

# **Student's Guide to Ophthalmology**

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## **Preclinical Years**

If you are already sure about ophthalmology this early on, then you are ahead of the game! Below are a few tips for what you can do now:

### **1) MAKE GOOD GRADES**

Ophthalmology is competitive and having AOA helps. Not having AOA does not necessarily hurt you, but it can only help if you do. There is a section on AOA later on with more information about how AOA works at UMMC (as of 2018 at least).

### **2) STEP 1**

Another unfortunate reality of wanting to do a competitive specialty – step 1 matters! The purpose of this guide is not for step 1 tips, but I will include a few anyway. For resources, nothing can beat the combination of UWorld, Pathoma, First Aid and Sketchy (micro specifically for me, the rest of the sections just barely came out when I was studying for step 1). As for review courses, such as DIT, I do not think they can guarantee you a good score. They can also be quite expensive. BUT if you happen to be the type of person that learns really well from videos or does better having a set organized study schedule provided for you, then a review course like DIT may be a good idea. Under the “Other Resources” section there is a document containing average Step 1 scores for matched applicants. AGAIN, you can definitely still match in ophthalmology with a score lower than the average, but it may just make things a bit trickier for you.

For points 1) and 2) note that these are GENERAL points about grades/AOA/Step 1. The purpose of presenting this information is not to scare an applicant away, but just to make sure they are aware. If you have a real passion for ophthalmology and you feel that the academic portion of your application is on the weaker side, then talk to the program director about how to strengthen your application. Always defer to the program director for a personalized (and better) assessment of your competitiveness.

### **3) RESEARCH**

The sooner you get involved with research the better! What are the types of research I can be involved in? Case-reports are generally quick write-ups and can make for interesting conversations during interviews. As you probably already know, UMMC sees a wide array of pathology, and the ophthalmology department is no different. If you are interested, check with the residents or faculty members for interesting cases.

There is always ongoing research within the department. Many of the residents are working on quality improvement projects throughout the year and are generally more than happy to have help from medical students. Get in touch with the program director and they can give you an idea of where to start. “What if my research is not

in the ophthalmology department?" That is okay. It is great to have ANY research on your application. It is a bonus if it is involved in the ophthalmology department, but you are NOT expected to know that you want to go into ophthalmology from the start of medical school; therefore, it is okay if your research is not related to the field at all. Starting research early is more about showing that you have good initiative and that you recognize the importance of research!

#### **4) RESUME BUILDING**

Participating in extracurricular activities with the ophthalmology department is a great way to boost your CV while also getting to know the residents and faculty. The program director is always happy to give you information on upcoming events. There are usually several eye screening opportunities going on in the community throughout the year. Also, the Jackson Free Clinic has recently installed Pan-Optic scopes that allow students to practice basic fundus exams.

Another great way to get involved is through the Ophthalmology Interest Group. Even if you're not 100% sure you want to do ophthalmology, get involved early as it will allow you to meet people in the department and gain valuable insight into the field and the program itself. Running for office within the interest group is another excellent way to add substance your CV!

There are so many ways to be involved at UMMC including the Associated Student Body (ASB), the Jackson Free Clinic (JFC) and the American Medical Association (AMA) among many other interest groups. I would pick organizations that you are passionate about and truly be involved. It will be fairly clear if you have "CV padders" and not organizations you truly care about.

#### **5) SHADOWING**

UMMC's ophthalmology department is very open to pre-clinical students shadowing! Also, a great way to break up the monotony of studying all day!

**Always keep your CV updated,** future you will be so grateful you did this!

A word of caution about picking your specialty early – DO NOT HAVE TUNNEL VISION. Changing specialties during third year is *very* common! If you have reasons to be sure now, then that is wonderful, but if not keeping an open mind is definitely a good strategy for approaching the third year of medical school.

## M3 Year

Some of what will be covered here will be similar to what is mentioned above, so I will summarize.

### **1) KEEP ON MAKING GOOD GRADES**

Your M3 grades will be prominently displayed on your Dean's letter. Keep in mind that M3 grades are weighted much more than preclinical grades; therefore, working extra hard on your rotations can have a strong impact on your final class rank and can boost your candidacy for AOA. Of note, I remember hearing a lot about making an A on surgery being very specifically important for ophthalmology, but I personally did not find this to be a big deal on the interview trail. Comments on your rotations are also very important.

### **2) RESEARCH**

If you haven't started on a project, then go ahead and get involved. If you already have research, but it is not ophthalmology related, this would be a good time to change that! Many students get involved in ophthalmology research during their third year and that will not reflect poorly on you.

### **3) OPHTHALMOLOGY ELECTIVE**

Make sure you do the ophthalmology elective (obviously!). Continue to be the fantastic M3 that you are, and you will definitely impress everyone. If you would like to learn some of the basics of ophthalmology while on this elective, then take a look at Ophthobook (link in resources section). There is a paper copy you can buy on Amazon or the book is available online FO' FREE. If you make the switch to ophthalmology, then meet with the program director and declare that you will be applying to ophthalmology.

### **4) AWAY ROTATION APPLICATION**

This is sometime during the spring of your third year (February/Marchish). Start on the application early as it can be quite cumbersome to fill out all the paperwork and to get everything you need from student health. As of 2018, the application service used is called VSAS (Visiting Student Application Service). "How do I pick programs?" There are many (MANY!) strategies and opinions on this. There is an in-depth discussion about this topic later in the guide. Ultimately, the utility of an away rotation depends on what you are expecting to get out of it. If you have a clear goal and are ready to work hard and show off your famous UMMC clinical training, then go for it! But be warned, no one can tell you if this is a right or wrong decision for you.

**Always keep your CV updated, future you will be so grateful you did this!**

## M4 Year

Be warned that your final year of medical school is some of the most stressful, relaxing and fun time in medical school all at the same time! Make the best of it.

### **1) UMMC OPHTHALMOLOGY MONTH**

Generally, it is a good idea to schedule this month as early as possible. Compared to your colleagues going into other specialties, your residency application is submitted early (Mid-August to Sept 1 is target submission time). Your month at UMMC is a wonderful one! You will get to rotate with the majority of different specialties and get a chance to spend some time in the clinic/OR with the program director and chair. If you are doing an away rotation, this is a great time to get prepared for them by being involved in the OR, practicing using the slit lamp (fancy microscope used to look at eyes) and asking lots of questions!

### **2) AWAY ROTATIONS**

As I hinted earlier choosing whether or not to do an away rotation is a complicated decision. First off, you are by no means required to do one to match in ophthalmology. If you have financial or family constraints that limit your ability to leave for a month or two, have no fear, you will be just fine! In fact, only about half of PDs recommend them, and the more prestigious the program the less likely the PD is to recommend them. Every year people do aways and make a great impression then interview and match. BUT every year students do aways and are not re-invited for an interview. The problem with giving general advice about away rotations is the experience varies WIDELY depending on the program. Some programs re-invite all their away rotators as a courtesy while others use the month as a pseudo-interview, and if they are not interested you will not be re-invited. Understand that an away rotation  $\neq$  an interview invitation. You have a wealth of information below in the form of advice from UMMC students who have rotated at the locations listed below. Away rotations can also be highly stressful. You have to be on your ABSOLUTE A-game for 4 weeks (or 8 weeks if you do two)! I would also take a good hard look at my evaluations from third year before I make the choice to do an away rotation. Be honest with yourself about how others perceive you.

On the other hand, many people have very positive experiences with away rotations. Even, in the “worst case scenario” i.e. not being re-invited, the information you gain from doing an away rotation is extremely valuable. If you are like most medical students, the only program you have seen pre-interview season is your own. An away can provide you with insight on how programs differ and what you value in your future residency program. Another great way to use an away rotation is to overcome geographical bias. You are more likely to get interviews at programs that geographically surround you. From a program’s perspective taking a person out of their environment and out of their support system is a risk. If you are sure you would like to move to a faraway state, then doing an away rotation there (or at a

program in the same region) can really demonstrate to the program you are serious about moving.

If that discussion confused you more than it helped you, then hopefully these next few sentences will help clear things up. What I would suggest is having a clear goal that is achievable with an away rotation. Next, I would get as much information as possible about the program (What is the schedule like? Do they normally re-invite rotators? ...etc.) and if that information checks out, then go for it!

Scheduling can also be a headache because some schools run their rotations on month schedules (like UMMC), while others are on week schedules. However, the ophthalmology department at UMMC is usually very understanding and will work with you if you need to leave a week or so early to begin an away rotation. VSAS usually has this information on hand when you look at programs, so you will be able to plan accordingly.

“Where do I stay?” Obviously, the best strategy is to stay with a friend if possible! If not, a great resource is <http://rotatingroom.com> where medical students/residents rent out rooms to rotators. People also use Airbnb’s, hotels etc.

Note about LORs from aways: I heard of people getting letters from their away rotations but again it just depends on the away (sorry I keep saying this, but it is THE TRUTH!). Some programs rotate you with many different faculty, or you may be spending most of your face time with residents. If that is the case, then asking for a letter is awkward, and I would not advise it.

This year many UMMC students did away rotations. Locations and resident names are below. Contact information is listed at the end of the document.

**Emory University** - Salma Dawoud

**Oregon Health and Sciences University - Casey Eye Institute** - Salma Dawoud

**Tulane University** - Landen Tharp

**University of Alabama at Birmingham** - Johnny McKenzie, Taylor Coleman, Ashley Pickering

**University of Arkansas** - Jessica Arnold

**University of Miami - Bascom Palmer Eye Institute** - Taylor Coleman

**University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill** - Elliot Browning

**University of Oklahoma - Dean McGee Eye Institute** - Johnny Lippincott

**University of Tennessee - Memphis** - Ashley Pickering, Landen Tharp, David Riem, Jessica Arnold

**University of Utah - Moran Eye Center** - Johnny Lippincott

**Vanderbilt University** - Elliot Browning

### **3) STEP 2 CS/CK**

I would aim to take CS as early as possible. As annoying as UMMC's CS practice can be, it truly does prepare you for the actual test so it's best to take it while it's all still fresh on your mind. It also helps to have one less board exam to worry about as you go through fourth year!

In the ophthalmology world especially, CK is not as important as step 1 because not all applicants will have gotten scores back before interviews. There are 2 main strategies for when to take CK. 1) Take it early to get it out of the way/improve your Step 1 OR 2) Wait if you are worried about dropping from your Step 1. Both are valid strategies, you will just have to decide if you want to take the risk! As always, UWORLD is KEY!

### **4) AOA**

As alluded to earlier, gaining AOA status is not at all necessary to match into ophthalmology, but it can certainly open doors and only strengthens your application! There are two times during medical school when you will be eligible for AOA at UMMC. Once during junior year and once during senior year. Junior AOA is based on class rank only. Those brilliant few in the top 5% are inducted purely on those terms. Being selected as a senior is a more complicated process. Students who are in the top 25% of their class after third year are eligible to apply for senior membership. Out of the top 25%, a maximum of 1/6 or 16% of the entire class (NOT 16% of the top 25%) may be chosen for AOA. Those chosen to apply fill out an application in which they can list and describe awards/honors, research, volunteer work, and leadership experiences that were obtained or completed while in medical school. Without the name of the applicant being revealed, each application is then graded by an AOA selection committee based on the above criteria in addition to class rank, step 1 score, and professionalism. Our class found out whether or not we got in at the end of July, but this can vary from year to year. Statistically, having AOA gives you a slight bump in likelihood to match (in advisement paper linked in "other resources"). But at the end of the day, there are still more people who match without AOA than those with AOA.

## **Application Process**

Before applying to ophthalmology, it is worth your time to undergo a personal eye exam in order to ensure that you have the visual health (depth perception, corrected visual acuity, color vision, etc.) necessary to actually be an ophthalmologist. In fact, many residency programs will require you to submit an eye exam form completed by an optometrist or ophthalmologist prior to interviewing.

### **1. SF APPLICATION**

Remember that liberating feeling you had when you submitted your medical school application? Well, guess what? You are going to have that feeling twice this year! As an ophthalmology applicant you submit two applications, one for intern year and one for ophthalmology residency via different application services. We will talk about intern year later. For ophthalmology, you submit your application via Central Application Service (CAS) and match through the San Francisco (SF) Match. This application is just like you would imagine; demographics, extra-curricular, employment, research, personal statement and LOR sections. Do yourself a gigantic favor and keep your CV updated throughout medical school and include descriptions of everything. If you do that, then filling out your application will be a piece of cake! Have someone read it over it to check for spelling/grammar mistakes. It is amazing what you can miss reading over your own work. And finally, ALWAYS be 100% honest on your application. Never exaggerate anything on your application and be prepared to speak about EVERYTHING thoroughly. I cannot emphasize this enough. If you lie you *will* be caught and not only is that embarrassing, but it is unprofessional. There are horror stories every year, and you do not want to be that person. And on the flip side don't down play your accomplishments! You have worked hard, and you should be proud of yourself!

#### **a. Personal Statement**

Start on this early. A great personal statement can help you get an interview, a mediocre one probably won't matter much, and a terrible one will hurt you. Writing your personal statement can be a frustrating and sometimes daunting task (at least it was for me), but there are some tips that help! You want to be unique and interesting, but you definitely don't want to stand out too much. In general, "Don't be weird," is the best advice I can give. Be straightforward in your writing. Try to avoid deep analogies, quotes, and super cheesy stories (basically anything that would make your audience roll their eyes). Length of the personal statement is also important. Be succinct! Keep in mind that any given program will have to go through hundreds of personal statements, so try to get your points across without all of the added fluff. Anything over one page is too much. Also note, you do not have to revise your personal statement at all when applying to TY and preliminary programs.

Although I did not do this, some people suggest writing more than one so that you can compare multiple directions and go with the one that works best for you. Revise, revise, and revise some more. Once you think it's perfect, put it down for a few days and then revise it again. Have multiple people (friends, family, academic mentor...etc.) read it and give you feedback. Last but not least, PROOFREAD! The last thing you want to do is potentially cost yourself interviews by making a simple grammatical or spelling error. Most importantly, don't misspell ophthalmology!

Now you may be asking yourself, "What do I even write about?" Your personal statement is an opportunity to let programs know more about yourself on a personal level. The goal is not to rewrite your CV. Dr. Kimberly Crowder (Chair) advises to explore parts of your life that are not anywhere else on your application. This will make your personal statement a great conversation starter! Make sure it is professional and not so personal that you feel uncomfortable discussing it on the interview trail. Talk about your unique background and what led you to the field of ophthalmology. Almost everyone reading your application already knows why ophthalmology is the best field ever! What they don't know is who you are, and what draws you to ophthalmology. Throughout your essay, sprinkle in skills and qualities that you feel will make you an excellent ophthalmologist without explicitly saying how they relate to the field. What I want to end with is do not underestimate the power of a personal statement. It is common to hear people say that it doesn't matter, which can be true, but if you have an interesting story and you feel comfortable then share it!

#### **b. Letters of Recommendations**

You get to submit three and ONLY three letters of recommendation for ophthalmology. These three letters will be sent to each of the programs to which you apply. For example, you cannot submit more letters and then pick and choose which programs receive which letters. The majority of applicants get two ophthalmology letters and one non-ophthalmology letter. However, I have spoken to a few applicants who got all three ophthalmology letters and matched just fine. It comes down to a matter of personal preference.

As far as the ophthalmology letters are concerned, my general advice is to aim to obtain these letters from the chair and PD. Ophthalmology is a relatively small community and these two faculty members are well-known by PDs and chairs at other institutions; therefore, letters written by them will, at least in theory, carry more weight. With that being said, if you know another faculty member who is well-respected in the ophthalmology community (via ground-breaking research, former faculty status, etc.) and you feel that he or she will write you a great letter, go for it! Make sure you set up a time to talk to both about 4-6 weeks before you plan to submit your application. Bring your CV to this meeting, and formally ask for a letter. This

is a great time to get to know the PD and Chair and ask any questions you have about the application process.

If you do choose to go the conventional route and obtain your third letter from a non-ophthalmology physician, I would seek out a faculty member in internal medicine. These letters are advantageous as most prelim and even TY programs are based on internal medicine. But this is not a hard and fast rule, I obtained my non-ophthalmology letter from a pediatrics faculty member who I had known for 4 years. Ultimately, the most important thing is to choose people who you are confident will write you excellent letters because this part of the application truly does make a difference!

**c. How many programs should I apply to?**

The average number of programs to which each applicant applies has risen steadily over the years as ophthalmology has gotten more and more competitive. In 2018, the average applicant applied to 70 programs (compared to 50 in 2009). But, if you look at the SF match data, the number of interview invites plateaus at 12 for around 40 applications. This means you will not get more and more interview invites if you apply to an increasing number of programs over 40. Also, the cost of applying increases dramatically after 40 programs. For the first ten programs, the cost is \$60 total. The next ten costs \$10 per program, followed by \$15 for the next ten, and \$20 for 10 after that. After you've applied to 40 programs, the cost jumps up drastically to \$35 per program. In other words, the average applicant spends an extra \$1,050 without any clear benefit in the number of interview offers they receive! The "magic" number of interview invites is 10-12. This is the number of interviews that correlates with a high likelihood of matching. THIS IS NOT THE MAGIC NUMBER FOR EVERYONE. You may interview at less places and match at your dream program and you may interview at more places and have the same result. If you are competitive, and properly advised, I challenge you to stick to around 40 applications and not pan-apply. It is so tempting to over-apply because ophthalmology is competitive, and it can be scary. But it is so obvious when an applicant is interviewing at a program that they are not actually interested in. Don't waste your time and money, and don't waste the program's time. Each interview invite is a privilege and should be treated that way!

**d. How do I pick programs?**

There are many factors to take into account when picking programs. I personally found this to be one of the most over-whelming aspects of the application process. Ask yourself: do you want to stay near home and family? Are you ready for a new adventure? How many co-residents do I want? Is call-schedule very important to you? Do you care a lot about research? What about fellowship? These are just *some* of the questions that may be important to you. You may not be able to answer a lot of these questions now but that is okay, I just want you to think about where you are applying

and why! One rule of thumb is avoid wasting money applying to places where you have no real interest in training. For example, I truly didn't see myself living in New Orleans for three or four years, so I didn't apply to Tulane or LSU New Orleans. Other than that, it is best to do your own research and talk to residents/faculty about which programs may work best for you. Look at each website to get more information AND to check if they request supplemental information.

**e. Doximity and Student Doctor Network (SDN)**

Interview season is stressful, and it can bring out the best and worst in your fellow applicants. I made friends with many lovely people some who I actually matched with and others who I look forward to seeing at conferences. On the other hand, you will meet very anxious applicants who may not be on their best behavior.

SDN is a website used by many medical students around the world and contains forums for pretty much anything you can think of including ophthalmology. Although, SDN is made up of many types of applicants, my opinion is that many of them are brewing anxiety and negativity. If you think you can handle that, then take a look at their interview thread. If not, then stay away!

Doximity is a website dedicated to physicians and has many resources. On here is a rank of all the ophthalmology programs based on "reputation." This may or may not mean a lot to you, but I found it helpful for deciding what programs to apply to.

**f. How competitive am I?**

Do I need a backup plan? Take a look at the match statistics and ask yourself this question. Ideally, you have also had this discussion with the PD, who will give you the best advice on what to do with a weaker application. For many applicants, this means dual applying to other specialties besides ophthalmology. It is best to do this early if you are concerned as it will become much more difficult to secure interviews the longer you wait.

**2. INTERN YEAR**

Ophthalmology, along with dermatology, radiology, radiation oncology, anesthesiology, and physical medicine and rehabilitation, requires applicants to apply and interview at both their specialty programs and intern year programs. As mentioned above, SF Match is the system used to match in ophthalmology residency. Unfortunately, you'll have to use a separate system, ERAS, to apply for intern year. Other than the added costs, it really isn't as bad as it seems since you basically only have to transfer information from SF Match to ERAS. It is also important to note that many ophthalmology programs are starting to offer integrated internships in which the applicant will automatically land an intern year position if he or she

matches with that ophthalmology program. UMMC ophthalmology has incorporated an integrated internship for several years now in which the intern gets six months of ophthalmology and 6 months of internal medicine related experience. However, keep in mind that the applicant still must use ERAS to match into an integrated intern year.

Intern years can basically be divided into three categories, transition year, preliminary internal medicine, and preliminary general surgery. As one can probably imagine, preliminary general surgery years are usually least desirable as the hours and workload can be quite strenuous. Transition years are generally regarded as the more “cush” intern years and as a result, are usually the most competitive. They offer a more diverse experience as they give interns a mix of surgery and medicine experience in addition to offering more electives on average. Preliminary internal medicine years are more plentiful than the other two categories. They usually don’t offer much surgical experience and instead focus on internal medicine wards and subspecialties such as cardiology, GI, and rheumatology.

The previous paragraph offers a very broad perspective on the options for intern year. Keep in mind that each individual program can vary widely. For example, some prelim IM programs can actually be more cush than many TYs. When applying to intern year programs, make sure to do your own research. Find programs you’re interested in based on location, reputation, etc., and go to their websites to find more detailed information.

“When should I schedule these interviews?” If you have the option push them as far back as you can, around January, so you can cancel some when you find out where you match.

### **3. INTERVIEW SEASON**

Ophthalmology interview season spans across much of M4 Fall semester. I received my first interview offer email in late August and my last one in early December. Waiting for interview offers can be quite stressful and exciting. Make sure you’re available to check and respond to emails as quickly as possible as programs will fill dates on a first come, first serve basis. If you respond too slowly (which, believe it or not, can sometimes mean responding 15 minutes or less after the email is received), you may not get the date you need and in turn, you may have to be wait-listed for your desired date; so, it is best to stay on top of things as much as possible.

In 2018, the average matched applicant received 12 interview offers while the average unmatched applicant received four interview offers. The goal is to get in the 10 to 12 range, but don’t freak out if you come up a little short. The more you receive, the better your chances, but at the end of the day, it only takes one! My advice is to accept each and every interview offer early on. You can always cancel later if a more desirable program offers you an interview for the same date (if you do decide to cancel an interview, aim to do so at least two weeks prior to your

interview date so that the program will have time to offer the spot to someone else). If you find out that a program you applied to has sent out invites and you did not receive one, don't panic! Many programs do not go through all applications at once and will send out multiple rounds of invites. Also, some programs send out rejection letters and some programs don't send anything to applicants who don't make the cut.

Interviews generally occur in the months of October, November, and December, with November and early December being most popular. Most of your interviews will be clustered in the week before Thanksgiving and the first few weeks of December. Since the interview period is compressed, unfortunately, many of your interviews will be back to back without much time in between.

#### **4. PREPARING FOR INTERVIEWS**

##### **a. Travel**

Interview season can be quite expensive, and travel costs can add up very quickly. One piece of advice I'll give is to drive to every program when it is possible. This saved me a TON of money. Also, talk with your classmates and travel together when possible so you can split the costs. For most applicants, however, flying will be inevitable at times. Flying out of Jackson can be much more expensive than flying out of Memphis or New Orleans (I drove to New Orleans for all of my flights). You must weigh convenience and cost in most cases. Picking airlines is also very important. Southwest seems to be the most popular choice as you can cancel up to 10 minutes prior to your depart time and still use the money you paid for a future flight.

Many programs will offer discounted hotel rooms available to applicants. Although this may sound appealing, you can often find hotel rooms or AIRBNBs on your own that are just as nice or nicer for a fraction of the cost. An even better option is to stay with a friend if he or she lives in the area where you will be interviewing.

##### **b. Mock interview**

Dr. Clark will offer mock interviews. I would recommend scheduling one. You are videotaped during the interview and given back some valuable pointers. Do you fidget when you are nervous? Well I do, and I did not notice until it was pointed out to me during the mock interview!

#### **5. INTERVIEW DAY**

##### **a. Socials**

Most programs will offer an optional social dinner the night before or the night of your interview date. It is best to attend these whenever possible for several reasons. Firstly, it will allow you meet many of the residents in a relaxed setting and really get a feel for whether or not you will fit in with that

particular group. Secondly, it will give you an opportunity to leave a positive impression on the residents that could theoretically have an impact on your ranking (depending on the program). Lastly, and most importantly, the social is an excellent opportunity to eat and drink at a nice place FO' FREE! Seriously though, I had a blast at these events, and I would highly recommend you taking advantage of them!

#### **b. The Interview**

Ophthalmology interviews, for the most part, are very casual. But remember to still dress in business professional attire. The programs generally just want to get to know you and see if you will be a good fit for them. They also do their best to leave a good impression on you as they realize you are interviewing them as well. So, take a deep breath, relax, and be yourself! One good way to prepare for interviews is to go to the program's website and read up a little on the program so that you can tailor your questions for the faculty. Also, write down the names of the chair, PD and coordinator for each program and know them before going into your interview.

Many of the questions you will get are very generic interview questions and you can find these online. If you are asked a really weird question that you did not prepare for, don't freak out! This is probably their way of seeing how you handle the pressure of being put on the spot. Relax, take a moment to think, and answer the question as best you can. They are likely looking more at how you deal with the stress rather than your actual answer. No matter who is interviewing you, they will all have one thing in common. They will ask you, "What questions do you have for me?" So, always make sure to have questions prepared for each place you'll visit. Not asking questions will make you look uninterested. When in doubt, my fallback question was always, "What brought you to this program and what has kept you here?"

#### **6. RANK LIST**

Making your rank list can be very difficult or very easy depending on your individual experience with your interviews. While making your rank list, consider factors such as "fit," location, call schedule, research, surgical numbers, clinical experience, etc. One important piece of advice is to rank the programs based only on your preference. Do NOT rank programs based on where you think they will rank you. The match algorithm is designed in a way that allows you to truly rank each program based on your preference, and there really is no advantage to using any other strategy. Also, as a rule of thumb, if you are thinking about not ranking program X at all because of a bad experience, undesirable location, etc., do so only if you would rather not be an ophthalmologist than match at program X.

One more important note to mention here is post-interview communication. During this interview season, the majority of candidates sent thank you notes via email following the interview. Some programs may prefer handwritten notes but those are a minority. Many applicants also sent a "number one" email declaring to a

program that they would be ranking them number one. It is by no means a requirement to send any of these emails, but it seems to be what is traditionally done. It is also hard to say whether or not it will impact your spot on a rank list. What I do want to emphasize is that is to be careful in believing what a program may communicate to you. I would advise NOT to let what a program tells you to change how you rank them. In addition, DO NOT lie and send more than one “number one” email. Ophthalmology is a small world and there is a chance you will be caught.

## **7. MATCH DAY**

As you probably already know, Match Day for ophthalmology applicants occurs in early-to-mid-January. You will get an email in the early morning (6 AM central) telling you whether or not you matched. The vast majority of programs will reach out to their matched applicants via email or phone call sometime after the email goes out informing you where you match specifically.

A few ophthalmology programs integrate their intern year, like UMMC, guaranteeing you a spot when you match ophthalmology with them. In that case, you “double match” and are all done. Keep in mind that you will still need to apply for internship on ERAS and you will officially match in March, but you know that you are guaranteed a spot. If not, you have one more match in March for your intern year.

### **a. Bad news**

Unfortunately, not everyone gets good news on match day. You may have already dual applied if that was appropriate for your application. It may also be a big surprise. Either way, Dr. Clark will lead the way for your next steps.

Give yourself a HUGE pat on the back. This was a long journey, and you did well.

## **Other Resources**

- SF Match website - <https://www.sfmatch.org/>
- SF Match statistics - [https://www.sfmatch.org/PDFFilesDisplay/Ophthalmology Residency Stats 2018.pdf](https://www.sfmatch.org/PDFFilesDisplay/Ophthalmology_Residency_Stats_2018.pdf)
- Ophthobook - <https://timroot.com/ophthobook/>
- The Successful Match - <http://a.co/02wOvnD>
- Advising Students Interested in Ophthalmology: A Summary of the Evidence
- Grubbs, Joseph R.Mian, Shahzad I. et al. Ophthalmology , Volume 123 , Issue 7 , 1406 – 1410
- <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ophtha.2016.04.016>

## Terms

- **Ophthalmology** - Common misspelling of ophthalmology
- **SF Match** - San Francisco Match - ophthalmology match service
- **CAS** - Central Application Service - online application submission
- **LOR** - Letter of recommendation
- **AOA** - Alpha Omega Alpha honor society comprised of medical students in top 25%
- **PD** - Program director - person in charge of the residency - Dr. Kyle Lewis
- **Chair** - Person in charge of the department - Dr. Kimberly Crowder
- **ERAS** - Electronic Residency Application Service
- **NRMP** - National Residency Matching Program

## Contact List

“OH MY GOSH, I AM SO STRESSED! I STILL NEED TO TALK TO SOMEONE!”

UMMC Ophthalmology faculty and residents can provide you with a wealth of information! And please reach out to anyone listed below. We all volunteered our names because we want to help!

- [Salma Dawoud](#), University of Iowa
- [Johnny McKenzie](#), University of Alabama at Birmingham
- [Daniel Robbins](#), University of Wisconsin
- [Taylor Coleman](#), University of Mississippi Medical Center
- [Johnny Lippincott](#), University of Mississippi Medical Center
- [Ashley Pickering](#), Louisiana State University at Shreveport
- [Elliot Browning](#), University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill
- [Jessica Arnold](#), University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill
- [David Riem](#), University of Mississippi Medical Center
- [Landen Tharp](#), University of Mississippi Medical Center