

## Med/Vet/Dental Application Newsletter

### Secondary Applications: Tips & Advice

2025-2026 Cycle

July 1, 2025

Hello all!

As medical schools now start receiving verified applications, we know you have “secondary apps” on your mind! Whether you have already been verified, are waiting to be verified, or are just about to send in your completed primary application, here are some tips and advice to help you prepare for writing your secondary applications. First, we encourage you to give yourself a short break after submitting your primary application to celebrate this accomplishment and refresh your mind. Then, if you haven’t already, 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 and draft your essays even before you receive your secondaries.

We send our best wishes as we cheer you on!

Sarah, Nicole, and Rae

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### When Do You Receive Secondary Applications?

While a small handful of schools send secondaries as soon as they get the signal that they are on your school list, most schools send you their secondary application after your primary application has been verified by AMCAS. Now that the first group of verified apps

has started going to med schools, they will be steadily sent to schools as they are verified from here on. Most schools send a secondary to everyone who has applied to them. Only a small handful of schools will review your AMCAS app before choosing to send a secondary. Most admissions offices have pretty small staffs, so you may know someone who received a secondary from a school before you did, even though you were verified at the same time. Make sure to check your spam/junk email, but in general, you will receive yours. If, however, a couple of weeks have passed and people you know with the same verification date as you have received one, it's okay to email the admissions office to make sure it didn't get lost in the shuffle. Note –give it a couple of weeks-not days. Again, they have small staffs.

## Why are there Secondary Applications?

Secondary applications generally contain essay prompts that focus on topics important to each school, aligning with their mission and values. They are essentially a way to get to know a little more about each applicant in a tailored way.

## Tips & Advice

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!

### CREATE A SYSTEM!

**A master spreadsheet:** If you haven't already, it is immensely helpful to create a spreadsheet that includes the following for each of your schools:

- Contact info for the school: name, email, and phone number.
- Any password info for getting into their portal (where you can upload updates, etc.)
- Their mission statement. At this website you can quickly find an [updated list of all schools' mission's statements](#) (as well as other useful reports).
- The date you received their secondary application.
- The Secondary deadline, if there is one, or your goal timeline.
- The cost of the secondary application
- The date you paid the secondary fee.
- The date you submitted your secondary application.
- The date you submitted your composite letter packet.
- Any other important information about each school?

**Tackling all the questions!** Be reassured! There are many overlapping questions, so working on any secondary helps you prepare for others. There seem to be two main systems for organizing the writing process:

- a. Pull out all overlapping questions and themes and begin developing and refining ideas and drafts, tailored to each school's actual prompt and character count. Once you gain clarity on what you want to say, start sending completed secondaries.
- b. Complete secondaries one by one, school by school.

OUR RECOMMENDATION: Strategy “a” is often preferred by applicants. Often, when applicants start with strategy “b,” they report that after completing several, their answers have gotten better and they wish they could have a “do-over.” That said, applicants still need to be focused on having reasonable goals for completing and submitting their secondaries to remain timely.

With every question you work on, even school-specific or unique questions, you are writing all your other questions and secondaries. Each broadens your reflections, and you will wind up using almost everything, somewhere. It is not as endless as it appears.

**Take breaks!** If you start to experience burnout, overwhelm, or even extreme boredom with yourself, 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.

**Remember to tailor to each prompt!** Even though many questions are similar, it is important to tailor each essay prompt to the school you are applying to. *Schools certainly notice if your answer does not do this.* Also, make sure not only to answer each essay prompt precisely, make sure to completely address each part of the essay prompt – some schools may ask several questions all within the same prompt. In terms of character/word count: since there can be wildly differently character/word counts for even very similar prompts you may need to write different versions, not merely edited ones.

## Secondary Timing

You have probably heard external/social media 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.” They may even have a recommendation to submit within two weeks. Many schools now just add that to their secondary. However, distinguish between a required deadline (for example, UCLA does have a strict 15-day deadline) and a general recommendation.
- While it is important to get them in a timely manner, it’s important that the quality of these essays should still be a 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. In addition, you should also keep in mind which schools have rolling admissions and which do not.
  - Please note: For the few schools with **explicit two-week deadlines** (UCLA, and U. of Michigan are the ones we know about), 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.

## Common Essay Prompts

***The “Why are you interested in us?” Question*** – For questions like these, we highly recommend you refer to the school’s mission statement as well as explore their websites to learn what unique academic programs, research foci, or opportunities exist there for students that directly speak to you. While mission statements can seem similar from school to school, after close examination, you should be able to distinguish key elements. Your reflections will help you clarify the elements of each school’s missions you align with, and you can 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”*** – These are usually optional questions. Did you face barriers or hardships during the pandemic? If so, 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 and/or insights during this transformative time.

***The “Gap Year Question”*** – For this one, make sure to share not only WHAT you will be doing/have been doing but also WHY. Sharing insight on your motivations for selecting specific gap year opportunities is another way to share new information about yourself. Be mindful of your tenses. If you are STILL doing something you’ve been doing this past year, don’t put your experience all in the past tense.

***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 also how you navigated this challenge*. In addition, it’s also important 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, and again, make sure it’s tailored to the school’s specific prompt. This question can come in many formats (and character counts!). This can include discussing your experience with different

identities, including cultural backgrounds, races/ethnicities, religious groups, etc. This can also include diverse experiences, skills, or interests that you have and will be bringing to your peers and future colleagues. What about you, do you believe will add to the diversity of your cohort? Diversity strengthens a medical school cohort – how can you contribute to the strength of their medical class?

***The “Is There Anything Else You’d Like Us to Know/You’d like to Share?” Question*** – This question is often optional. It can address something you haven’t had a chance to address elsewhere, like distinct changes in academic performance or unique challenges for instance—however one can also think of this question as an opportunity to share something about you that you’d love to share and didn’t get a chance to elsewhere for that school. Did one school’s prompt remind you of a unique experience, challenge, skill, hobby, transformative class, etc? Were you always the one who cooked for your friends? Have you been performing slam poetry; have you been hiking your whole life? If the school doesn’t have a “why us” question, but is it a school you have very concrete reasons for being interested in that’s another option. IE: it doesn’t have to be a challenge or adversity, but it should have substance.

## Secondary Application Fees-Financial Assistance Program

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 qualified for the Financial Assistance Program (FAP) and your fee is not automatically waived/reduced, you should contact your medical schools directly to ask if a waiver is available.** If you did not qualify for FAP but came close or have extenuating circumstances, you can still reach out to the schools on your list and ask. Some may still reduce or waive their fees.

## 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](mailto: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. We look forward to providing feedback that you can apply to other secondary applications! In addition, if there are 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. 😊**