

*TheMedCoach.com*

# 5 Mistakes to Avoid When Applying to Medical School

Learn how to Increase Your  
Admissions Success!

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# About This Book

So you've decided you want to go to Medical School! I'm sure you're excited, overwhelmed and nervous, and that is all **TOTALLY NORMAL**. Getting into medical school is no easy feat, and there is SO much to learn about how to get accepted.

In this Ebook I will reveal **5 BIG MISTAKES STUDENTS MAKE WHEN APPLYING TO MEDICAL SCHOOL**.

# Admissions Statistics

Let's start with some facts about medical school admissions today:

## Medical School Admissions Statistics:

In the 2018 application season, there were **52,777** students who applied to US medical schools

Of these 52,777 students, **21,622** started medical school in the US that fall

This is a **40% acceptance rate**

<https://www.aamc.org/data/facts/applicantmatriculant/>

The **mean MCAT** score for students accepted to US Medical schools in 2018 was **505.6**

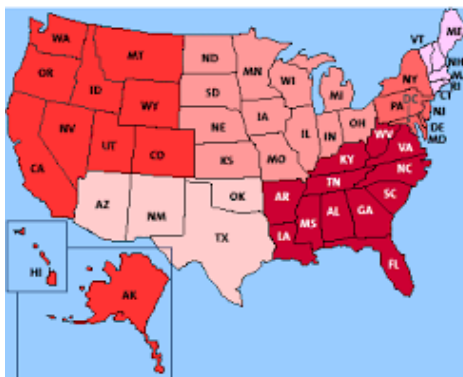
The mean **Science GPA** was **3.47**

The mean **Overall GPA** was **3.57**

Each applicant applies to an average of **16 medical schools**. Almost all medical schools use a common application, but each medical school has their own secondary application and supplemental requirements.

Considering these competitive statistics, it's extremely helpful to know some things to avoid during the application process.

**In this book we will go over 5 mistakes that premed students often make. You won't regret reading this!**



## Mistake #1: Being Overconfident and Limiting Your School Selection

When my coaching client Mike came to me, he was discouraged. He felt like he was a strong applicant. His scores were competitive and his GPA was fine. When he didn't get in on his first try, he sought my help. As we looked over the applications he submitted the first time, I realized that he had only applied to 6 schools, and they were all actually a "Reach." Oops. I'm happy to report he was accepted the second time, after applying to more "Target" schools. Success!

As mentioned on page 1, **only 40%** of those who apply to US medical schools were accepted last year. Don't let this discourage you, but use it as a reality check of what you'll need to do and where you'll need to apply.

Students often have the highest GPA of their friends, or the most hours of volunteer experience, but sometimes on a national scale, they're falling behind the average compared to other applicants.

Some common questions:

### How Do I Avoid Applying to Too Many or Too Few Schools?

The average applicant applied to **16 medical schools** last year.

While it may seem like applying to more schools increases your chance of admission, it is also exhausting and expensive to apply to tons of schools. Each school has secondary applications, supplemental essays, and application fees pile up.



It's more important to apply to enough of the right types of schools, rather than every top tier school in the country or only the schools in your home state or dream location.

If you apply to 15-20 carefully selected schools, you can focus your time, attention and money on making each application perfect.

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### **How Do I Know What Caliber Of Medical Schools To Apply To?**

Most schools post their admission statistics on their website. Use your MCAT score and GPA as a comparison to decide which schools are realistic options for you.

- Those schools whose average MCAT score and GPA is higher than yours should be considered a "Reach."
- Schools whose average MCAT and GPA are very close to yours should be "Target" schools
- Schools whose average MCAT and GPA are a fair amount lower than yours should be considered "Safe" schools

At least  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the schools you apply to should be those that are Safe or Target schools.

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### **Will I have to Leave My Home or Preferred State?**

Not necessarily, but keep in mind that schools in particular regions such as California, NYC, Texas are known to be very competitive. It may be a smarter decision to attend an MD program in the Midwest rather than only applying in NYC and California and not getting in to any MD schools. Something to think about...again you'll need to consider your stats and the schools' averages.

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### **Should I apply to DO and Caribbean Medical Schools?**

If you are unable to find enough Safe schools, you may want to consider DO and Caribbean Medical schools. Make sure you apply to those with strong track records for US residency matches.

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## Should I consider a Gap Year or Postbac degree?

Many students these days take a “Gap Year” or pursue a Postbaccalaureate degree before entering medical school. Often, this may be because they did not get accepted to any medical schools and will re-apply. Other times you may decide that your MCAT score and GPA weren't high enough to apply this year, and you want to retake the MCAT and boost your GPA.

If you decide to take a Gap Year, **make sure it's worthwhile**. Try to get a volunteer or research position that is more intense and involved than you were able to fit in during undergrad. A paid position would be wonderful, so you can save up before Med School, but this isn't always possible. You may consider a non-medical part time job if the paid medical jobs don't seem to help your application.

Your gap year project/work can be a very valuable asset to your application. This will be a **common discussion point at your interviews**, so make sure you're spending your year in a meaningful way.



## Mistake #2-Undervaluing Letters of Recommendation

My client Joann had excellent Bio grades and a good MCAT score, but had no idea who she would ask for letters of recommendation. She was too nervous to ask her Bio professor, despite her great performance in his courses. I coached her on realizing the worst that could happen is he would decline, and of course he agreed and wrote her the fabulous letter she deserved.

Most medical schools require at least 2-3 letters of recommendation. AMCAS allows you to load up to 10 letters of recommendation, and assign different letters to each specific school.

**Asking for letters can be intimidating.** You may feel like the physician barely knows you, or that you're bothering them by asking for a letter, **but the worst that can happen is they say no!** They may say they don't feel comfortable because they haven't worked with you enough. If so, and you still think their letter would be valuable, you can ask if there is any way to spend more time in their office, OR, etc. Again, the worst that can happen is they say no!

Also, you want to make sure to ask people who can write **enthusiastic letters** and not standard or forgettable form letters. Asking someone who you think has an impressive name might sound like a good idea, but if they've only met you once or twice they'll likely use a standard recommendation form letter and fill in your name. This will be VERY obvious to admissions committees.



**Make sure to ask for letters with more than enough time to complete them.** I recommend asking at least 2-3 months before applications open. I was once asked to write a student's letter of recommendation, which was due THE NEXT DAY! And while I luckily happened to check my work email that day, and was nice and scrambled to write the letter, many of my colleagues would have refused to work with this timeline.

Remember that physicians and professors are busy, and someone who promises to write you a letter, just might not get around to it, or may not write it on time. Because of this reality, it's important to ask for more than just 2-3 letters.

Remember to ask politely, send gentle reminders if needed, give writers enough time, and keep in mind that you may as well ask anyone you think will write a strong letter, because the worst thing that can happen is they decline! You won't be blacklisted from med school for simply asking for a recommendation letter, go ahead and ask!



## Mistake #3: Not Having Memorable Extracurriculars and Experiences

My Client Sam came to me, disappointed that his recommendation writers and advisors didn't seem impressed by his experiences in the medical field. Looking over his application, I saw that he only mentioned "Worked as a volunteer at Memorial Hospital" and included the dates. On further questioning, it turned out Sam was much more than a volunteer. He had in fact started a new program, where volunteers read stories to pediatric patients before bed, to lower their stress when the children's families couldn't be there. Once we added this description to Sam's application, the admissions committees appreciate the heartfelt side to Sam's personality, and it made all the difference!

The AMCAS application allows you to list **up to 15 experiences** in the "Work and Activities" section. They will be displayed in chronological order and formatted in plain text. You will be allowed up to 700 characters to describe these experiences.

Additionally, applicants can select up to 3 of these activities that they consider the most meaningful and are given an additional 1325 characters to explain why.

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### So how do you choose which kinds of activities to do?

Find experiences that **you're interested in**, that you're excited to spend free time learning more about and working on. Look for research labs working on topics you liked reading about in your courses.

Find a list of recent medical school applicants from your college and ask if you can take over their clinical placements once they leave. Ask them how they found their volunteer work. This will be much more valuable than going to your local hospital and working as a wheelchair transport assistant or something equally vague.

**Alternatively, don't be afraid to be the first premed student asking to be involved with a lab or clinical project.** The worst that can happen is the preceptor declines! No problem, on to the next one. **Unless you ask to be involved, you won't be involved.** If you find a fascinating lab online, or have an amazing professor for a course, ask them if there's anything you can help them with. Tell them you're premed and you'd love to get involved in any way you can. If they can't help, ask if any of their colleagues might have need for help from a premed student. Don't be pushy but don't be afraid to ask!

**If there's something you love or that you've been involved with that's not medically related, keep doing it!** If you are a semi-professional salsa dancer, don't give it up unless your grades suffer because of it! This will be good for both your own personal well being and happiness, and makes you an interesting and unique med school candidate. If you're passionate about animals and volunteer at a local shelter, keep doing it! Your commitment and stake in the cause will be obvious in a well worded application and during your interviews. You should still make sure one or more of your experiences are medically related, but don't give up your interests outside of medicine either.

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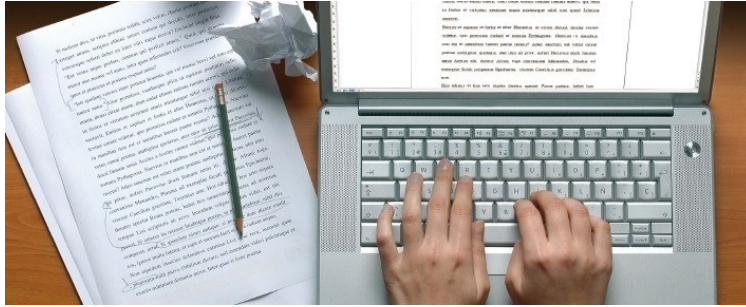
### **How do I choose which experiences to write about? What should I say was my most meaningful experience?**

At least 1 of these "most meaningful" activities should be medical, since you are applying to medical school! But it's ok if you have a non-medical passion and want to include this on your application, even in the "most meaningful" section.

Let's say you've competed in 5 Triathlons, and this has been an extremely positive experience for you. While it's not medical, it shows extreme dedication and commitment, and maybe some of these races were run for charities. If this is something you love talking about, include it in your application.

**Writing about something that may seem off topic, or too unique, is much better than only including “safe” work and activities experiences,** as your bland description of these activities will make it obvious that they weren't meaningful experiences. Exaggerating your level of involvement is also NOT recommended, as medical academic communities are small, and these “white lies” can easily be figured out. A quick phonecall to a colleague can be made that may prove your claims wrong. Not a good way to gain a spot into med school!

Medical school admissions committee reviewers see the same types of work and activities every day-volunteering at the hospital, doing research in a large lab, so they love anything unique and different. **They can read your passion through the lines of the paper,** and if you're given an interview, it's amazing for them to hear you talk about something you're passionate about. You may find that almost your entire interview was spent talking about the triathlons and not medicine at all. **Your grades and scores will speak for themselves, the interviewers want to see what kind of person you are, what sets you apart and what you love doing.**



## Mistake #4: Writing a Forgettable and Vague Personal Statement

When Jessica asked me to edit her Personal Statement, I could see why she seemed so hesitant. It sounded like everyone else's story. We had a long discussion about when she first became interested in medicine. She recalled, in detail, a story about an injury she had during her years of competitive figure skating, but thought this was too unrelated to discuss. Her excitement telling this story was so strong, that I knew it would translate into an excellent opening anecdote. Once she added this story, she felt so much more pride and ownership in her personal statement, and admissions committees loved it.

The Personal Statement is often one of the most dreaded and anxiety producing part of the medical school application. Common concerns are

- How do I sum up my personality and achievements in 1 page?
- How do I explain why I want to become a doctor in a way that's any different from every other applicant?
- What if I haven't had any major tragedies or transformative experiences in my life and don't have anything interesting to write about?
- How do I write in a way that's not overly formal?
- How will I remember any specific patient experiences to grab the reader's attention?

These are all valid questions!

Any book or blog article on writing your personal statement will instruct you to “hook” or capture your reader with an anecdote at the beginning of your essay. But how will you choose one or remember what will be most interesting?

One piece of advice, that is often received too late, is to **keep a JOURNAL of your clinical or volunteer experiences, no matter how early you start them.** It makes more sense for those experiences you had in high school or early college years, as these are what you're more likely to forget, especially after cramming in all that organic chemistry!! Lets say you spend a few days shadowing a physician in the summer between junior and senior year of high school, how great would it be if you had a journal of memories from that experience, so you could draw on them when its time to write your personal statement for medical school?!

All it takes is a few sentences at the end of each day you spend volunteering or working, to jot down some notes about an interesting patient encounter or personal achievement. This will make it easy to select a great example to write about, with much more vivid details than you'll remember 3 years later. This is how you "hook" the reader and make them excited to finish your essay. **Go buy that journal now or start a new section in your phones Notes app today!**





## Mistake #5: Boring your Interviewers

My clients often feel confident in their study strategies, their test taking skills, and their finished Personal Statement, but have a lot of anxiety about their interview skills since they have SO little practice with this.

I always encourage clients to go through several practice interviews with me, before the real deal. And I'm so glad I do. When Leah and I did a practice interview, her usually engaging personality fell flat. She answered questions politely but with just a "yes" or "no" and few other words. With practice, Leah became less anxious and realized the interviewers are all just people, wanting the best for her. She finally opened up and made a few jokes, even smiled. What a difference it made!

While you might have stellar grades, a near perfect MCAT score, and an impressive work/activities list, **many medical schools finalize their admissions decisions once they meet you in an interview.** Interviews are used to make sure you have good interpersonal skills, are easy to get along with, can speak intelligently and have a professional appearance.

You may have had your personal statement edited 20 times and received letters of recommendation from the chairman of Medicine at Harvard-but **an interview is a live performance**, and you'll need to think quickly and sound genuine.

**It's not just a good idea to practice your interview skills, it's necessary!** It's fine to read a book about commonly asked interview questions, but its much more important to practice your answers out loud, and with someone you don't know well, or who makes your slightly nervous.

**Before each interview it's a good idea to research the medical school, their curriculum and unique characteristics.** You will definitely be asked if you have any questions about the school. **You should always try to come up with at least one** well thought out question that isn't obviously answered by reading the first page of their school website. Ask about advising, mentorship, international electives, not how much vacation you're given or how early classes start each morning! But find **something** to ask or you'll seem disinterested.

**You should also be able to answer questions about ANY word written on your application and essays.** Make sure you can quickly summarize your research project findings, explain any scientific concepts behind that research, discuss the mission of any charities you were involved with, and justify any red flags or time off in your application timeline.

**Also, you should be familiar with various types of interview formats.** You may have five separate interviews with one interviewer at a time, one longer group interview, or the newly popular Multiple Mini Interview (**MMI**) format. In an MMI students rotate through various stations and have to answer various questions or act out scenarios. This is again a format you should practice in advance, since it's not "natural" to anyone.

Remember to appear professional, and smile! Even if it's your safety school, you never know where you will and wont get accepted. It would be a shame to get rejected from a school because you seemed bored or arrogant in the interview.

# SUMMARY

So, after reading this book, you may feel like you've got everything figured out. But, trust me, this is the tip of the iceberg!

**My coaching clients are always blown away by how much they DON'T know about the whole application process and how to succeed. I want to be there for you, to help you each step of the way, and make you sure you achieve success and get ACCEPTED!**

Please feel free to contact me anytime at [Sara@TheMedCoach.com](mailto:Sara@TheMedCoach.com) and visit my website at [www.TheMedCoach.com](http://www.TheMedCoach.com) for tons of valuable information, including --

- Anonymous FAQs submitted by your peers with my answers,
- Info about the application process for your parents
- A weekly updated Blog
- List of my Premed and Med student advising services, which range from 1 hour consultations on a subject or question of your choice, to a comprehensive year long package that gives you unlimited email and messaging access, application and essay edits, interview help, and so much more.

**See last page to schedule your free 15 Min Consultation Today!!**



Premed and Medical Student Coach

## About the Author-Sara Bittman MD

I am a Board Certified Physician who has a passion for helping students succeed in their premedical and medical school years. I have lived through every moment that you have been through or are going to go through in your training. **I know exactly how you feel because I've been there, and I want to help you get there too!**

I have worked with hundreds of medical students and love to lecture on medical school study strategies, finding the specialty that best suits you, and how to successfully apply to residency. I have interviewed dozens of residency applicants, and understand what residency program directors are looking for. I love sharing this knowledge and building relationships with eager and motivated future doctors.

I am committed to working with clients in all phases of training, from the first year of college to residency. **I take pride in developing a personalized approach to coaching, so that students feel they have a supportive mentor, rather than working with a large corporate advising company.**

### Professional Experience:

Attending Physician Obstetrics and Gynecology

Residency in Obstetrics and Gynecology - Rutgers New Jersey Medical School

M.D. New York Medical College

Columbia University Postbaccalaureate Premedical Program

B.A. Barnard College - Magna Cum Laude

# Book A Free Consultation

Wouldnt it be great to have someone on your side, guiding you through this process toward Acceptance to med school? Want to hear more? I offer a FREE 15 minute call to potential coaching clients. Click below to sign up!

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