AMCAS? Use this guide: [https://aamc-orange.global.ssl.fastly.net/production/media/filer\_public/33/f0/33f0bd3f-9721-43cb-82a2-99332bbda78e/2018\_amcas\_applicant\_guide\_web-tags.pdf](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.google.com/url?q%3Dhttps://aamc-orange.global.ssl.fastly.net/production/media/filer_public/33/f0/33f0bd3f-9721-43cb-82a2-99332bbda78e/2018_amcas_applicant_guide_web-tags.pdf%26amp;sa%3DD%26amp;ust%3D1537488497813000&sa=D&ust=1537488497846000&usg=AFQjCNHqWuOH3b-wyTEIZ-B0WfA_A76pYg)