

Ophthalmology Application Guide

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New - UPDATES FOR 2020-21 Season:

- All interviews will be virtual during the 2020/2021 cycle
- A maximum number of 20 online interviews will be imposed this year (thoughtfully calculated by AUPO/SFMatch based on historical data).
- All ophthalmology residency programs will be required to utilize the new interview scheduler program through SF match. This scheduler will allow applicants to schedule a maximum of two program interviews per day (i.e. one AM and one PM session.) Interviews can be cancelled to make space for other interviews, however, programs can then fill the newly opened slot.
- Applicants can upload more than one personal statement and more than 3 letters of recommendation, allowing students to personalize the files they send to programs.

When/where to start?

- Start getting to know your ophthalmology department as soon as you think you may be interested in ophthalmology. It is a small field, so getting more face time with the department early will stand out!
- Here are a few ways to get involved early
 - Shadow people in the department! You can either approach this by working with your ophthalmology interest group for shadowing opportunities, emailing faculty that you may be interested in shadowing, or talking to your home program ophthalmology medical student director (at Vanderbilt that is Dr. Janice Law).
 - For Vanderbilt: some good faculty to shadow include: Dr. Sobel in Oculoplastics, Dr. Law in Retina, Dr. Gangaputra in Uveitis/Medical Retina, Dr. Lindsey in comprehensive (She is also the current program director), Dr. Longmuir in Neuro-ophth/glaucoma, Dr. Morrison in Pediatric Ophthalmology
 - Attend grand rounds or other lectures given by your department (reach out to the department residency program coordinator or medical student director to find out the dates and times of these conferences.
 - If time allows, and you are interested, get involved in research very early. Attendings and residents will usually have projects that they would like help with. (see research section)
 - Try to meet with the department chair or program director once you are sure about ophthalmology. At Vanderbilt Drs. Sternberg and Lindsey are very approachable and like getting to know the Vanderbilt Medical students who are interested in ophthalmology.
 - There are several additional resources to get connected early for underrepresented minorities (URM):
 - The American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) Minority Mentoring Program (M.O.M.), the RABB-VENABLE through National Medical Association, and various diversity-related research opportunities from different institutions that you can learn about through your school's Office of Diversity Affairs

Breakdown by Year

MS1

The important thing in MS1 is to focus on classes and learning the material! This is the only time you will have to dedicate to reading. While many schools are pass/fail, and pre-clerkship grades often are overlooked compared to your clerkship grades, learning the material well during first year will set you up for success on the wards. If you are one of the few people who knows you want to do ophthalmology during your first year, you can start to get involved in small ways if you feel you have a good handle on your coursework. However, remember that there is a whole world of medicine out there, and you should equally give other specialties a chance!

- Attend grand rounds to show your face and absorb!
- Shadowing (if your schedule permits, you can schedule shadowing either in clinic or the OR even if it's brief)
- Volunteer at your medical school free clinic in ophthalmology (and general medicine/other specialties!) or even start an ophthalmology clinic! Your help is valuable in these settings, and you will get exposure to the field in ways that you would not get through your home department. At Vanderbilt, this is also an opportunity to spend time with the volunteer attendings and residents.
- Become familiar with the faculty and subspecialties at your ophthalmology department. Meet with your medical student director to ask about other learning opportunities or ways to stay updated!
- While absolutely not necessary, consider talking to faculty about research opportunities.

MS2

- Second-year is clerkship year at Vanderbilt, so this is your opportunity to explore all of the specialties in medicine. Approach each rotation as if you are evaluating whether it is something you are interested in. With clerkship year you will get out of it what you put in. Be present for your patients and read, read, read! Sign up for an ophthalmology elective (at this stage, you can experience up to two 2 weeks electives at Vanderbilt through Surgery rotation or as part of the Peds, OB/Gyn rotations). This will give you a chance to meet the department in a clinical setting.
- Start talking to the department to find out what kind of research you may be interested in. In the spring of MS2 year, you will need to have a mentor

identified for your PLAN project for 3rd year. There are many faculty who have worked with medical students in the past, so work with Dr. Law and upper-class students to determine which mentor may be the best fit for you.

MS3

- Fall MS3 year should be dedicated to research. You will have 3-5 months dedicated to research, so this is your chance to be productive and learn more about the exciting field of ophthalmology from a scientific and research perspective. Use the time during research to shadow faculty clinically and make more connections!
- See other courses to take below

What courses should I take and when?

- Ophthalmology: Take advantage of your home ophthalmology rotation if you have one. Some schools offer multiple course opportunities for ophthalmology. At Vanderbilt you can take the 4-week Advanced Clinical Elective (ACE1) and ACE2 (enhanced experience in ophthalmology) in addition to 2 weeks during your clerkship year elective (already discussed).
 - When to take it: Taking ophthalmology as MS3 between January - June allows you to get to know the department well before the application process starts as an MS4. The faculty that you meet and work with can be great advocates for you!
 - Other things to consider include when visiting students rotate at your institution (if any). Often being on ophthalmology alone gives you more face time with certain key faculty, and allows you to stand out!
 - Other tips on taking ophthalmology: At Vanderbilt *Careers in Medicine* allows additional shadowing opportunities outside of formal 2 week electives.
- Other courses: Remember that you are in medical school to become a physician, so take any other courses that you are interested in! Some courses at Vanderbilt that were helpful:
 - Critical illness, Medical Imaging and Anatomy, General Neurology, Anesthesia, Emergency Medicine
- Vanderbilt global health rotations beneficial to ophthalmology include:
 - Aravind global health rotation in India and a medical Spanish course set in Costa Rica.
- Sub-I/Acting Internship: In many schools ophthalmology does not count as your sub-I/AI requirement. You do not necessarily need to take your

medicine/surgery sub-I prior to applying. Many take it after the application season is over, unless you would like to get a letter of recommendation. In which case, plan on taking it early enough before the application process.

- As an MS4 applying, it may be helpful (but not necessary) to take a lighter rotation in September and October as that is when the majority of the interviews come out (except 2020-21 cycle - pushed out 1 month to October/November). Try to take vacation in November and the beginning of December as the majority of ophthalmology interviews occur in November. Traditionally, there are a handful of interviews toward the end of October, and a handful toward the beginning of December.

Away Rotations

- MS3 or MS4 Away rotations: There are many many different opinions on away rotations (also known as visiting or audition rotations)
 - Pros
 - No residency program is the same. You can use away rotations as an opportunity to work with faculty from a different department and learn about their teaching philosophy and training culture.
 - This could be your chance to demonstrate to a program your interest in them. Sometimes programs prefer to select a strong and “known candidate” that wants to be at the program. So it is important to do well and impress!
 - If you come from a smaller school or ophthalmology department, you can expand your network this way and it can work to your advantage as you interview across the country
 - It can be fun to live in a new city for a month, and see if you could potentially see yourself living in that city!
 - Cons
 - Some will tell you that if you have a good application on paper, away rotations can only hurt you (as it is often difficult to be particularly helpful as a medical student in ophthalmology or stand out, and especially if there have been interpersonal skills concerns in the past.)
 - Visiting rotations can be very expensive. Housing in the city (on top of your home rent) ~\$500-2000 depending on the city, flights can range from \$200-300, VSAS application free ~\$80, etc). See also the article by [Patel and Kelly](#).
 - Coming from a strong home ophthalmology program, you do not need to do an away rotation in order be “competitive”

- Some programs may question why you applied for an away rotation in the region but did not rotate with them (have a good answer!)
- Review the pros and cons, and talk to your mentors to figure out whether an away rotation is right for you. If you are interested in doing one, here is a rough schedule for applying to away rotations through VSAS
<https://students-residents.aamc.org/attending-medical-school/article/visiting-student-learning-opportunities/>
 - January – Decide where you may want to do an away rotation, many programs will have a deadline for applications (specific program, specific city, or region). Sometimes enrollment is first come first serve.
 - January - If you want to do an away rotation, download the immunization form (from VSAS) and go to student health to have them fill it out. You will need titers, and if any of your titers are low, you will need to get re-vaccinated and retested for titers. This can take more than a month, so get this done early!
 - Background check – Vanderbilt should send you a link to complete a background check. Other schools may have something similar, but check with your medical school.
- Important things to consider for visiting rotations: other program rotation schedules may not align with your home schedule. Specifically, Vanderbilt’s clinical schedule is different from many other schools because of the immersion weeks, so you may need to take a flex (vacation) month or consider a 2 week rotation (only a few exist) in order to fit in an away rotation.
- Check out Rotating Room (<https://rotatingroom.com/>) if you are doing an away rotation and want to try to save some money. This is a website that is geared toward medical students looking for housing for away rotations. You can either list your own apartment while you are gone, or you can find someone’s apartment for less than you may be able to find an AirBnB.

USMLE: Step 1 and Step 2

Step 1 will be changing to pass/fail in 2022, but until then, it is an important aspect of the ophthalmology application cycle. While hard cutoffs often do not exist, ophthalmology programs tend to look at step scores when considering who to interview. There isn't a specific number to aim for. It is still possible to match if you have a score below the mean for ophthalmology matched students on [sfmatch.org](https://www.smatch.org). Talk to your mentors for guidance on scores. TexasStar also has a list of de-identified applicants with their score information. It is important to note that many of these self-reporting sites are biased toward those who have high scores, so take this test seriously and ask for help when you need, but do not fret if your score is not as high as some of the people who post their scores on these sites.

Step 2 used to be a test that was not mandatory to take prior to applying. This may change in light of the plans to change Step 1 to pass/fail. A handful of programs will ask for an updated step 2 score at time of interview, but most do not. There are several different strategies on how to approach step 2

- People tend to do better on it than step 1, so if you have time to dedicate to studying for it and feel confident about your performance, go ahead and take it early whenever it is convenient for your scheduling (some like to schedule step 1 and 2 back to back to keep the content fresh and momentum strong)
- If you did not score as well on step 1, step 2 is your chance to show that you can perform well on standardized tests. Study hard for step 2 and take it before you apply to show that you can improve your score significantly (more than 10 point increase because Step 2 mean is already 10 points higher than Step 1 mean)
- Timing: there is a "sweet spot" for taking step 2 where you do not have to report your score at the time of submitting your application when results are not back yet. You can elect to send it as an update once you get your score returned if it is good. You can also elect to not send it as an update if it is not what you hoped. This is generally 2-3 weeks before you plan to submit your application. Be careful, because there is an area where you list what date you took the exam. It might come up in interviews (though rare), so be prepared to explain it if you take it in this "sweet spot".
- Some elect to take it after matching (if their school requirement is late enough). You do not need it to match into ophthalmology, but you may need a passing score in order to get ranked by certain internship programs.

For 2021-2022 application cycle, all applicants will be reporting 3-digit Step 1 scores. For 2022-2023 application cycle, applicants will still be reporting 3-digit Step 1 scores.

For 2023-2024 application cycle and later, most (not all) applicants will be reporting pass/fail scores depending on what year they were eligible for the exam. It may be beneficial to take Step 2 soon after to show a strong traditional 3-digit score.

AOA/GHHS

Alpha Omega Alpha (AOA) and Gold Humanism Honors Society (GHHS) are two honors given out usually during 3rd or 4th year of medical school that can be listed on SF Match. AOA is often a representation of academic excellence while GHHS is a representation of excellence in clinical care, leadership, compassion, and service. Of the two awards, AOA is the most recognized in ophthalmology. Though these awards are prestigious and can help your application, they are only a small part of the application as a whole. The selection process varies depending on the school. Some schools select once during MS3 year and once during MS4 year, while others only select during MS4 year. There are several schools that don't even have AOA offered (there is a place in SFmatch to indicate if this is the case). At Vanderbilt, AOA is only selected during the MS4 year, and it is often selected too late to be included in the application. If you receive notice that you have been selected after your application has been submitted, you can send in your acceptance nomination as a supplemental letter or email the programs you want to know.

MS4: APPLY!

This is the year you prepare all pieces of your application. It is exciting and nerve-wracking, but you are ready for it! The rest of this guide is geared toward putting together all the pieces of your application.

APPLICATION SEASON 2020-2021

Important dates

Specialty	Applicant registration begins	CAS target/deadline date	Rank list submission deadline	Results released to programs	Results released to applicants	Results released to medical schools	Post-match vacancies posted on	Training position starts
Ophthalmology	Wednesday, Jul 1, 2020	Tuesday, Sept 15, 2020	Monday, Jan 25, 2021	Monday, Feb 1, 2021	Monday, Feb 1, 2021	Monday, Feb 1, 2021	Monday, Feb 1, 2021	July 2022

How many programs to apply to?

The average number of applications submitted per matched individual has slowly increased from 52 in 2011 to 77 in 2020. The point of diminishing return (where more applications does not result in more interviews) appears to be around 40 applications for an average applicant. While ophthalmology positions offered have increased by 7.6% from 2011-2020, the match rate has remained between 74-78%. ([SF match report 2020](#)). The number of programs you apply to will largely depend on how competitive your application is. Getting a sense of this is very challenging as you are just starting, so ask your mentors in ophthalmology medical education to help gauge how many applications you should apply to. At Vanderbilt, Dr. Law, Dr. Sternberg, and Dr. Lindsey are great people to talk to about this.

While several reports indicate that around 40 applications submitted at some point have diminishing returns - if you apply to less than 40, it is important to have a strong understanding of what programs are good matches for you. Interview skills and good communication will be very important in this process.

Some factors to consider as you are narrowing down the programs to apply to:

- Number of residents in the training program
- Number of residents in neighboring programs (will there be enough patient volume?)
- Geographic preferences during training and post training (fellowships and job) ie. want to get a job in SoCal after residency, consider California programs
- What type of research you want to get involved in or continue
- What fellowships you are interested in (does the program have a fellowship or have a history of matching into strong fellowships)
- Where do residents go after graduating (geographical, how many comprehensive/ fellowships, jobs?)
- Are there known faculty or mentors you want to train with?
- Are there training satellites like the VA hospital?
- What kind of patient populations do they serve? Underserved? Global health?

- What is your learning style - Do you like almost full autonomy, lots of time for lecture and oversight, or a mix of both.

SF match will cost \$100 to start your application, then there is a fee structure as follows:

of programs Processing Fee

1-10 \$60 total

11-20 \$10 per program

21-30 \$15 per program

31-40 \$20 per program

41 and up \$35 per program

Helpful tip: as a Vanderbilt student, there are many many faculty who are happy to advocate on your behalf for one or two programs if they know you well. Just remember to use this sparingly and only if you are definitely interested in a specific program! You don't want to burn any bridges by not following through.

Letters of Recommendation

You will be asked to get at least three letters of recommendation. **New this year, you can upload more and choose what programs you are sending each letter.**

Who to ask for letters of recommendation: It is key to get a recommendation letter from someone who knows you well enough to write a personal and strong recommendation letter. One of which must be from an ophthalmologist. Many will recommend getting at least two letters from ophthalmologists. This is because ophthalmology is a rather small field, and so many ophthalmologists you interview with will know and trust the letters written by their colleagues. The final letter can also come from an ophthalmologist, but there are benefits to having a letter outside of ophthalmology to highlight other strengths that may be harder to speak on as an ophthalmologist. This could be from someone who has seen you work on a clinical team. Any additional letters may be people who know you well that may have specific ties to certain programs that you think will be able to write a strong letter of support. Remember, you will only be able to assign 3 official letters total per program.

How/when to ask for a letter of recommendation: Start thinking about who you want to get your letters of recommendation from as early as MS3 year. It is important to give your letter writers plenty of time to write a strong letter prior to submitting your application, thus it is important to give them at least 4 weeks (preferable more) to write the letter. Some may even recommend asking for a letter soon after you

worked with the person, so that they have an opportunity to take some notes from their experience with you while it is still fresh. It is important to ask (either in person or via email) whether that person would be able to write you a STRONG letter of support. While it may seem awkward to ask this at first, it is important to find out and ask someone else if the original person hesitates in any way. Once you get a resounding yes to that, you should prepare and follow up with an email with your formalized request, some key things you learned or key experiences while you worked with that specific person, important deadlines for the letter (perhaps give a deadline 2 weeks prior to the real deadline), and attach your personal statement and updated CV.

Only some training programs for the 2020-2021 application cycle have an integrated or join internship, so you will likely need to apply for a separate intern year via ERAS. This application is due later than the ophthalmology application and your letters of recommendation could be used for those programs as well. If you want to use the same letters, you should ask your letter writers to change the letter very briefly to be more specific to an intern year in preparation for ophthalmology (after they have submitted them to SFMatch to avoid confusion). If you prefer to get an additional letter from internal medicine or surgery, you can definitely do so, but it is not mandatory.

Personal Statement

This is truly the opportunity for you to show your character and personality and to show the person reviewing your application your interest in ophthalmology. The key is to start early and to have people that you trust review it. This is your story.

See the full tweet-thread here. It's well worth the read:

<https://twitter.com/gradydoctor/status/1263916918135758849>

Dr. Kimberly Manning's tips for writing a personal statement (@gradydoc on twitter): "Becoming is better than Being' - Carol Dweck. A story of how your experience standing on top of Mt. Everest will never be as interesting as the story of the climb. She says that stories of being are reflected in your CV. The personal statement is where you talk about how you got there. The main ingredients should be an inventory of your strengths and what is important to you!"

Recipe

- Paragraph One
 - Grab us. A story, an experience, something that tells who you are and makes us want to hear more
- Paragraph Two
 - What they must know and what you're proud of
- Paragraph Three
 - Specific strengths to the specialty and leadership
- Closing paragraph
 - What you are looking for and what they can expect.

Dr. Manning's list of five things that PDs don't like seeing in a personal statement

- Not personal at all
- Too long (keep it to 1 page!!)
- Boring/cookie cutter
- Too much time talking about the field
- Noncommittal

Here's another good tweet-thread on personal statements by Dr. Gabriel Bosslet, fellowship director @gbosslet

<https://twitter.com/gbosslet/status/1158463541667606528>

Expenses

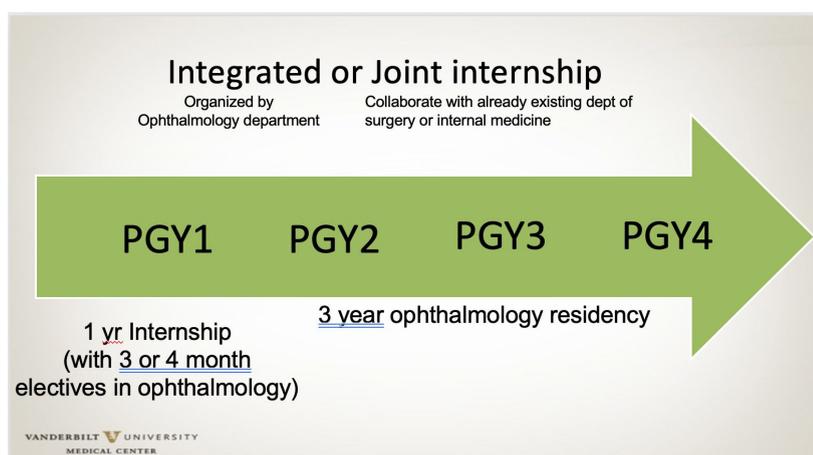
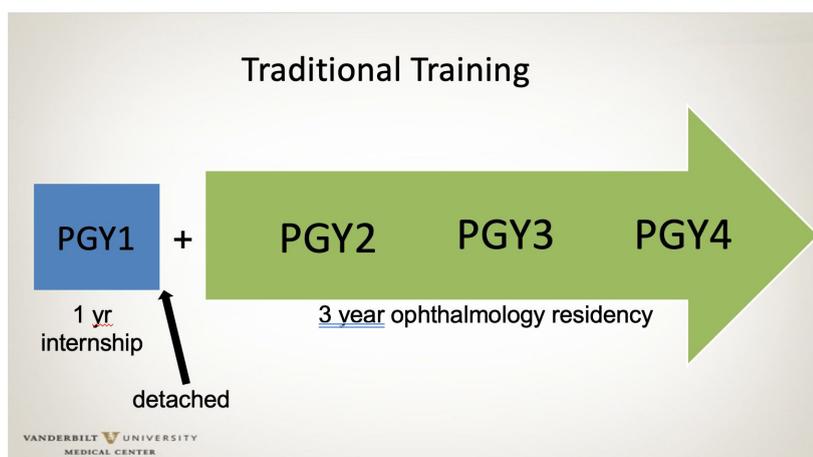
Application season is expensive, so take a few things into consideration before starting. The majority of the expenses will come from traveling and submitting your application. To give you an estimate, applying to ~85 programs amounted to \$1700 in application fees. Here are some tips:

- If you are not taking maximum loans, try to take out that maximum for the fourth year.
- Open a rewards credit card for traveling ~3-4 months prior to interview season.
 - If you live in a city that is a hub for a specific airline (ie. Nashville is a Southwest hub) consider getting a credit card for that airline. Do your research on what points and rewards you get! Some credit cards will have travel insurance or rental car liability insurance included. The Southwest card comes with an annual fee of between \$69-\$99. There are several more perks to the \$99 one, and you get an annual point bonus equivalent to the fee you pay in the Southwest credit card, so if you are interested in the Southwest card, you should go with the higher costing one.

- Many people like Chase Sapphire Preferred/Reserve, because travel points can be used on any airline. The Chase Sapphire Reserve comes with a much larger fee, but there are significantly more perks.
- The Costco credit card actually has 3% back on all travel related purchases, which when you convert points to dollars comes to about an equivalent amount. If you have the Costco credit card, this may be a great way to get cash back.
- Consider renting a car for places that may be further away from the airport. Often you can rent a car for less than \$100 for two days, which may be cheaper than a \$40 Uber/lyft each way to and from the airport, and ubers to and from the interview. Often programs will provide free parking. If you elect to drive, make sure you leave for your interview earlier so that you can find parking.
- Try to contact friends or alumni in the cities to save on hotel prices. If you've met people at previous interviews, sometimes you can even coordinate a hotel with that person at a future interview!

Integrated internships vs. Joint internships vs. Traditional programs

Ophthalmology as a whole is undergoing a transition from traditional, detached internships + 3 years of ophthalmology residency (1+3) to having either integrated or joint internship programs. By 2021, the ACGME accreditation organization has requested that all programs become integrated or joint. If you match into a traditional program you will need to apply to and match to a different program for your PGY1 year through ERAS. There is not a great comprehensive list of which programs have an integrated/joint internship, but we have tried to compile as complete of one as possible below. Source: OphthoMatch 2019-2020 (accessed 7.5.20).



List of programs with integrated/joint internship

Albany		SUNY Downstate	
Albert Einstein/Montefiore	Y	SUNY Upstate	Y
Bascom Palmer	Y	Temple	
Baylor	Y	Texas A&M	
Beaumont	Y	Texas Tech	Y
Boston University		Tufts	
Bronx-Lebanon Hospital	Y	Tulane	Y
Brown University	Y	U Rochester	Y
Case Western	Y	U Wisconsin	Y
Cleveland Clinic	N	UC Davis	
Columbia		UC Irvine	
U Colorado	Y	UC San Diego	N
Cornell University		UC San Francisco	Y
CPMC		UCLA	Y
Duke	Y	University of Alabama	N
Eastern Virginia Medical School		University of Arizona	N
Emory	Y	University of Arizona COM - South	N
Geisinger		University of Arkansas	N
George Washington	Y	University of Chicago	
Georgetown	N	University of Cincinnati	Y
Henry Ford	Y	University of Colorado	Y
Hofstra Northwell	Y	University of Florida - Gainesville	Y
Howard	Y	University of Florida - Jacksonville	N
Illinois Eye & Ear Infirmary	Y	University of Iowa	Y
Indiana University		University of Kansas	Y
John H. Stroger/Cook County	N	University of Kentucky	Y
Kresge Eye Institute / Wayne State U	N	University of Louisville	Y
Loma Linda University	Y	University of Maryland	
Louisiana State University	Y	University of Michigan	Y
Loyola	Y	University of Minnesota	Y
LSU--Shreveport		University of Mississippi	Y
Massachusetts Eye & Ear	N	University of Missouri - Columbia	Y

Mayo Clinic	Y	University of Missouri - Kansas City	N
Medical College of Georgia	Y	University of Nebraska	
Medical College of Virginia (VCU)	Y	UNC-Chapel Hill	Y
Medical College of Wisconsin	N	University of Oklahoma	
Medical University of South Carolina	Y	University of Pennsylvania / Scheie	N
Mt. Sinai/NYEEI	Y	University of Pittsburgh	Y
Nassau University		University of South Carolina	
New York Medical College	Y	University of South Florida	Y
Northwestern	Y	University of Southern California	
NYMC - Jamaica		University of Tennessee	Y
NYU	N	University of Texas - Houston	N
Ohio State	Y	University of Texas - San Antonio	Y
Oregon HSU	N	University of Utah	Y
Penn State		University of Virginia	N
Rush	Y	University of Washington	Y
Rutgers	Y	UTMB/Methodist	Y
Sinai of Baltimore/ Krieger Eye Institute	Y	UT Southwestern	N
St. John Macomb-Oakland		Vanderbilt	Y
St. Louis University	Y	Virginia Commonwealth	Y
Stanford		Wake Forest	Y
Summa Health	N	Washington University in St. Louis	Y
SUNY - Buffalo	Y	West Virginia University	Y
SUNY - Stony Brook	Y	Wills	N
SUNY Downstate		Wilmer/Hopkins	N
		Yale	N

Since there is still a large portion of ophthalmology programs that have not transitioned, there is a good chance you will need to fill out the ERAS application as well. In doing so, you may need an additional letter of recommendation (some internship programs have a minimum of 4 letters of recommendation). Furthermore, you will need to adjust your personal statement to indicate you are applying to an intern year program in (either medicine, surgery, or a transitional year). You do not need to change your personal statement completely, simply adjust the ending to apply to the relevant intern year.

If you match into a program that has a joint or integrated program, you may need to still rank the program on NRMP when it comes to submitting your rank list. If this is the case after you match, your program coordinator will send you a specific code for their internal medicine or surgery program. You may or may not need to even apply via ERAS to the program. Your program will inform you before the NRMP rank list deadline.

Types of intern year programs

General Medicine - This is the most commonly applied to preliminary internship. Many will choose to do their internship program at the same institution that they apply. If this is of interest to you, reach out to the general medicine program coordinator after you match in January (or February 2021) indicating your interest. If you have enough foresight, sometimes you can even coordinate an interview on the same day as your ophthalmology interview (if and when travel bans are lifted). General medicine programs vary in rotation offerings and call schedules, so if elective or ambulatory time is important to you, make sure you get a good idea of requirements and scheduling. Internal medicine programs vary in intensity and culture, so talk to people where you end up matching about where they did their intern year.

General Surgery - Some elect to do a general surgery intern year. While this is less common, this may be a route for you if you enjoy surgery much more than medicine. It is important to consider the culture of a program and how they treat preliminary residents compared to their categorical residents when selecting a surgical intern year.

Transitional year or (TY) - These programs are often a mix between internal medicine, surgery, emergency medicine, and elective time. These are becoming less and less common and only a handful still exist to this day. A list of TY programs often are found on various forums online. [FREIDA](#) is a resource put together by the AMA that allows you to see many of these transitional programs and some information like work hours, number of residents, vacation time. [TexasStar](#) also will have a list. Transitional year programs have a reputation of having more elective rotations and variety of offerings than internal medicine programs. However, some TY programs can be more time-intensive than certain internal medicine programs, so be sure to thoroughly investigate the different programs and ask about rotation schedules. Talk to an upper-class student who recently went through the cycle because much of the information about programs are passed down through word-of-mouth. Programs with a lot of elective time are naturally highly sought after and the applicant pool is competitive representing students from competitive subspecialties (ophthalmology, dermatology, radiology, etc). These transitional year programs get thousands of applications a year.

Timeline for applying to intern year

The timeline for applying for intern year depends on what type of internship you want. If you are set on doing a transitional year program, you will need to apply and demonstrate interest to those programs early.

If you are interested in doing intern year at your home institution, reach out early so that you can schedule those interviews early. At Vanderbilt you can reach out to the coordinators after you submit ERAS and they will often set up a very brief (10-15 minute) interview with you. You can either schedule this interview early, or you can schedule the interview after the ophthalmology match so that you can cancel if you match into an integrated or joint ophthalmology program. Either strategy is acceptable, just maintain open communication with the program coordinator.

If you are interested in matching into a program in the same city as an ophthalmology program, ask the residents where they tended to do their internship or prelim years during your interviews and their timeline for applying.

If you know you want to be in a specific city for the intern year independent of your ophthalmology program, go ahead and apply to those programs early.

Strategies to approach applying to intern year

- Consider staying at your home program! This reduces the number of times you need to move, and you are already familiar with the system.
- Apply to intern programs in the city that you have matched in. There are benefits to only moving once (cost, timing, etc). If you do an intern year at the same institution in which you matched for ophthalmology, this allows you an opportunity to meet the people who will likely be consulting you in the future.
- It is also common to choose an internship to be close to family or significant other for a year.

Pricing for ERAS

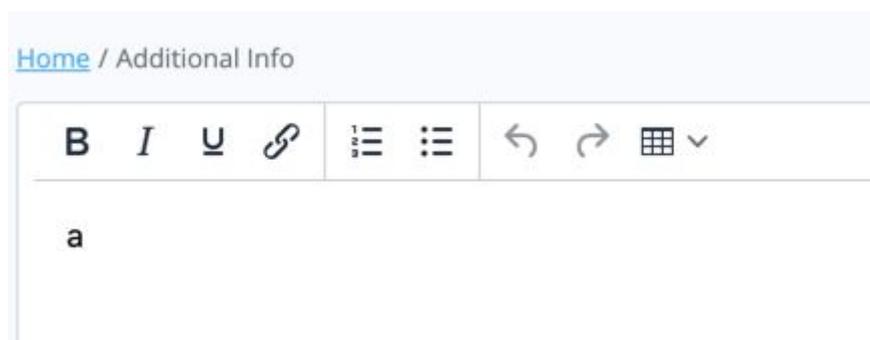
It is important to know that each category of internship you apply to (ie internal medicine vs. surgery vs. transitional year) has its own fees. This means that you will pay \$100 for each type of intern category you plan to apply to, and you can apply to up to 10 per specialty at that price. The price table for ERAS for 2020 is below:

Programs Per Specialty	Application Fees
Up to 10	\$99
11 - 20	\$16 each
21 - 30	\$20 each
31 or more	\$26 each

SF Match Guide

The application format for SFmatch changed in 2020, but many of the application sections have remained the same throughout the years. The categories are fairly vague and have some overlap, so you have some flexibility in choosing how to format your application.

Formatting: SFmatch has free-text boxes for many categories, and specific fill-ins for others. For the free-text boxes, most will recommend using bullet points with short descriptions and appropriate spacing in order to keep your application readable. You will be allowed to bold, underline, italicize but otherwise the formatting is somewhat limited.



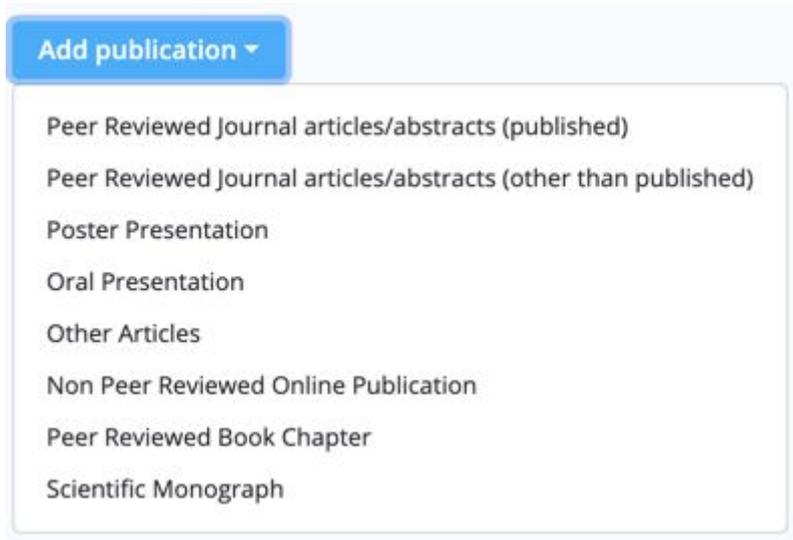
In the past, you could preview your application in PDF form to see the formatting the program directors will see. It is important to note that there may also be character/line limits for these free-text boxes. Sometimes words get cut off in the final document, so be sure to include a little bit of margin. As of 7.5.20, the 2020 website does not allow for PDF preview. Hopefully this will change before the submission target date.

Review of each of the sections

Personal information: This is a fairly intuitive section. Make sure you list all relevant employment! Many programs appreciate seeing service-related jobs (ie restaurant server, front-desk manager, retail, fast-food, paper-routes etc) as it can highlight aspects of your character and people-experiences. If you worked through college, it also shows time-management, discipline and work ethic!

Take advantage of listing your previous home (or parents') address in the alternate address section if different from current address. It is natural for readers to connect positively with applicants when they see they might have a connection to that town or state which sometimes does not show up elsewhere in the application.

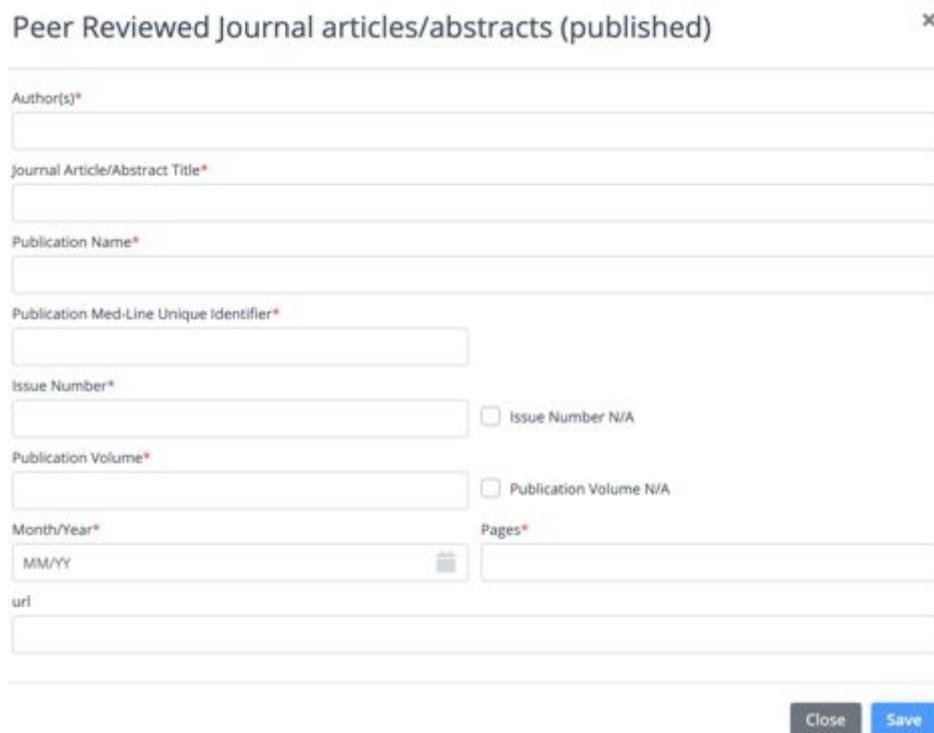
New in 2020 the personal information section now consists of a dropdown menu similar to ERAS to record your research publications and presentations. These are the options for input:



The image shows a blue button labeled "Add publication" with a downward arrow. Below it is a dropdown menu with the following options:

- Peer Reviewed Journal articles/abstracts (published)
- Peer Reviewed Journal articles/abstracts (other than published)
- Poster Presentation
- Oral Presentation
- Other Articles
- Non Peer Reviewed Online Publication
- Peer Reviewed Book Chapter
- Scientific Monograph

Here is the information needed to be imputed:



The image shows a form titled "Peer Reviewed Journal articles/abstracts (published)" with a close button (X) in the top right corner. The form contains the following fields:

- Author(s)*
- Journal Article/Abstract Title*
- Publication Name*
- Publication Med-Line Unique Identifier*
- Issue Number* Issue Number N/A
- Publication Volume* Publication Volume N/A
- Month/Year*
- url

At the bottom right, there are "Close" and "Save" buttons.

It is important to double check minor things like author-order, because it is easy for author order to have been changed minorly in the final manuscript ([Tamez et al](#)).

Honors/Interests: This is also under personal information for 2020-21 cycle. This is where you can list your honors, awards, achievements, other research activities, outside interests, and hobbies. That is a huge list for the specific box. Use that to your advantage - if there is information listed elsewhere in your application, perhaps do not discuss it in this section.

Create subheaders to keep this section organized.

Some things that you might not think to consider that can go in this section are:

- Don't forget about research awards - those can go here!
- Anything you consider an achievement can go here! Did you set up a cool program at your school? That could be considered an achievement.
- Other research activities give you a chance to highlight research projects that are not yet published or presented. It is also an opportunity to briefly outline the research you have done with your mentors.
- Outside interests and hobbies are so important to include in your application! This is one of the most popular questions asked during the interview process. If there is some hobby you are passionate about, put it there, and be prepared to talk about it!
- A lesser priority, but if your school has a nontraditional grading system, this may be an opportunity to re-highlight that by reiterating that and indicating which courses you honored in.

Additional information:

Career objectives - short description of what your objectives are beyond being an ophthalmologist (ie, academic research, private practice, med ed, basic science research, mentorship, regional, global health, etc)

Specialty electives and related activities: Specialty electives include any electives you did related to ophthalmology. This is a place for you to highlight visiting rotations or multiple ophthalmology rotations. "Related activities" is rather vague but use it to your advantage and list anything related to ophthalmology or activities related to a focused skill set (i.e. chalk talks given or courses like neuro-radiology, volunteer activities or Zoom lectures attended across the country). You can include specific research interests you may have. Most things can qualify as "related activities" as long as they are related to your preparation for ophthalmology.

Public Service and Activities: Again, this is rather vague because of the word "activities." Keep this section organized with headers like you should organize the rest of your application. This is a chance for you to highlight any service-related activities you were involved with. However, this is also an opportunity to highlight your leadership roles in other activities in medical school. Many things can be considered "public service" so find things in your CV that you want to highlight here.

Self-identification as URM: Check this box if you are a URM as defined in the application. Read this carefully, in the past people have accidentally checked it when it does not apply to them. The AUPO and AAO are committed to increasing ethnic and racial diversity in ophthalmology.

Documents:

Global: Upload your transcripts, step1, MSPE, AOA letter etc here.

Personal statements: See above for tips on personal statement writing. This year you are able to upload multiple personal statements to selectively send to different programs. This allows for flexibility to change the statement to reflect why you might be interested in a specific geographical area or describe a connection to the program (i.e. "My mother, having been an alumn of Emory Eye Center has always cherished the mentorship culture of this program.") This isn't necessary or expected, but the opportunity exists if you can take advantage of it.

LOR section: The program allows you to send a request to your letter writers.

Programs: This is a directory that will allow you to search for programs by state and application deadline. If the program is listed to have four years of training, you can count on that program being integrated or joint. However, if it is listed to only have 3 years of training, that does not necessarily mean that they do not have an attached internship.

Interview scheduler: this is new as of 2020 and will be used to schedule interviews. The exact process for this is unclear still, but there will be a maximum of 20 virtual interviews scheduled through the virtual platform and you cannot schedule more than one in AM or more than one PM interview.

Interviews: To build your match list, you will need to select the programs you interviewed at on this page.

Rank List: you will order your rank list here after you interview.

At Vanderbilt, Dean Fleming is a great resource, and she will help review all CVs early to make sure you have it formatted well. She helps reword phrases as well as recommend items to put on your CV you may not have thought of! She will even help you review your finalized application if you schedule a meeting with her.

Assign documents: New this year you can upload more than 3 LORs and multiple personal statements. An additional step prior to submitting is to assign documents to programs (similar to ERAS). Make sure you assign the correct documents to the correct programs!

Supplemental essays

Some programs will ask you to submit supplemental information by specific deadlines. This could include getting an eye exam with stereovision and color vision testing (many Texas programs ask for this), or essays requesting you to respond to why you're interested in their program. A compiled list of programs that require supplemental essays is updated annually by other student online resources. Always check on the website to confirm. Most programs will email you with a request once you apply. Source: OphthoMatch 2019-2020 (accessed 7.5.20)

Residency	Supplement
Albany Medical	Your application will be reviewed only if you have submitted a document briefly answering the following two questions. 1. What particular interests do you have in our program? 2. Please share a life lesson that you have learned on the job prior to entering medical school. Please send the document to the Program Coordinator at albanophthalmology@gmail.com with subject line "SF Match Supplement" . Thank you.
Beaumont-Taylor Campus	In order to qualify for an interview applicants must: (1) Pass all COMLEX/STEP exams on first try. (2) Do a 2 week audition with the program (Contact Martha Clemens to set up) (3) Turn in completed

	application to SF match by October 1, 2019. For more information or questions please contact Martha Clemens (martha.clemens@beaumont.org). Thank you.
Dartmouth-Hitchcock	In one paragraph, please describe your interest in moving to northern New England and joining the Dartmouth-Hitchcock medical community for your ophthalmology training.
Emory	Photo upon request
George Washington	SF Match - A separate statement, 1 page or less, indicating your interest in our program should be sent to the program co-ordinator, Ms. Patricia Johnson.
Hofstra	interviewees must submit beforehand (or bring to the interview) a report of a complete ophthalmological examination which includes best corrected acuity, alignment, motility, and stereopsis.
Kentucky	Dear Applicant, Completed applications must include a short 400-word maximum statement discussing why you want to pursue your Ophthalmology residency at the University of Kentucky. Additionally, submission of a 2x2 photo is recommended but not required. Please email these supplemental items to our GME Residency coordinator Olivia Turner, olivia.turner@uky.edu before the application deadline, Friday, 13 September 2019.
Loma Linda	1 page interest
Tufts	Yes, we accept additional letters of recommendation to be sent directly to Elizabeth Cook ecook@tuftsmedicalcenter.org
Tulane	Tulane application, 2 photos, CV
U. Arizona	Please submit (1) a short paragraph about why you are interested in our program (email to pbroyles@eyes.arizona.edu) and (2) a secondary application fee in the amount of \$10.00. Please make a check or money order payable to the "UA Department of Ophthalmology," and mail to UA Department of Ophthalmology, Attn: Pat Broyles, 655 N. Alvernon Way, Suite 204, Tucson, AZ 85711. [secondary instructions were sent in an Email]
U Texas - San Antonio	IMPORTANT: Our program will need a stereo acuity measured eye exam to complete your application.
U. Florida - Jacksonville	Additional non-CAS materials required: A statement (up to 200 words) describing why the candidate is specifically interested in our program. E-mail the statement to eye.gme@jax.ufl.edu stating your CAS number.
U. Utah	Additional supplemental information is welcomed via email to Meghan Johnson at meghan.johnson@hsc.utah.edu Thank you
UC Irvine	Please email your most updated CV, USMLE Score Steps 1 & 2 (CK and CS) Reports, and a 2x2 headshot photo, additional letters (optional) TO: DJROMO@UCI.EDU by 9/1/19. Please add your name and "Residency Applicant" to the subject line to be sure your application is sent to the correct committee. Thank you!
UCSD	professional photo to residency@eyecenter.ucsd.edu

University of Washington	<p>Additional Information Requested: Please send us a paragraph of 100 words or less about why specifically you would like to come to the University of Washington by SEPTEMBER 1 in MS Word Document. Please no PDFs. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs): 1) May I send additional or updated documentation and/or letters of reference directly to you, in addition to those requested by SF Match? Due to the high volume of applicants, we ask that you do not send the program supplemental materials beyond the 500-word paragraph that we ask. The program will directly request more information if needed. 2) Do you accept IMG applications, or applications from foreign nationals attending US medical schools on F-1 visas? Yes we do. In order to be eligible for ranking, applicants must work with programs to obtain pre-approval for visa sponsorship from the UW International Scholars Office. Please read carefully the UW visa eligibility requirements, which must be met prior to ranking: http://www.uwmedicine.org/education/Documents/gme/Visa-Policy.pdf 3) Are there minimum score requirements for the USMLE Steps 1 & 2? We look at each applicant individually and consider all of his/her qualities as a whole, not just the test scores. Letters of recommendation, clinical grades, participation in research, personal essays and academic history are all important components of the application. Therefore we do not state a minimum for USMLE test scores.</p>
USC	Supplement letters are acceptable via email or mail to the program
UTSW	CV, photo, supplemental application (requested upon interview invitation)
Minnesota	1 paragraph interest

The interview process

- How do you choose which programs to interview at? At first, be less picky, but as soon as you have the critical minimum number of interviews (10-13 interviews), you can be comfortable to be more selective moving forward if you want to maintain around that number (some applicants choose to cancel already accepted interviews, but be careful and considerate if you are in this position). If you have specific needs (ie. couples matching or 2nd time applicant) you may want to aim for more interviews.
- Most applicants will use a completely separate Gmail account to sign up for SFmatch. There are ways you can set up your Gmail to notify you as soon as interview invites come out. Unfortunately most schools only have a few days that they interview, so if you do not respond within minutes, your preferred day may be filled. That could be the difference between attending an interview at a program and having to choose between two programs.

- An extremely type-A method to plan your interviews: Pick 25-30 places that you want to interview at and list of all their possible interview dates. Once you do this, rank and notate the dates in the preferred order you would like them. You will notice that there are only a few permutations that would allow you to participate in all of those interviews (virtually or in-person). Thankfully if you're only interviewing at 12-13 programs, the permutations are higher, but you do not know which places will offer you an interview, and you only have a short amount of time to request your #1 interview spot.

Here is an example calendar for planning interviews with possible interview dates outlined in purple. As you confirm interviews, you can easily change around your #1,2,3 if needed and you can add your confirmed interviews and flights in a different color (blue here).

Today < > November 2019 🔍 ? ⚙️ Month ▾ ☰

SUN 27	MON 28	TUE 29	WED 30	THU 31	FRI 1 Nov	SAT 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4pm Southwest Airlines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baylor Baylor #1 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2:25pm Southwest Airli 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michigan #1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bayor #2 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cleveland Clinic Cleveland Clinic #1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baylor #3 Cleveland Clinic #2 3:55pm Southwest Airli 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scheie #2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vanderbilt Vanderbilt #1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michigan #3 Vanderbilt #2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northwestern Baylor #4 Northwestern #1 Vanderbilt #3 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10:25am Southwest Airli 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scheie Eye Institute Scheie #1 WashU#3 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utah #1 6:30am Southwest Airli 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michigan Michigan #2 WashU #2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utah #2 11:25am Your Itinerary: 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5:30am Your Itinerary: C 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Iowa Iowa #1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scheie #3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Washu Utah #3 WashU #1 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OHSU OHSU #1
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

Responding to interview invites

- Interview invites come in several different ways:
 - Direct email communication from program coordinator requesting date preferences
 - SFmatch email from coordinator requesting an emailed response
 - InterviewBroker invitation where you select your interview date
 - Thalamus invitation where you need to make an account and select your interview date

It is helpful to create a draft email for each of your possible interview invites (the most important ones) so that you can easily search, confirm that the dates offered are the same, and copy/paste to send to the requested email address immediately. Update your draft emails as you need to move around your schedule for interviews.

Hello,

These are my preferred interview dates in order of preference.

- November 13
- November 15
- November 20

Thank you!

Best,

This allows you to have a delegate looking over your emails if you are traveling, busy in an interview, or in clinic/surgery with patients.

If you do not get your first choice interview date, sometimes you can contact the program coordinator and request to be placed on a waitlist for a particular date (some programs offer this). It is not appropriate to organize a switch outside of program coordinators, so the best option is to request to be put on a waitlist for the date wanted.

Virtual interviews

For 2020, virtual interviews will be conducted by all ophthalmology programs. These formats might vary from the program's historical methods of interviews, so keep in mind this is just as new to them as it will be for the applicant. When a full day or 1.5 days has previously been planned, it is possible this will break up into a series of sessions before the interview (or after the interview). The interview will possibly last half day (AM or PM) and may have multiple interviews and styles: one-on-one with another faculty, 2-faculty interviews, resident group interviews, or small group break-out sessions with multiple faculty/residents. Most programs include opportunities to meet residents either socially or through formal interviewing. Socials and networking will also look and feel very different. They are trying to get to know you and promote their program virtually, which is difficult to do without physical tours. Do your homework and lots of it - to learn about the program culture and training experience - to make the most out of these limited screen interactions.

Start practicing now to master your facial expressions and responses into a camera rather than to a specific person. Get comfortable talking into a green light while being yourself on Zoom or Teams! Learn how to be dynamic on camera!

Set up:

1. Be sure to be in a location with strong connectivity. Have a clean, tidy, and professional background (school, office, or home) or use a very non-distracting virtual background.
2. Avoid a rocking or swivel chair.
3. Sit up tall, dress to impress as if it were in-person. You will feel professional if you dress the part. Avoid flashy jewelry which can be distracting.
4. Position your video camera at eye level so you don't look sleepy (camera positioned too low) or surprised (camera positioned too high)

Zoom socials. The same rules apply, have the right netiquette, posture, and don't fidget. Practice eye contact into green light. Put the videos of your interviewers on the top of the screen to bring your eyes closer to the video camera.

If you prefer contact lenses or have no preference regarding eyeglasses, this is the time to choose to wear contact lenses to avoid the glare that computer screens have on many glasses.

Other key points about the interview day:

Take notes immediately after you finish the interview: strengths, weaknesses, topics to follow up on or get more information.

Interview tips

- **PREPARATION PREPARATION PREPARATION.** This is perhaps the MOST important thing to do to prepare for your interviews. Know everything in your application inside and out. That research from college? Someone will ask you about it. Your obscure hobby? Someone will ask you about it! The one sentence in your personal statement that you forgot about? Someone will ask about it. Behavioral questions also come up often, so prepare answers to many of those. At Vanderbilt, Dr. Law holds mock interviews and may offer extra practice if you request it. She is by far one of the hardest interviewers during the mock interview, so a session with her will be great practice. You should practice in the mirror, practice with faculty from other disciplines, video yourself, set up multiple practice sessions with others via Zoom, etc.
- **Answers:** Be honest, authentic and try not to sound scripted. Because you have a screen in front of you during virtual interviews, it is tempting to write out answers on Word, but instead just write on paper key words to jog your memory or place a paper sticky note on screen. It will feel more natural and will be less overwhelming to have to find your e-notes behind windows. When asked about your institution, stay positive even if there are many changes you'd like to suggest or if you have a negative experience. Don't forget your institution may be another faculty's alma mater. Don't have yes/no or dead-end answers, always find a way to explain what you've learned or briefly close with how you've experienced something. Keep answers illustrative but concise.
- **What questions do you have?** Ask them. It looks bad to say "I don't have any" or "All my questions have been answered". This shuts down the interviewer. Use this space to learn what that interviewer has to say about a similar question that was previously answered elsewhere as this helps you have a better understanding of the program. But don't ask questions that are answered by the website. Instead, state that you read X on the website and ask a perspective question about X. (ie. description of research program: "I read about the structure of the research program on the website; can you tell me how residents find mentors and projects?")
- **Dinners and socials:** These are not traditionally mandatory, but are often your best resource to figure out what programs are the best fit. Pay attention to how happy the residents are, and what kinds of things the residents do for fun! Ask the residents a lot of questions, but most importantly figure out if you fit in. At many programs the current residents or chiefs have some say in the final rank list. There are a handful of programs that have a cocktail hour for their social rounds where faculty also attend. If business casual is the dress code, it's okay to err on the side of business more than casual. Many faculty or residents come directly from clinic.
- **Thank you notes:** Email > Card > None. You will get many different recommendations for thank you notes, but ophthalmology is a small world, so at

minimum, a personalized thank you note can show courtesy and gratitude and may be remembered as such. Some programs will give you a strict no-email policy, but most will provide you with emails for your interviewers. If you write a thank you note, keep it short, but try to include a few sentences that were personal to your interview. Some programs rank applicants on the final day of interviews, so the thank you note or email may not make it to the interview members in time to have any impact. In fact, most will say that a note will not influence rank, [see recent publication on this topic](#).

- Your behavior and professionalism is being observed at all times! You are always building your reputation. How you communicate and interact with program coordinators, directors, residents, and other candidates is carefully considered. Stay engaged and be courteous to everyone, even while declining interviews or rescheduling dates.

(The hardest) Interview questions

- What would your sibling say about you that no one else would say about you?
- What would your frenemy say about you?
- Tell me your 3 greatest weaknesses
- Share an ethical dilemma you've encountered
- Describe a time that you failed as a leader and what did you learn?
- Describe a time when you had to admit a mistake?

Helpful books/resources for medical students on ophthalmology

- AAO's Basic Ophthalmology: Essentials for Medical Students, Tenth Edition <https://store.aao.org/basic-ophthalmology-essentials-for-medical-students-tenth-edition.html>
- Medical student page on AAO website: <https://www.aao.org/medical-students>
- Tim Root: <https://timroot.com/>
- Eyewiki: https://eyewiki.aao.org/Main_Page
- Iowa's resources: <http://eyerounds.org/>
- Moran Eye Center resources <https://morancore.utah.edu/>
- Gonioscopy: <http://gonioscopy.org/>
- Eye Guru: <https://eyeguru.org/>
- Medskl: <https://medskl.com/>
- Eyes for Ears Podcast: <https://eyesforears.net/>

Other Match Guides

Basic info from AAO on ophthalmology residency:

<https://www.aao.org/medical-students/residency-match-basics>

2020 Advice for the Ophthalmology Residency Match Season - Link to 90 minute joint AAO/AUPO webinar held June 29, 2020:

<https://www.aao.org/annual-meeting-video/2020-advice-ophthalmology-residency-match-season>

SF 2020 match report

https://sfmatch.org/PDFFilesDisplay/Ophthalmology_Residency_Stats_2020.pdf

University of Iowa Match Guide:

<https://webeye.ophth.uiowa.edu/eyeforum/tutorials/iowa-Guide-to-the-Ophthalmology-Match.pdf>

University of Minnesota Match Guide:

<https://med.umn.edu/ophthalmology/education-training/residency>

Virtual interview tips:

<https://www.aamc.org/what-we-do/mission-areas/medical-education/conducting-interviews-during-coronavirus-pandemic?fbclid=IwAR3-EnIRLZPBqGwPDLrLpoL4qt4xJS4CHKsziF-Gmwep2Z4tBK2iixF0Wk>

Compiled map of ophthalmology programs:

<https://www.medmap.io/specialty/Ophthalmology>

Social media

Social media is a growing way to learn more about various departments across the country. This can give you a preview of the research going on in various departments and can show you what kinds of educational programming is offered. However, you should also know that anything you post on social-media is public or can be shared and negatively affect you. Be considerate what kinds of things you post on your social media. [It can be a powerful tool, but can also be detrimental \(Schmutter et al\).](#)