



# **GUIDE TO A SUCCESSFUL MEDICAL SCHOOL APPLICATION**

**Dr. Mitchell Goldman**

[http://www.nimbios.org/education/undergrad\\_conf2011](http://www.nimbios.org/education/undergrad_conf2011)

“Life is not always about where you came from, but rather where you are trying to go, so where will you allow life to take you?”

-Felisha Moseley

“We make our world significant by the courage of our questions and the depth of our answers.”

-Carl Sagan

What encouraging quotes will you live by that will guide you on your journey?



# THE RULES

Rule 1: There is no substitute for straight A's. Grades matter. They are often the first measure looked at and unless you have some unusual circumstances poorer grades are hard to overcome.

- If you don't have straight A's, it doesn't mean you should not apply. Just be ready to explain why you do not.
- What is my overall GPA? What is my Science and Math GPA? Is this GPA sufficient for Medical school?

Rule 2: There is no substitute for over 40 on the MCATs. If you don't have high MCATs, it is harder to get in so take them seriously. The distribution is also important. They should all be above sixes and sevens. Take the writing part seriously. Take a review course, if you can. Study for the test in a concerted manner. The review course may overestimate your score-don't get cocky1

- Refer to Rule 1

Rule 3: It is better to be in, than reapplying. However, reapplications are looked upon favorably so do reapply if you don't get in, but you've got to improve your application. Spread the field!

- How many schools do you want to apply to?



Rule 4: Major in what interests you. Majoring in science may help you a bit on the MCATs, but will give you very little advantage in Med School.

- What are some of your interests?
- Which could you turn into a major in college?

Rule 5: Apply early and often as you can afford (See Rule 3). It's nice to be close to home, but try not to have geographic constraints as this will limit your opportunities. There are a lot of applicants just like you, all vying for the same spots. You could get in when someone who appears to be better does not and there is no consistent rhyme or reason why you are liked over the other. So, the more you can shotgun the better. Always apply to every state school in your state.

- Look up and research all the medical colleges in your state of residence.
- What other medical colleges are you interested in possibly attending?

Rule 6: Do something that shows commitment. Extracurricular activities are necessary, but not sufficient. So, do something that you can do well and don't spread yourself thin over a multiplicity of clubs, especially if you end up violating Rule 1. If you are an athlete, play if you can make the team; if a musician, play. Be passionate about something.

- List all extracurricular activities that you are involved in on the chart provided; also provide a brief description about each (2-3 sentences).

<b>Name of Extracurricular Activity/ Organization</b>	<b>Dates (Start-End)</b>	<b>Description of Activity</b>	

Rule 7: Do something that shows an interest in humanity. Mission trips are good, but you can also volunteer in free clinics, nursing homes, hospitals, mentoring programs, etc. It is probably helpful if it is something medically related, but that is not totally necessary. The key is to show commitment. Do not just do it once or twice, but consistently, over time. It will be meaningful to you as a person if you do it well and will not look like you are just trying to check off a box on the med school application. On the application talk about what you learned and how it made you better.

- What public services and volunteer projects/ organizations have you been involved in? (Use chart on next page)
- Which have been medically related and how?
- Find out more about opportunities in your area.

Volunteer Activity	Dates (Start-End)	Description of Activity	

Rule 8: May be the same as Rule 7, but you have to learn about medicine so that the med schools know that you know a bit about being in medicine. That is a bit of assurance that you know what you are getting into. Shadowing is OK, but if you do it, do it to learn and do it often. Think of what you want to learn from the physician. Watching a few surgeries is titillating, but if you do it infrequently and can't talk about what you learned about medicine in general it is a bit shallow. Remember every one shadows. Make it meaningful. On the application, (in the activities section) say why it was meaningful.

- What shadowing have you had the opportunity to participate in? (chart in back on booklet)
- What was significant about each procedure?

Rule 9: Research is okay, but not absolutely necessary. It doesn't take the place of Rules 1 and 2, and is not as important at most institutions as Rules 6, 7 and 8. If you do it, be able to talk about it in a meaningful way. Remember Rule 6 is all about commitment; same here. There is nothing that sounds more fake than a dilettante in the lab, someone who spent some time in a friend of the family's lab and didn't learn in depth about the research problem being addressed, the techniques used and the results if any (if not, why not?). You may get asked about the meaning of what you did, how long you did it and why you did it. You should do it because you have a real interest in science and not to check off another box.

- What research have you had the opportunity to participate in? (chart in back on booklet)



Rule 10: This is a BIG one!! Think of why you want to be a doctor. Write down the reasons so you are familiar with them yourself. There are lots of reasons, but what are yours? Also, what influences made you want to do this instead of being a lawyer, a teacher, an artist, a coach, a nurse, a mechanic, etc. Dig deep for this one. Find out what the pros and cons are to being a doctor and weigh them. Remember there are cons. It's not all "Scrubs", "Grey's Anatomy" or "ER"; some of us are ugly!!! Also, just because you watched your uncle's, wife's nephew go through a bout of flu is not a good reason to want to be a doctor. You ought to know about what is going on in medicine now, the issues, the policies, diseases, etc.

- Why (in your heart) do you want to be a doctor? (you can use the next page)

Why I want to go into the medical field

Rule 11: Think about what internal drive you possess that would make you a good doctor. Did you persist through a difficult trial? Are you a leader, an empathetic person? Be ready to show examples. Not all of us had cataclysmic events in life that shaped us. If you did, use it to show some characteristic or what you learned. If you didn't have a major event, think of some of the things, events or people that shaped you and how they shaped you. We have all done things that are worth touting as part of what we are.

- Write all the significant qualities or talents you feel will help you to become a good doctor.

Rule 12: Go to the best place you can afford. First, all medical schools will teach you the basics of medicine to about the same degree. Residency is the finishing school. It is easier to get a better residency from a more prestigious medical school. Some residencies (Dermatology, Radiology, ENT, Urology, etc.) are more competitive than others and the reputation of the Med School and its network contacts may be an advantage. If you absolutely know that you want to go into private practice, in a less competitive residency, in a specific geographic area, you might sacrifice the reputation of the medical school for the locality and cost. Beware most students are not sure or change interest along the way. Rules 1 and 2 apply to getting a residency no matter what med school you go to.

- Research medical schools, examine their cost, and determine which costs are most affordable for your price range.







Rule 13: You will go into debt. Understand that most students accrue \$80-200K of loans. The military offers scholarships which are attractive, but you have to pay back in years and you may not get to do fellowships until after you pay back some years. You also may not get into residency where you want. However, many military residencies are more than acceptable. Hospitals and some states will pay for your education if you promise to either come back to that hospital or a rural area and practice. These are usually specialty specific like primary care. Look around for other specific (minority, geographic, institutional) scholarships.

Rule 14: Get recommendations from people who know and like you. Get to know the professor. Go to his office hours during the class. You don't get to see the letter, but it's okay to talk to the writer about things they may say about you. A bland letter from the Professor who doesn't really know you is not worth much. Make an appointment, go over your goals, the things that you think are important about yourself, your performance in his/her class. Unless you have maintained a close relationship after a class is over, talk to the professor soon after the class about a letter and come back to remind him when the time comes. Recommendations from doctors you shadowed should also be meaningful. If you rarely talked while shadowing or only went a few times, they really can't say much pertinent and no matter how important the mentor may be, the admissions folks can tell if he didn't really know you and the impact of the letter may be less. Watch out for the doctor who graduated from xyz med school who says he can get you in. There are a lot of folks calling the admission committees and while the info is appreciated, it is not sufficient to get you in. Some committees receive too many "pressure" calls from people who don't really know you. Make sure you go to the pre-med office early (Freshman year) and keep in touch with the pre-med advisor so they get to know you.



Rule 15: Be yourself when you interview. Dress well. Don't express your creativity or individuality through your dress. A dark suit is a safe bet for both sexes. Shake hands. Sit up. Make eye contact. Speak clearly. Don't fidget. Have pertinent questions that you have thought out before the interview. Prepare. Read about the school, the hospitals, and the special programs. Be prepared to answer questions about yourself, your motives, and your experiences. There are stress interviews at some places. They are meant to see how you handle stress not to see what you know. It's all right to say I don't know, but often the interviewer wants to see how you work through a problem. Say goodbye and thank you.

Rule 16: Follow up with your interviewers, by sending a thank you note. It is a nice gesture.

Rule 17: Have a backup plan for not getting in. Consider Osteopathic schools or off shore medical schools if you applied to US allopathic schools. Remember, allopathic residencies are harder to come by in some specialties if you come from a non-US or osteopathic medical school. **There are now more graduates of US allopathic schools than all allopathic residencies.** So, try one more time before you go another route. Call the admissions officer of the places you wanted to attend and ask for suggestions as to how to improve your application. In general they are happy to talk to you. Consider a baccalaureate year if your academic record and or MCATs could be spruced up. You do have to try to make your application better. Finally, consider some of the very exciting opportunities in medical careers that do not require an MD.

NOTES Section (50-100 pages):



NOTES:





# TO DO LIST

Done

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## Research Experience

DATE	LOCATION	HOURS	RESEARCH DESCRIPTION	

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