

A Very Short Guide on Applying to Residency and the Match

Class of 2027



What is a Match?

"The Match" is the process by which medical students get into a residency. Senior medical students do not make independent agreements with residency programs to train at their program. Instead, applicants and residency programs are "matched" with each other using ranking lists that both create. The Match was developed to provide an impartial venue for matching applicants' preferences for residency positions with program directors' preferences for applicants.

There are actually four different matching programs: The National Residency Matching Program (NRMP), the San Francisco Match, the American Urological Associate Match (AUA or Urology Match), and the Military Match. The SF, Urology, and Military Matches are often referred to as "early matches" because they have accelerated schedules compared to the NRMP Match, which is often referred to as the "main match". Each Match covers different specialties: the SF Match matches applicants into Ophthalmology, the AUA (Urology) Match matches applicants into Urology, and the NRMP Match matches applicants into all the other specialties. Specialties are not repeated in each match, meaning if you want to match into Urology, the AUA Match is the only match that matches into Urology, and if you want to match into Family Medicine, the NRMP Match is the only match that matches that specialty.

Things you can begin doing *NOW*

1. ***Introduce yourself to specialties*** Reach out to departments and specialty experts. Let them know you are interested in their specialty and set-up an appointment to meet. THEY WANT TO MEET YOU. They will be your #1 resource and can assist in establishing a matching plan, picking programs, finding opportunities, resources and events in their specialty, and A LOT MORE. Again, they are expecting you to reach out. Do not worry if you are not 100% committed to a certain specialty or if you are planning on

applying to multiple, they can help you decide and plan and get you opportunities to learn more.

2. **Reviewing guides and data.** You can find links to guides and match data on our residency info page at <https://med.umn.edu/md-students/career-guidance-match/optimize-and-apply-match>
3. **Create and share your CV.** If you do not have a CV already you can find a template [here](#). This template asks for the same info that will be going into your application when you apply for residency. So if you begin entering this information here and keep it up to date it will be easy to transfer it over to your application when the time arrives. Also, even if you do not use this template, it is best to have a CV you can share with letter of recommendation authors. [Additional handouts and resources](#) and a [video](#) for developing a CV.
4. **Register with ERAS** Electronic Residency Application Service—an online application tool administered by the AAMC that transmits residency applications and supporting materials. You have received a Token via email to register with ERAS. ***If you no longer have your ERAS token, please email resapp@umn.edu to request that it be re-sent.*** Currently the only things you will be able to do in the system are register and set-up letters of rec slots. Later in June of your 4th year the full ERAS system will open and you will be able to start entering your application, entering personal statements, selecting programs, etc...
5. **Begin asking for letters of rec.** You should begin asking for letters of recommendation now. A best practice is to ask for a "strong letter of recommendation" directly after working with a physician. You are fresh in their mind at that point and they can easily recall their interactions with you and specific examples of how great you are. Because all letters must be uploaded by the writer (or their designee) to the LoR Portal, you will need to set them up as a writer in ERAS and get them instructions on uploading. To do this, you'll need to first activate your ERAS token and generate slots for letters and print off or email uploading instructions for each letter and send these to each writer. These instructions will include a unique ID for

each letter that the writer will use when uploading. Instructions for setting this up are available here are available in the [ERAS User Guide](#)

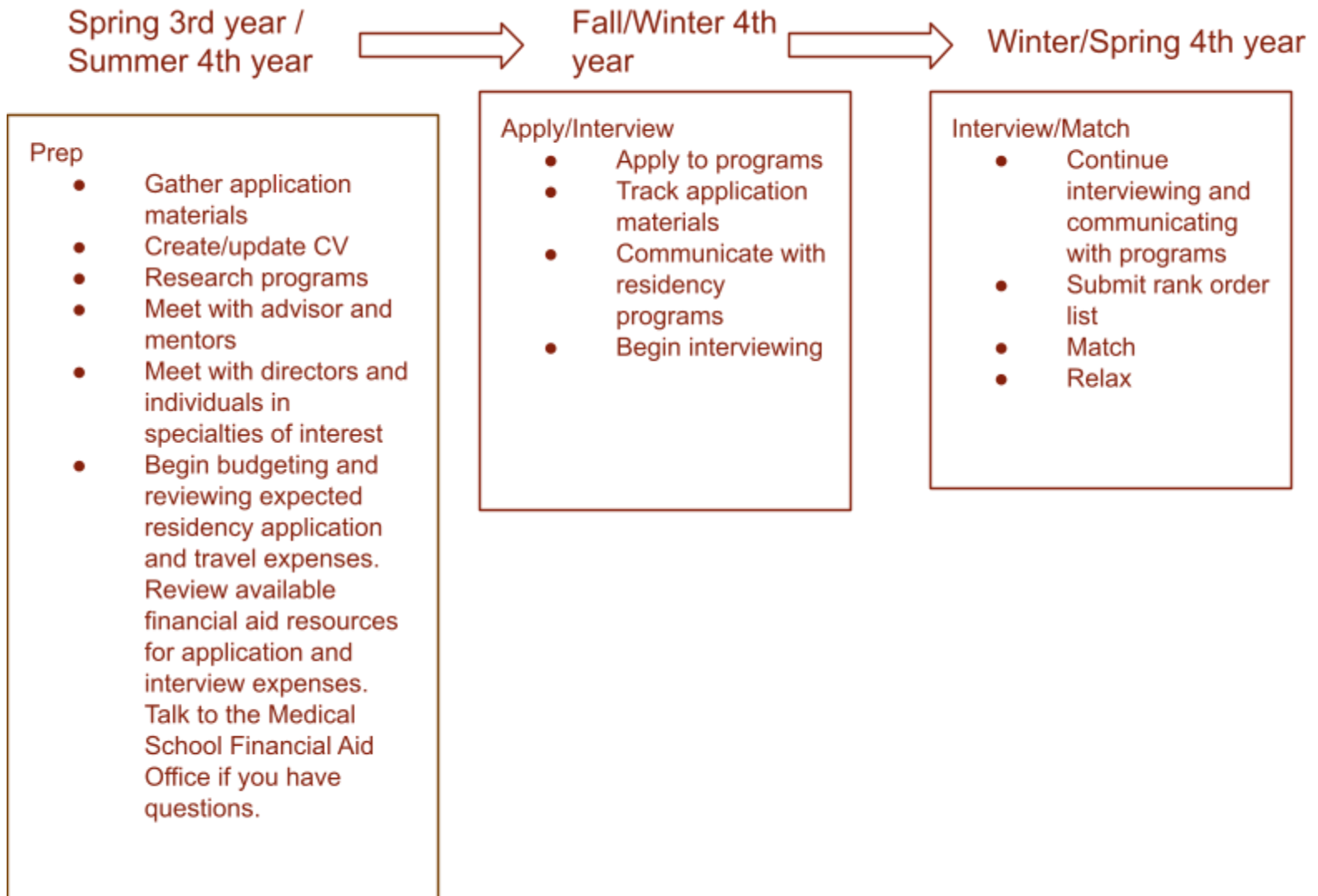
6. ***Apply Smart*** As you consider the number of residency programs to apply to, you should do so in light of your complete application and personal circumstances. But you may not know where to start the process. Researchers at the AAMC conducted a study with the goal of helping anchor your initial thinking about the optimal number of applications. **This tool** contains the result of that research.
7. ***Start planning for financial costs.*** Begin reviewing your personal budget and expected residency application/interview expenses. If you have not borrowed the maximum financial aid offered for the summer semester (start of year 4), consider borrowing additional funds in this semester to assist you with application/interview costs that will be forthcoming. Contact the Medical School Financial Aid Office (msfao@umn.edu) with any questions related to financial aid eligibility and financing residency application/interview costs.

Refer to the following AAMC resources/articles:

- [The Cost of Applying for Medical Residency](#)
- [Residency and Relocation Loans](#)

When do I apply? Match?

The process of applying is broken into three distinct phases or time periods covering a student's late third year and all of fourth year. Each of these phases has specific requirements. Here is a schematic of a typical cycle:



Basic Historical Timeline

Match	Specialty	Begin Applying	Interview	Submit Rank Order List	Match Date
NRMP Match ("main match")	All specialties except Urology, Ophthalmology , Plastic Surgery	September	October – January (majority in Nov and Dec)	Mid February	Late March (third Friday in March)
SF Match	Ophthalmology , Plastic Surgery	Beginning of September	October – December	Beginning of January	Mid-January
AUA Match (aka Urology Match)	Urology	September	October – December	Beginning of January	Mid – late January
Military Match	Various	September	October – December	Mid October	Mid December

Each phase has its specific tasks and actions. A more detailed timeline and checklist can be found [here](#).

What makes-up a residency application?

1. Application (this is a common application form)
2. MSPE (Medical Student Performance Evaluation)
3. Medical School Transcripts

4. USMLE Transcripts
5. Personal Statement
6. Letters of Recommendation
7. Photo

What resources do I have?

Workshops and Informational Events

- Faculty Advisor and Student Affairs Sessions
 - Choosing a Specialty & Early Match Prep
 - During Intersession, beginning of Fall semester of year 3 as well as group and individual advising sessions during MS-3 and MS-4 years.
 - Optimizing Your Application and Working with Departments
 - During Intersession, Spring semester of year 3 by Student Affairs
- Residency Launchpad - Workshops and materials
 - March/very end of MS-3 year
 - Presented by Student Affairs in concert with Program Directors, MS-4 students, and other residency application experts
 - Complete overview of process, the various matches, requirements, and how/when to apply, and more
- Specialty-run informational events
 - Spring and summer of years three and four
 - Hosted by individual specialties and Student Interest Groups
 - Great way to get specialty-specific application information and to meet the directors
- Personal Statement Workshop/Critiques
 - Critiques are held during Intersession for rising MS-4s in August

- Designed to give students an opportunity to receive feedback on drafts of their statements prior to uploading them into ERAS.
 - Information on how to develop a personal statement is found in [this handout](#), and the AAMC has a great resource within Careers in Medicine [here](#) (login required)
- Interview Skills
 - Held during Intersession for MS-4s in August
 - Panel of residency directors walk students through a typical interview for residency, how to act and what to prepare, and answer their questions as well as a specific Faculty Advisor-led session.
 - Access [Big Interview](#) Medical anytime in order to review information on interviewing and to practice/share mock interviews.

Internal Resources

- Residency Directors & Departments
 - **[Specialty Experts](#)**
 - *# 1 resource for specialty-specific application information*
- [Residency Information Page](#)
 - Forms, PowerPoint, recordings, general information, guides, data
- Your Faculty Advisors and Letter of Recommendation writers
- **[Year 3 Checklist, Year 4 Checklist](#)**

Outside Resources

- [Careers in Medicine \(CiM\)](#)
- [Residency Explorer](#)
- [AAMC Apply Smart](#)
- [FRIEDA](#)
- [ACGME General](#)
- [ACGME Program Search](#)
- [NRMP](#)

- [SF Match](#)
- [Urology Match \(AUA\)](#)
- [ERAS](#)
- [ResidencyCAS](#)

Literature & Data & Tools & People

- Data
 - [NRMP Data](#)
- Tools
 - [Residency Explorer](#)
 - [Year 3 Checklist, Year 4 Checklist](#)
 - [Specialties Page](#)
 - [AAMC Apply Smart](#)
- People
 - [Specialty Experts and Residency Directors](#)
 - RD's doors are always opened and students are encouraged to reach out to any RDs in specialties you are interested in

What is that acronym?

AAMC Association of American Medical Colleges. A national organization representing U.S. medical schools, teaching hospitals, and professional medical faculty societies. The AAMC operates a variety of programs and services that assist in the medical school and residency application processes.

ACGME The Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) is an independent, 501(c)(3), not-for-profit organization that sets and monitors voluntary professional educational standards essential in preparing physicians to deliver safe, high-quality medical care to all Americans. Graduate medical education (GME) refers to the period of education in a particular specialty (residency) or subspecialty (fellowship) following medical

school; the ACGME oversees the accreditation of residency and fellowship programs in the US.

- AUA** American Urological Association. The association that administers the Urology Match and governs the matching of students into Urology. Is an “early match”.
- CiM** Careers in Medicine. An online career planning program run by the AAMC designed to help students choose a medical specialty and select and apply to a residency program.
- ERAS** Electronic Residency Application Service—an online application tool administered by the AAMC that transmits residency applications, letters of recommendation, MSPE, transcripts, and other supporting credentials from applicants and medical schools to residency programs. ERAS User Guide
- FRIEDA** Fellowship and Residency Electronic Interactive Database. An online database with over 8,600 graduate medical education programs accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education, as well as over 200 combined specialty programs. Run by the AMA. FRIEDA is a great resource for finding general information about residency programs and contact information.
- MSPE** Medical Student Performance Evaluation. A summary of the medical student's education, used for applying to residencies and fellowships. Formerly known as The Dean's Letter. The MSPE is generated (with the student's participation) over the Summer and early Fall of a student's fourth year. It is sent to all residency programs an applicant applies to historically on October 1 each year.
- NRMP** National Resident Matching Program. A private, not-for-profit corporation that provides a uniform date of appointment to positions in graduate medical education (GME) in the United States. Often referred to as the “main match”.

SF Match The San Francisco Matching Program. Coordinates the processing, distribution, review of applicants, and match of students for post graduate medical education training in the specialty of Ophthalmology. Is an "early match".

VSAS Visiting Student Application Service. VSAS® is an AAMC application designed to streamline the application process for senior "away" electives at U.S. medical schools and independent academic medical centers that are members of the Council of Teaching Hospitals and Health Systems (COTH). The service requires only one application for all participating institutions, effectively reducing paperwork, miscommunication, and time. VSAS also provides a centralized location for managing offers and tracking decisions.

FAQs

Who should I get letters of recommendation from?

Letters of recommendation are a very important part of your overall application to residency. These letters will come from medical school faculty. If you know an individual you would like a letter from, it is best to ask them during or right after your rotation, while your accomplishments and performance are still fresh in their minds. It is also important to keep in touch with the letter writer; they may not author it right after you request it. Ask to meet with your letter writer so they can get more information from you to help write the letter. Some letter writers may ask you for more information, so it is important to have a CV and/or a personal statement created that you can give to them. Meeting with your writers also gives you a chance to let them know your strengths and your accomplishments and achievements that back-up these strengths.

The goal is to get strong letters of recommendation. So it is important to ask specifically for that. The best and strongest letters come from those individuals you have worked closely with and who care about your career.

Some specialties will have specific instructions for your letters of recommendation. For example, Internal Medicine and Surgery programs often require each applicant to supply a letter from a Department Chairperson. So it is important to meet with the department of the specialty you are planning on applying to and get any specific information on how to get these letters and also of any other specific requirements that specialty may have. Specialties will also have preferences on who they like to see letters from (i.e. from department chairs, from surgeons only, from at least one family medicine doctor, etc...). **Stopping into departments you are interested in to meet with the director and also attending any departmental informational sessions** are a great way to learn this information.

How do I get letters of recommendation?

All letters of recommendation must be uploaded directly from letter writers (or their designee) to ERAS using the Letter of Recommendation Portal (LoRP). Once you activate your ERAS token, you are able to generate slots for letters and print off a cover sheet and upload instructions for each letter. These instructions will include a unique ID for each letter that the writer will use when uploading.

It is a best practice to ask for letters of recommendation from individuals early in rotations and throughout your third year and to provide them with the cover letter with upload instructions right away. This means that you'll need to activate your ERAS token early in your third year to generate this.

Instructions for setting up slots for letters are available here in the **ERAS User Guide**. This process is similar across application platforms, in that the letter writer will upload after you make a request in the system.

If you cannot find your token to register for ERAS, contact the Career Development and Residency Match Coordinator at resapp@umn.edu to have it resent.

How do I choose a residency program?

It is all about "fit". The goal is to know what type of program will make you the best doctor you can be. The programs that you feel will be able to do this, will "fit" you. What are the criteria to look for in a program and fit? Specialty, location, size, personal traits, community vs. academic program, your learning

style and their teaching style, etc. On the flip side, programs only want to match applicants that “fit” into their programs. So programs are looking for applicants that match their teaching style, personalities, etc. Directors are more likely to select an applicant that fits with their program than they are an applicant that has the best numbers or grades.

Resources you can use to help select programs include:

- #1A is your advisor
- #1B Local Residency Directors (*seriously, their doors are always open and they want to help. So [REACH OUT](#)*)
- [FRIEDA](#)
- [ACGME](#)
- [Careers in Medicine](#) and its assessment tools
- [Specialty Experts](#)
- [Residency Explorer](#)

What are the selection criteria for the different programs?

As stated above, residency programs want applicants that fit with their program. Programs will use a number of different criteria and sources of information to select applicants for an interview and to rank them. These criteria will differ greatly between specialties, and even within programs of the same specialty. The AAMC's [Careers in Medicine site](#) is a great resource, and we also encourage you to review information through Texas Star as well as [Residency Explorer](#). Links to both of these can also be found on our [residency information page](#).

By far, your #1 resource to learn what residencies want are the [departments!](#) So get into the programs here and talk directly with the individuals making these decisions.

What is an MSPE?

MSPE stands for Medical Student Performance Evaluation (formally known as and often referred to as the “Dean's Letter”). It is a summary of a medical student's education, used for applying to residencies and fellowships. The MSPE is generated (with the student's participation) over the Summer and early Fall of a student's fourth year. It is sent on October 1 to all residency programs an applicant applies to .

The Residency Program Directors are the primary audience for the MSPE. The “anatomy” of a Dean’s Letter is as follows:

- *Noteworthy Characteristics*—determined by the student in consultation with MSPE writer. What special qualities, experiences, and skills do you bring to the residency program? 3 bullet points of 2 sentences or less.
- *Summary*—four key elements:
 - the unvarnished truth: transparency about your academic record
 - the student’s greatest strengths—including themes developed from a review of all clerkship evaluation comments by attending physicians, residents
 - characteristics that distinguish you from all other applicants to a residency program
- a strong sense of you as a person—who is this student?
- *Academic History*—dates of matriculation; expected graduation; any delays or extensions of training, academic and personal; any repeated or remediated courses; any adverse actions by the Medical School or University of Minnesota
- *Academic Progress*—All basic science and clinical courses, electives and research; honors and special awards (year one/two overall honors; AOA, Gold Humanism Honor Society)

What financial aid resources are available to assist with residency application and interview costs?"

The Medical School Financial Aid Office includes the average cost of students’ residency application costs in their standard financial aid Cost of Attendance (COA) or budget for the 4th year of medical school. This means that the financial aid offers that students will receive for their final 2 semesters of medical school already have estimated/average residency application costs built into these financial aid amounts. Costs are adjusted annually based on student survey data of average costs incurred during the previous application cycle.

The AAMC has information on [the ERAS fee rates](#) posted. Under this structure, residency applicants will pay \$11 per application for up to 30 applications and \$30 per application for 31 or more applications. Additionally, the AAMC extended their [Fee Assistance Program to residency applicants](#) using the Electronic Residency Application Service® (ERAS®).

If a student's required residency application expenses exceed the average amount already in the standard financial aid Cost of Attendance and the student has borrowed the maximum amount of aid allowed under the standard financial aid budget, the Medical School Financial Aid Office has an appeal process (starting in later October of your 4th year through later March) whereby students can document expenses related to ERAS applications/MATCH NRMP fees and (if applicable/required) residency interview travel expenses in order to receive additional federal student loans to cover the costs of these expenses. The total amount of any additional federal student loan offer will be the difference between total eligible expenses, minus the amount already allowed for residency application expenses built into the standard financial aid Cost of Attendance/budget for the academic year. The maximum federal loan adjustment for residency application expenses is equal to the documented application costs the individual student incurred.

If you have other residency interview/relocation expenses, including optional interview travel expenses and/or moving expenditures, you may consider a private residency/relocation loan, not offered by the Medical School Financial Aid Office, to help cover these costs. There is a guide to the private residency/relocation loan options available. These private loans are offered to 4th-year medical students who may need to borrow more than the sum total of their residency application costs and fees available from federal loans for residency interview travel expenses or residency relocation.

Additionally, U of MN Medical School Alumni Relations has developed the [Help Our Students Travel \(HOST\) Program](#).

The HOST program aims to connect current Medical School students and trainees traveling for residency and fellowship interviews with alumni hosts in the vicinity of their interview sites. Alumni provide lodging for students in their homes during their stay, as well as offer invaluable advice about the community in which they are interviewing.