

DARTMOUTH

Health Professions Program

Med/Vet/Dental Application Newsletter

Secondary Applications: Tips & Advice

2024-2025 Cycle

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Hello all!

We wanted to provide you with some tips and advice to help you prepare for when you start receiving secondary applications. First, we encourage you to give yourself a short break after submitting your primary application to celebrate this accomplishment and refresh yourself. Once you feel ready, a good place to start is to look up the previous cycle’s secondary application questions. Many schools keep the same essay prompts year to year, although they can certainly change. This will allow you to brainstorm writing topics or even draft your essays.

We send our best wishes as we cheer you on!
Sarah, Nicole, and Rae

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What are Secondary Applications?

After you submit your primary application, and it has been verified by AMCAS, you will receive secondary applications from each school you apply to. Secondary applications generally contain essay prompts that focus on topics important to each school, such as their mission and values. It is important to be organized throughout this process since most of these secondary applications will be sent to you all at once. Writing your secondary

applications can feel like a daunting task, so we highly recommend that you consider the following tips and advice to stay organized and motivated!

Tips & Advice

1. **Create a system!** If you haven't already, it is immensely helpful to create a spreadsheet that includes each of your schools:
 - a. Contact info for the school: name, email, and phone number.
 - b. The date you received your secondary application.
 - c. The Secondary deadline.
 - d. The cost of the secondary application
 - e. The date you paid the secondary fee.
 - f. The date you submitted your secondary application.
 - g. The date you submitted your composite letter packet.
 - h. Any other important information about each school.
2. **Be reassured!** There are many overlapping questions, so working on one secondary can help you prepare for others. Even more school-specific or unique questions can help you broaden your reflections, which can be useful when working on other secondary applications. It is not as endless as it appears!
3. **Take a break!** If you start to experience burnout or your stress becomes overwhelming, it is important to step away for a day or two to renew your energy and clear your mind – your work will benefit. Burnt-out people write burnt-out essays, and it becomes more difficult to notice and correct any errors.
4. **Tailor each prompt!** The essays do not have to be significantly different, but it is important to tailor each essay prompt to the school you are applying to. By doing this, your essays will be stronger and stand out more. Make sure to answer each essay prompt precisely as it is asked, since some schools may ask about the same topics but in a specific way. Additionally, make sure to completely address each part of the essay prompt – some schools may ask several questions all within the same prompt.

Common Essay Prompts

- **“Why are you interested in us?”**- We highly recommend you refer to the school's mission statement for questions like this. While mission statements can seem similar from school to school, after close examination, you should be able to distinguish key elements. Once you explain the elements you align with, support this by providing specific examples of your past experiences. Reflect on how the school's opportunities will help you achieve your goals and interests. Schools want to know how you fit into their mission and program! Additionally, if you are connected to the school, community, or state in any way, make sure to include that information!
- **“The COVID-19 Question”** – What barriers did you face during the pandemic? This is your opportunity to shed light on how the pandemic may have impacted you. In addition, how did you navigate this? This is also an opportunity to demonstrate strength and resilience.

- **“Gap Year Question”** – For this one, make sure to share not only WHAT you will be doing but also WHY. Sharing insight on your motivations for selecting specific gap year opportunities is another way to share new information about yourself.
- **“The Challenge Question”** – This is an opportunity to share a difficult challenge you have had to overcome or navigate. It can also describe adversity that you had to face. The key to this one is to describe not only what happened but how you navigated this challenge. In addition, it’s important also to share what you learned from this experience. Again, this is another opportunity to demonstrate your strengths!
- **“The Diversity Question”** – You can approach this question in many ways! This can include discussing your experience with different identities, including cultural backgrounds, races/ethnicities, religious groups, etc. This can also include diverse experiences or interests that you have. What do you believe makes you diverse? Diversity strengthens a medical school cohort – how can you contribute to the strength of their medical class?

Secondary Application Resources

- The [AAMC’s Preparing for Secondary Applications page](#).
- Sarah and Nicole can review and provide feedback on your secondary application writing. You can schedule a meeting through Calendly with [Sarah](#) or [Nicole](#), or by reaching out to Rae at Health.Professions.Program@dartmouth.edu.
 - **Please note that with the number of applicants that we advise, we will not be able to provide feedback on every secondary essay you submit. However, we are happy to help get you started by providing feedback that you can then apply to other secondary applications! In addition, if there are any specific ones you want to make sure you get feedback on or essays that you are stuck on – please reach out to us for feedback. 😊**

Secondary Application Fees

As a reminder, most schools will charge a secondary application fee. This fee varies from school to school, with the average being around \$100. Reminder! If you qualify for the Financial Assistance Program (FAP) and your fee is not automatically waived/reduced, you are welcome to contact your medical schools directly to see if a waiver is available.

Secondary Timing

You have probably heard many external messages about how you must submit secondaries “within two weeks” of receiving them. We know that this can be stressful, but it is not necessarily true. Each school’s secondary policies are listed in the [AAMC’s Medical School Admissions Requirements Report](#).

- Most schools do not have deadlines until fall for submitting your secondary. In some cases, they may suggest submitting “promptly.” It’s important to be consistently working on these so that you can submit them **promptly but with care**, the quality of these essays should be your top priority!

- Admissions directors frequently tell us to “remind applicants that their secondaries should be well thought out and well written; we read everything.”
- You may be able to submit a good number of schools within two weeks (especially if you are pre-writing) but this may not be realistic if you are applying to 20+ schools! Set realistic goals for yourself. For example, maybe you aim to have half of your essays done in the first two weeks after receiving them and the other half in another two weeks.
- How do you prioritize which secondaries to start with? Some students start with their top choice schools so that they get those applications in first. Others feel that their writing improves throughout the process, and they save their top schools for last – both options are valid. Find what works best for you!
 - Please note: There are a few schools with **explicit two-week deadlines** (UCLA, for example). Prioritize those. If you are applying to such a school and cannot meet the deadline due to extenuating circumstances, make sure to reach out to their admissions office early and ask for an extension.