

Medical School Applications: AMCAS

By: The Education Team at WebStraw



Introduction

Hi! Thank you for checking out this AMCAS resource by WebStraw at Western University! In this document, the AMCAS team at WebStraw has compiled key information and resources for navigating the AMCAS application process and tips and tricks for success. It is designed to provide future applicants with information about the key differences in the AMCAS process (compared to OMSAS), the application timeline, tips for the primary and secondary applications, and some frequently asked questions.

How to use this resource: We recommend using the resource to supplement other resources that you may have to make well-informed choices on how to approach the AMCAS application.

We wish you the best of luck in your applications!

Disclaimer: This resource is meant as a supplementary (non-comprehensive) resource written by students for other students. These are anecdotes and researched information from select students and may not be generalizable to every student or every school.

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Important differences with the Canadian system

The US application cycle is different from the Canadian cycle in numerous ways including:

1. There is greater emphasis placed on the MCAT score in US applications than in Canadian applications.
2. The US application cycle starts much earlier than Canada's, starting around June 1st, while Canada's starts around August and ends in November.
 - a. Dalhousie is in August, followed by OMSAS and western schools, then McGill.
3. US applications have to be tailored to the school, while Canadian applications do not.
 - a. In Canada, not only are most applications similar, but you do not have to 'convince' the school that you are a good match for their program, rather that you are just a good applicant. In the states, due to the number of schools, you have to tailor your application (particularly your secondary) to match each school.
4. The US application process is much more extensive, expensive, and time-consuming than Canadian schools.
 - a. This is not a process that should be taken lightly. That being said, it is good practice for Canada since it occurs beforehand and forces you to get your ducks in a row in terms of your references, verifiers, and your descriptions of activities. In addition, the stories you reference in your secondaries and primary will be material that you can reuse if you get an interview in Canada or the US.
5. US medical schools cost far more than Canadian schools.
 - a. This is because Canadian medical students have most of their education funded by the government and the school. While this will balance out in the long-run, particularly if you stay in the states for work, it is still important.
 - b. A rough estimate is that it would cost about \$500k for the US and \$100K for Canada in tuition over the four years of medical school.
 - c. To afford tuition, you may need a line of credit, or cosigners for big loans.
6. Canadian schools typically force you to take the CASPer while the vast majority of US schools generally do not have it as a requirement (make sure to check the school!).
7. US schools function via rolling admissions, releasing acceptances largely based on a first-come-first-served basis.
 - a. Hence, when the applications open, it is incredibly important that you submit as fast as you can.
8. US schools are also split into MD and DO programs, which each have their pros and cons. Most students however, are interested in MD programs.
9. Clinical experience is critical in the application process, meaning you need 50-100 hours of shadowing, as well as 100+ hours of clinical volunteering (eg. senior home).

Timeline

Primary

The application timeline is very different from Canada. You should begin writing your primary application in **May**. This is the point where you will be considering the schools you want to apply to, ordering your transcripts, as well as writing up your application (including contacting references and verifiers). It is important to submit your primary application as soon as possible once the submission window opens (generally **June 1st**) because with rolling admissions, the earlier your application is looked at, the more seats there are available.

Secondary

Once your application is submitted, it takes AMCAS approximately **one month** to verify your application (they cross-reference it with your transcripts) and send it to the schools. In that **month**, you should be pre-writing your secondaries for the various schools. You can find previous secondary essay questions on [sdn](#) (student doctor network) and you should pre-write answers to these essays. Generally, schools don't change their questions much year to year so this will help you out significantly once schools start emailing you secondaries. At the end of **June** to the first week of **July**, you should start getting emailed secondaries from schools. The typical recommendation is that you return these to the schools within **2 weeks** of receiving the email, preferably around **1 week**. This is because schools can see how quickly you submit your essays back to them, which can be an indication that you prioritize their school over others.

Interview

Once you submit your secondaries (you should be done around **mid-August** depending on how many schools you applied to and when they email you), you are done! Then, you wait for interview invites (anywhere from **September** to **March**, clustered mostly between **September** to **December**).

How to pick schools

The first step to narrowing your search is your budget. Figure out how much you are willing to spend on applications, then choose the number of schools accordingly. Once you have selected how many schools you want to apply to (anywhere from 5-20 is manageable), then you should take a look at the [List of Canadian-friendly USMD Schools](#) as well as purchasing the [MSAR](#) (through AMCAS) to determine which schools you have a good chance at.

Unfortunately, some schools say they take Canadians, but the statistics reveal that they do not (with the exception of rare inside candidates). By using these two resources, you can filter for the schools that you have a more reasonable chance at. Typically, these will be the upper tier schools such as Mayo, Harvard and Yale, some middle tier schools such as Dartmouth and

Emory, and lower tier schools such as Virginia Commonwealth University (depending on your stats). Based on how confident you are of your chances in Canada, you should adjust your school list to be more heavily weighted to ‘reach’ schools or ‘safety’ schools. Looking up your “LizzyM” Score should give you a good idea of which schools fall in which category for you. However, due to your status as a Canadian applicant, you will have to apply a small deduction (of 3-10, depending on the school’s tendency to take Canadians) to your LizzyM.

Primary Application Tips

The primary application consists of a personal statement in addition to your reference letters (they do not need to be sent yet, but they need to be allocated to the schools). It is imperative you have no spelling mistakes or imperfections in this application. The primary is sent to all schools you apply to, so the room for error is quite small compared to secondaries. The typical advice is to tell a story in each experience’s description and highlight how it will help you become an excellent physician. The personal statement is a bit abstract and can be anything from a pseudo resume to a complete narrative. However, it is best to be somewhere in the middle and to mix a narrative with a list of your experiences that will help you excel as a physician. Try and highlight the story about how you decided upon medicine and what you have done to get to this stage. It’s ideal if you have a specific situation that can form a narrative, but don’t worry if you do not! Just try and find your story and make it more of the resume-type than the narrative-type.

The primary also includes your transcript, which should be ordered a minimum of 2 weeks before the application submission date, as well as your references. References are generally not due with the primary, but you still have to contact them so you can allocate your references for each school. Different schools require you to allocate different references (eg. 2 science profs and one non-science, or one volunteering and one prof and one your choice etc.). Each of your references will send one letter to AMCAS, which is distributed based on your choices. An all-encompassing selection of references is: 2 science profs, 1 non-science prof, 1 volunteering, 1 research, 1 other. If you have these, you should be fine for any school.

Secondary Application Tips

Tip 1: Prewrite Essays as Much as Possible

- Secondaries are a huge grind, particularly when you apply to a lot of schools and you really need to pre-write them to have any chance of submitting on time. Some prompts (what makes you diverse, name a time you _____, etc.) are really common so you should try and pre-write these at various lengths (100, 250, 500 words etc.).
- Another common prompt is ‘why our school’ but that needs to be adjusted heavily based on the school and the research you do for the school. There are lists of the most-common prompts as well on reddit/sdn in addition to the school-specific ones.

Tip 2: Submit Within 2 Weeks of Receiving your Email

Tip 3: Read up about the programs

- Research the programs (particularly their mission statements and things they're known for), then match your essays and arguments accordingly to present yourself as the best fit for their school. .
- Remember that you have to sell yourself to the school much more than you do in Canada.

Mental Health during the Application Process

Applying to medical school is a tremendously stressful and anxiety-ridden process. You have to spend countless hours trying to 'sell' yourself to a school so they can make your dreams become a reality. Whether it works out or not, the process is a marathon and can negatively impact one's mental health. Thus, it is critical to surround yourself with a proper support system should you experience burnout. Make sure to reach out to friends or family if you have difficulties handling the stress. Furthermore, numerous studies have shown the benefits of socialization on not only mental health, but also cognitive performance, so make sure to take a few hours each week to catch up with your friends!

If you or someone else are seeking additional mental health resources in Canada, please check out this link: [Mental health support: get help](#). For mental health resources at Western University, click [here](#).

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Q1) "What courses do I need to take?"

It depends heavily on the schools that you are applying to. To ensure that you qualify for most schools, you should take:

- 2 semesters of biology
- 2 semesters of chemistry
- 2 semesters of physics
- 1 semester of calculus
- 1 semester of math
- 1 semester of statistics (biostatistics preferred)
- 2 semesters of organic chemistry
- 2 semesters of english
- 2 semesters of a non-science elective.

Different schools will have different requirements, but these will make you qualified for the vast majority. If you are in Med Sci then you should only need to worry about orgo 2, 2 english courses and enough non-sci electives. Everything else is required for your degree.

Q2) “Where can I find resources to help me through this process?”

Reddit, sdn and premed101 will be able to answer many of your questions. Alternatively, it is great to ask Canadians who have been through the application system. If you have any questions, feel free to contact kkashanian@webstraw.org and I will either try and help, or connect you with someone who can.

Q3) “Is it even worth applying?”

If medicine is your dream then you should try and achieve it by any means possible. Ultimately, it really depends on how strong of a candidate you are and whether you want to work in the US. If you are a strong candidate, you do not necessarily have to apply to US schools, although it is great to have the safety option should you need it. Also, if you want to work in the US or care about the calibre of your school, then perhaps US medical schools would be more up your alley than Canadian ones. If you are not as strong of a candidate, it is important to apply as broadly as possible in Canada and the US to maximize your chances of acquiring an acceptance. The money spent on your education will balance out in the long-run, you just have to think of it as an investment in yourself.

Q4) “Do Western’s grades really convert to 4.0 when you have above an 80?”

Yes, due to the fact that Western does not use A-, 80%+ converts to AMCAS 4.0. However, there is a steep drop where 70-79% converts to AMCAS 3.0 and 60-69% a 2.0. Therefore, you do have some space for error as long as you get above an 80 in all or the vast majority of your courses, but below that, you start to take major hits to your GPA.