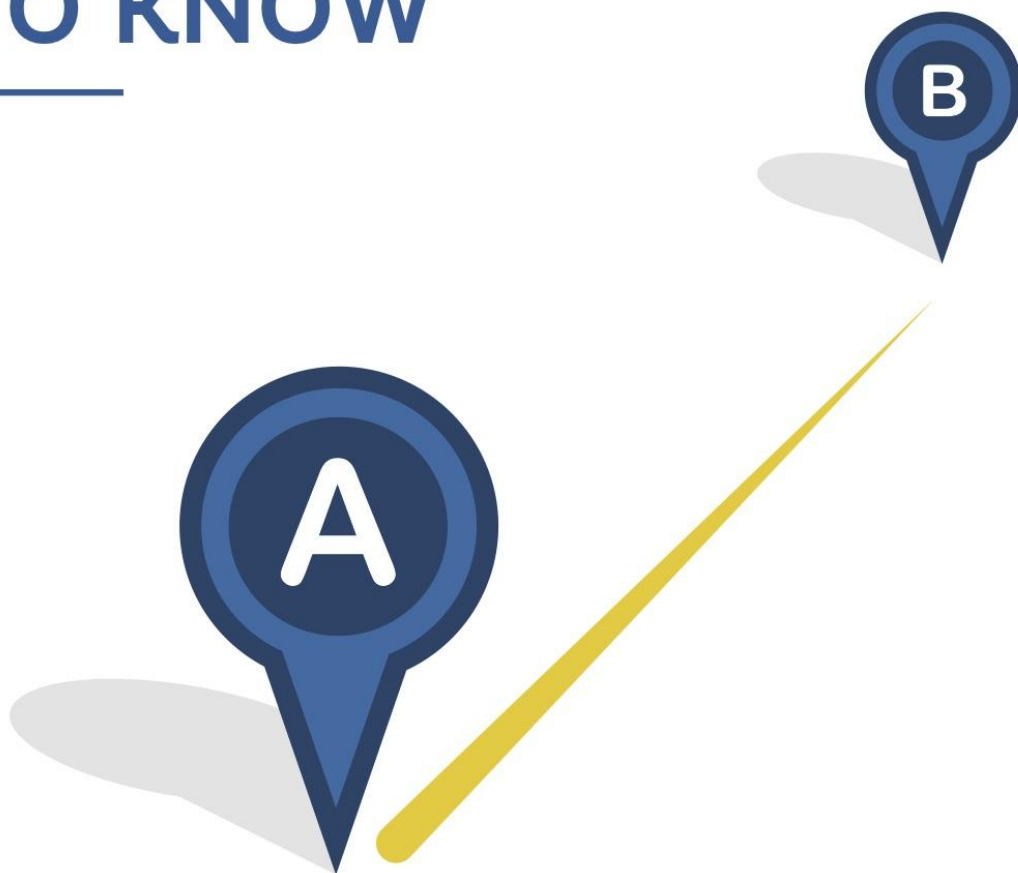




# APPLYING TO MEDICAL SCHOOL WITH LOW STATS: **WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW**

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## Intro

You may think that your MCAT and GPA don't carry so much weight and that if the rest of your application is stellar, then your less-than-perfect stats won't break your stakes. Like it or not, that's not necessarily the case. These scores are often the first elements of your application that adcoms look at, and if they're not in the ballpark, the admissions readers will likely only look at your application with a jaundiced eye, if at all.

You have some decisions to make: Are your stats so low that you should push off applying to med school for a few more years while you work on improving your profile? Should you alter your list of schools, apply to international programs, DO programs, or other programs with lower average MCAT/GPA stats? Should you retake the MCAT? Are your scores just high enough that you can explain your stats in a well-written optional essay?

The tips found in this guide will guide you as you look closely at your stats and examine your credentials and goals to discover your next steps to med school acceptance.

## Why Our Clients Love Us

No matter where you live and no matter where you're applying, our expert admissions consultants are ready to listen, mentor, and guide you as you prepare an outstanding medical school application that will get you accepted. You'll love us because you'll see from the first phone call or email that we care about you and support you as you strive to achieve your goals and dreams.

But don't take our word for it. See what some of our clients have to say about Accepted...

"I've been thinking about this whole crazy process [after being accepted to three medical schools] and I know that I wouldn't have had a prayer of a chance of getting in if it weren't for your substantial help. They say the essays are one of the most important aspects of the application, especially for someone like me whose numbers are a little below average. So I can't express my appreciation to you enough. You have helped me immeasurably. You greatly de-stressed an important part of this process that was making me quite anxious. I felt much more confident in my essays after working with you."

"Thank you again for your help with my essays. Several of my interviewers commented on how polished they were and I think they really helped to offset my lower score in the MCAT verbal. I have been recommending you to others!" - *Accepted to Penn State, SUNY Downstate, SUNY Upstate, Stony Brook, George Washington University, and NYU*

"My consultant was an amazing advisor and tremendous help for my medical school application process. Her knowledge and skills are above par and she truly wants all her clients to succeed. She was very supportive and helped me discover my strengths and passion for medicine. I never thought I would be so happy and proud of my personal statement! I cannot thank her enough for her help and guidance. I am accepted!"

"Without Alicia and her invaluable help, I am positive I would not have gotten into medical school. She was there to assist me with every step of the application process. Alicia was not only friendly, supportive, and encouraging, but also brought out my creative side. When it came to my essays, Alicia asked thought-provoking questions that guided me through the writing process. When prepping for interviews, Alicia gave awesome feedback regarding my replies to mock questions. I couldn't have done it with you! Thank you!"

[Read more feedback on why our clients love Accepted.](#)

# Boost Your GPA

Did you decide on a medical career late in your undergraduate career? Were you immature, undisciplined, and unfocused in your college study habits? Did you find the transition from high school classes to undergraduate coursework challenging? Were you overwhelmed by moving to a new area or by newly acquired independence? Did you have personal issues that took your focus away from your school work?

If the answer to any of these questions is yes, then you likely have a lower GPA than is required for a competitive medical school application. For students with a low undergraduate GPA, there are several things you can do to improve your credentials, in particular your BCPM GPA (grade point average in biology, chemistry, physics, and mathematics courses).

A low GPA is probably the hardest area to improve. This makes sense – it was years in the making, and can't be undone without time. It can take about a year of advanced level science courses to bump a high 2.x GPA over 3.0. The lower your GPA and the more classes you've taken, the longer it will take to reflect improvements in your academic record.

Fortunately, whether your GPA is just a bit off the mark or well below the competitive level, there are steps you can take:

- **Apply to a DO program**

If you only applied to MD programs previously, you should consider an [osteopathic medical program](#). Although still extremely competitive, DO programs have slightly lower GPAs and MCAT requirements and a more holistic criteria for evaluating applications.

Before you apply, be sure to shadow some osteopathic physicians and learn about the osteopathic approach – these schools don't want to be a fall-back plan for allopathic applicants. Doctors of Osteopathic Medicine focus on integrating the whole person into the healthcare process. This makes them especially strong in primary care specialties – family practice, general internal medicine, and pediatrics – and popular in many other specialties. For instance, in 2021, a higher percentage of DOs matched with emergency medicine programs than did MDs ([12.5% vs. 9.6%](#)). And, with the recent merger of

allopathic and osteopathic residencies, the distinction between MDs and DOs will likely be blurred even more.

[Getting into a DO program](#) is still going to require a strong GPA. So what can you do if your grades are lower?

- **Boost your GPA with post-baccalaureate coursework**

This is a popular route, especially for applicants who did well on the MCAT but need some help with their GPA. Retaking science classes can show you've mastered the material, but a better strategy is to take advanced classes *and do well*. If you have any doubt about your ability to get an A, then this is probably not the best path for you.

The quality of the institution offering the courses is also important – community college won't cut it. An attractive option is to see if your own alma mater will allow you to take additional courses; often this can be done at a reduced cost.

- **Improve your GPA with a science-based master's program**

This is another good route for would-be reapplicants because it provides opportunities for more independent, self-directed research and demonstrates scientific acumen. It can be especially useful if you don't have a research background already. Keep in mind though that you need to excel in your coursework and that you will have to finish the entire program; making below-average grades or dropping out before the program ends will do more harm than good when you reapply to med school.

Master's programs aren't right for everybody – you might not want to commit to a multi-year program, or you might not be confident about your academic performance. Or you might not have the minimum GPA required for admittance in the first place. In that case:

- **Prove your potential in a post-baccalaureate or special master's program (SMP)**

Success in these programs, which are usually one or two years long, can show the admissions committee that you're ready for medical training, which means that once you're accepted into a SMP, the odds are very good you'll eventually get into medical school.

Programs like [GeorgeSquared](#), [JHU's Health Science Intensive](#) and [Georgetown's Special Master's in Physiology](#) immerse students in a rigorous science-based curriculum similar to what they will experience in medical school; often, they are even taking classes or being graded alongside first-year med students. Some programs even cater to the lower end of the GPA/MCAT spectrum, such as [East Virginia Medical School M.S. in Biomedical Sciences](#), [Drexel's Interdisciplinary Health Sciences \(IHS\)](#) and [Pathway to Medical School programs](#).

Use the [AAMC post-baccalaureate and master's database](#) to find programs that will help you boost your academic qualifications for medical school.

But what if you don't have the GPA to get into a post-baccalaureate program? Some programs, like Drexel's IHS program, accept applicants with GPAs below 3.0, but many are more competitive. If you are still determined to be a physician, there's one more route:

- **GPA bump followed by a post-baccalaureate**

This method is a bit circuitous, but it does work. First, you need to get your GPA up – a year of good grades in upper-level science courses might be enough to get you up to a 3.0. At that point, you can apply to a post-baccalaureate program with strong links to a medical school. This will take you a minimum of two years, which might not seem appealing at this point. However, look at it as a way to build your confidence and shore up the science and study skills that will enable you to excel in medical school.

If you still don't have the GPA or MCAT score for acceptance at a North American medical school, there is a final option – one generally thought of as a last resort.

- **Apply to an international medical school**

Carefully consider whether this is the right decision. As an international medical student, you will have to contend with many different challenges – from language barriers to culture shock – that could affect your studies. Classes are large and may feel impersonal, and attrition rates are high. You might not have as many choices for clinical rotations, and you might even need to arrange your own elective rotations.

The biggest concern for international medical graduates (IMGs) is matching with a residency program after completing medical school. Some international schools have very poor records of residency placement. Attending the wrong medical school could mean you incur thousands of dollars in debt and struggle to practice medicine once you're finished.

Despite these obstacles, an international program can be a viable option for some people. The required GPA is often lower than the U.S. average and in some programs, the MCAT is not required. You will interact with peers, professors and patients from around the world and with a wealth of different perspectives. And while securing a residency is a challenge, it's certainly not an insurmountable one. In the [2021 Main Residency Match](#), US IMGs accounted for about nearly 15% of the applicant pool; 59.5% of these matched to their preferred specialty. These vary by specialty, and applicants in the primary care fields fare the best.

I've worked with many successful IMGs over the years and what consistently sets them apart is that they make up for any lack in their initial qualifications by working harder than the average medical student. They're heavily involved in university activities, community healthcare initiatives, international case competitions, etc. They are the ones who go above and beyond in their clinical rotations, demonstrating their cultural competence by adapting seamlessly in varied environments and contributing on different teams. And significantly, they're the ones who can express the advantages of their non-U.S. medical education, including resourcefulness and the deep grounding in diagnoses that comes from doing without modern diagnostic equipment.

If studying medicine in another country appeals to you, do your research. Among the Caribbean programs, Ross University, St. George's University, San Saba, and the American University of the Caribbean have consistently high placement rates. Courses are often taught by U.S. academic physicians with well-established clinical rotations in the United States. Israeli programs like Sackler and Ben-Gurion also have partnerships with American programs; likewise, the University of Queensland has an attractive option for U.S. students. And Ireland's Atlantic Bridge program, although quite competitive, is flexible with regard to the GPAs of otherwise qualified American and Canadian students and offers a diverse, world-class medical education.



Being an IMG is not for the faint of heart, but if you've tried everything else and still have your heart set on medicine, it is something to consider.

Boosting your GPA is likely to test your resolve to be a doctor. The next year(s) won't be quick or easy, and you may question whether the effort is even worth it. You might find it's not, and that is fine – there are many other worthwhile careers you can pursue. But if you keep your eyes on the prize, then in all likelihood you'll be wearing a white coat someday.

# Applying with a Low Science GPA

The process of applying to medical school is stressful. [Applying with a low science GPA](#) can make the process even more nerve-racking. For over five years with the UC Davis School of Medicine Postbaccalaureate Program, I specialized in helping students with low numbers apply successfully to medical schools across the country. In my last year with the program, 100% of the students whom I assisted received acceptances. I learned many valuable lessons from this experience.

If you have a low science GPA, you basically have two options – push off applying to med school or move forward with your application, taking certain precautionary steps.

## When to Push Off Applying to Med School

You should consider waiting to apply to med school if:

- **You have a decreasing trend in your GPA**

This is the number one reason why many students will receive a rejection from medical schools. If you have a decreasing trend and you have already graduated, I recommend that you [complete postbaccalaureate coursework](#) to create an increasing trend by taking upper division biological science courses, most similar to the level taught at medical school. I have written and published a book, [The Definitive Guide to Pre-Medical Postbaccalaureate Programs](#), about all the different types of postbac programs as well as alternative paths to medical school.

- **You have not retaken any of the classes in which you received failing grades**

Retake any courses in which you received a C-, D or F for a higher grade as soon as possible to demonstrate your improvement as a student. I recommend making this step your priority, if you have already graduated. It is best to retake the same classes, if at all possible. If not, you can take equivalent courses.

- **You have not maintained a full course load of upper division science courses, earning all A's and B's**

If you have a C every quarter or semester without consistent improvement, this can be a red flag. It's best to take a full course load of all science classes and [maintain a strong GPA before you apply](#).

Selection committees are looking for evidence that you are ready for medical school. It's a terrible experience when a student is asked to leave a medical school.

It's painful for three reasons:

- It hurts the student on an individual level – it's devastating psychologically.
- It's bad for the morale of the student's class. Medical school is already a high pressure environment.
- It's terrible for the reputation of the school and specifically the committee members who decided to admit the failing student. Selection committees are under enormous pressure to select only students who will thrive in their school's academic setting.

## When to Apply to Med School with a Low Science GPA

If the criteria listed above don't describe you, to be successful in applying with a low science GPA, consider the following strategies:

- Carefully select and apply only to schools that have a history of accepting students with lower numbers.
- Directly address the reasons for the low numbers early in your education in your essays – state the facts, don't provide excuses. (See [5 A's for Your Low GPA](#) for more advice on addressing a low GPA.)
- Demonstrate improvement by creating a strong increasing trend and earning a competitive MCAT score.

- Show enormous commitment to medicine and community service.

Many students are accepted into medical school every year with below average numbers. In fact approximately half have below average numbers and science GPAs. It's better to have an impressive record of service and to demonstrate the ability to overcome any obstacle than to have perfect scores.

The challenges you have encountered have helped you build character. Often, the students with lower numbers have the most heart and the most commitment.

# What to Do with a “W”

Almost everybody has a blemish on their GPA. Usually it’s a failed class or a semester of [poor grades](#). But there’s also the issue of how a “W” on your transcript will affect your chance of admission to medical school.

The truth is that withdrawing from one or two classes is not going to hurt you at all. In fact, it’s a lot better than having an “F” on your transcript, since W’s are not factored into your GPA.

## Interpreting and Dealing with Your W’s

But what if you have a series of W’s? Then you need to look at them a little more carefully, just as the medical schools are likely to do. Are your withdrawals grouped around one or two semesters, indicating a difficult time in your life? Or are they scattered throughout your academic career? Are they mostly in science classes? Are there multiple attempts at the same class?

Each of these situations can lead an admissions committee to a different conclusion, and is something that you will want to explain. However, in most cases, you should avoid doing this in your primary [AMCAS application](#). Of course, if your reasons are integral to the story of how your interest in medicine emerged or evolved, then by all means include it in your personal statement. But otherwise, you can incorporate your explanation in a [variety of secondary essays](#). Questions like “What challenges or obstacles have you faced?” and “What makes you unique?” can be great venues to explain any setback that you’ve experienced.

For example:

- **Did you have a rough semester (or year) because of a family situation?**

Describe the situation, subtly mentioning your grades but keeping the focus on qualities like your compassion, the responsibilities you took on, and the personal growth you experienced.

- **Were you or your family in dire economic straits, leading you to work too many jobs and not manage your time well?**

Then tell us how you gained control, learned to prioritize, and developed better study and work habits.

- **Did you struggle to master organic chemistry, withdrawing a time or two before you finally got the hang of it?**

Detail how you overcame this mental block with the help of your determination, extra study time, and outside resources.

Different programs view the significance of dropped classes in different ways – some will see them as a red flag, others as a natural part of a student’s academic career. In either case, if you can address the challenges or obstacles you faced, your ability to overcome it will highlight your strong potential as a med student.

# Deciding Whether or Not to Retake the MCAT

Medical school applicants (or any other professional school applicant) must assess their credentials realistically to present themselves in the best possible way during the application process. Since applicants are evaluated [based on specific quantitative criteria](#) (primarily undergraduate GPA and MCAT scores) and non-quantitative criteria (research and clinical exposure, leadership skills, mentoring experiences), as well as on personal attributes such as compassion, discipline, motivation, and work ethic, you must acknowledge your strengths and weaknesses.

Most medical schools do weigh quantitative credentials heavily, in particular the MCAT score, because strong MCAT scores have been correlated with success on the USMLE. The MSAR reports each program's median MCAT score from the previous application year, as well as their lowest and highest accepted scores.

## Should you retake the MCAT?

If you already took the MCAT and scored lower than you had hoped for, your chances of admission may drop. [Should you apply with the score you have](#) or should you retake the test?

- **Case A: You DO NOT retake the exam**

If your MCAT score is borderline, and you choose not to retake the exam, you will need to present yourself in the best light by stressing your other attributes and credentials and by taking extra coursework that illustrates your strong academic background. Some schools approach applications “holistically,” meaning that they weigh all aspects of your application and realize that standardized tests are not always the best representation of a student's aptitude. But many medical schools screen applicants, at least initially, on their MCAT scores.

Read: [How Your Academic Statistics Influence Your Medical School Choices >>](#)

If your scores are simply too low to be competitive at American allopathic med schools, you might pursue osteopathic medicine, which evaluates applications more holistically and considers lower MCAT scores than allopathic schools. You might also investigate foreign medical schools, including [Caribbean programs](#). Some do not require the MCAT, although graduating from a program outside North America can make your return to a

U.S. residency more difficult. You can also consider alternative career paths, such as biomedical research or patent law, two common alternative career options that allow you to remain in science.

Note: Do not take the test unless you are scoring (on practice tests) above the range that you feel you need for admission. The confidence you possess on test day knowing you were scoring a 512 on practice tests is a large part of the mind-game you must master to succeed. Hard work, discipline, and true motivation are the necessary ingredients to MCAT success.

- **Case B: You DO retake the exam**

If you are committed to obtaining an MD, then you should [plan to retake the exam](#). You may take it up to three times in a year and seven times in your lifetime. Ideally you want to ace it the second time, but it's not uncommon for applicants to take it multiple times. This can demonstrate your persistence and determination to get into medical school. However, it is important to show an upward trend. Schools may average the scores, but they tend to give the latest score the most weight, and dropping even a few points can hurt you.

## Timing is everything

If you do decide to retake the MCAT, give yourself plenty of time. Too often, applicants sign up for a June or even July test date in the year they want to apply. If they don't score as high as they hoped, they can't retake until August or later, requiring they either [submit late or push the whole process back](#) another year. Be smart and schedule the test as early as you feel you're ready.

Keep in mind that many students do not prepare enough for the MCAT, thinking that their coursework is sufficient preparation. This is a faulty assumption, especially for applicants who struggle on standardized tests. Applicants need to study hundreds of hours over several months to review and prepare for the test. Applicants should utilize preparatory courses, private tutors, and varying prep approaches to succeed. Applicants need to have real discipline to do the necessary work – 40 hours a week for several months. It is also extremely important to take practice tests regularly (ideally weekly) in order to master not just the content but also the necessary test-taking skills to succeed under the additional test-day stress.



# Improve Your MCAT Score

Fortunately, it's easier to tackle a poor MCAT score than a poor GPA. While you should not retake the exam too many times, a better-prepared second or even third attempt can be a sound strategy.

Many people find that studying independently or with a group of friends works well. Reviewing your old class notes and introductory tests provides the most solid basis for your test preparation. Scrutinizing old tests remains one of the best ways to identify the areas where you're weak.

There are numerous resources available for self-study. The [AAMC](#) should be both your first and last stop. Focusing on their practice tests, both at the start of your study and again in the weeks leading up to the exam, can put you in the right frame of mind. Alongside the AAMC guides, the [Princeton Review](#) comes highly recommended for studying the physical section, while [Examkrackers](#) tops the list for both the verbal reasoning and biological sections.

For some people, private tutoring or even professional test prep services from companies like [Magoosh](#) or [The Berkeley Review](#) can give their MCAT preparation a jump start. Taking an MCAT prep class doesn't guarantee you'll get a good score – you get out of them what you put in – but they can help by providing structure and keeping test-takers focused and on track. They can also help you tackle head-on those areas you'd rather avoid.

## 3 MCAT prep goals to keep in mind

Whichever method you prefer, your goals in preparing for the MCAT should be to:

1. Understand why you got each wrong answer. If you understand the material, you may be having issues with the format of the question, and [this is something you need to straighten out](#) before test day.
2. Be able to choose right answers even when you don't know the material. It's unlikely that you can answer every question, but a keen test taker can read clues in the question that help narrow down the possible answers.
3. Finish every question in your timed practice tests with at least five minutes to spare. And it's a good idea not only to focus on what you're studying but how

you're studying. Sites like [Lifehacker](#) collect information about topics such as managing stress and establishing routines. Better time management and more effective study habits will help you not just on this exam but in your later studies.



## Understand the reality of test anxiety

If you identified test anxiety as one of your obstacles, then you have to address this before tackling the MCAT a second (or third) time. Exercise, breathing techniques, and yoga can help alleviate stress for some people; other test-takers might benefit from addressing learning disorders and seeing a therapist, as the [Mayo Clinic](#) suggests. Your college counseling center might even have options like biofeedback training to combat test anxiety. And putting the books away and relaxing the day before seems to be a pretty standard ingredient for success. But only you can know what works best for you.

## How do you know when you're ready to retake the MCAT?

This is a question that only you can answer, based on your performance in practice tests and your confidence levels. But try to sign up for an early exam [so you can get your application to AMCAS in June](#). By counting backwards from your test date, you'll be able to determine how much time you have to study, and what arrangements you'll need to make to be as prepared as you possibly can be. (Some people consider studying for the MCAT a full-time job. This is great if it helps you get in the mindset of intense study, but try to maintain a good work-life balance or you'll be miserable. If you manage your time well, you'll also be able to eat healthy meals, exercise, pursue some semblance of a social life, and even sleep!)

In the end, there is no magic formula that guarantees MCAT success. Nonetheless, knowing yourself, including your study habits and needs, will go a long way toward building your confidence.

# How the Adcom Views Multiple MCAT Scores

In 2007, the MCAT was first offered electronically. Prior to this technological shift, the MCAT was only offered a limited number of times a year – as a paper and pencil exam. AAMC also restricted the number of times you could take the exam in one year as well as in your lifetime.

Now that the MCAT was offered 31 times this year, many students take the exam more than once before [applying to medical school](#).

Still keep in mind the limitations placed on how many times you can take the exam in a calendar year or in your lifetime. The maximums are:

- Three times in a single year,
- Four times in two years,
- Seven times in your lifetime.

The way that these scores are viewed by admissions committees can cause a lot of anxiety, depending on the combination of scores that you have. Some adcoms prefer to look at your best scores in each section from multiple tests while other schools consider the average of all of your scores. There are many forums and discussion threads that attempt to identify the schools that rely on each method. However, [adcom members](#) may each have a personal preference for how they rank scores and applicants. It's impossible to predict how any one school will view your scores when there are so many different people involved in the review process. Each committee member will bring their unique perspective and opinion to the discussion.

## What really happens with multiple MCAT scores

That being said, based on my experience, I noted the following trends in our discussion of MCAT scores:

- The most recent score carried the most weight.

- As long as there was an increasing trend in the test scores, previous scores – even if they were low – did not hurt an applicant’s chances of acceptance (as long as all other parts of the application were strong).
- When there was high variability within the scores, the highest score for each section was considered and the average was calculated.

Overall, it demonstrated determination to see that a student had taken the MCAT more than once – this helped applicants especially when they improved their scores each time they took the exam.

## Multiple MCATs: Demonstrating determination

Taking the MCAT more than once will not necessarily hurt your application – unless you receive a lower score on the later exam than your previous exam(s). One of my favorite medical students, David, had taken the MCAT six times and completed three or four different [postbac programs](#) before he got into medical school. He was – by far – the most popular mentor for our postbac students because he had the best sense of humor and sense of perspective. In taking the MCAT multiple times and improving his score, he demonstrated his determination to succeed. He was able to convince adcoms that there was no other career for him.

While I don’t advocate taking the MCAT six times, I do recommend that you learn from each practice exam you take and that you use that knowledge to improve. Create a strategy that will not only help you [get into medical school](#), but one that will help you in medical school and in your career.

# Interview with an M1 Who Smashed Every Obstacle on Her Path to Med School

*This interview is part of an Accepted blog series featuring [interviews with medical school applicants and students](#), offering readers a behind-the-scenes look at top medical schools and the med school application process. And now, introducing Shantrice...*

**Accepted: We'd like to get to know you! Where are you from? Where and what did you study as an undergrad? When did you graduate?**

**Shantrice:** I have lived in Georgia all of my life! I graduated from Spelman College (Atlanta, GA) with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology. Upon graduating I enrolled in coursework at Georgia State University in order to complete prerequisites for medical school. I also received a Master of Science degree in Preclinical Science from the Mercer University School of Medicine (Macon, GA).

**Accepted: Can you share 3 fun facts about yourself?**

**Shantrice:**

1. I love cooking and whenever the opportunity presents itself I will binge watch Food Network and Travel Channel shows. A few of my favorites are: Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives, Food Network Star, Down Home with the Neelys" and Bizarre Food"!
2. While in elementary school I was introduced to creative writing and discovered poetry. As of today I have a collection of over 75 unpublished poems. Writing poetry has served a wide range of purposes for me. Writing has operated as a stress reliever, and an opportunity to express my individuality and life experiences.
3. My experience navigating through college with a full-time job was challenging – then add being a parent as well and it was a totally different dynamic! I tested out different strategies while in school – I even failed at a few things – but best of all, I learned so much about myself during the process. My experience as a college mother led me to establish a non-profit organization, Conceive A Dream Foundation. The foundation's primary target is women like myself, pursuing collegiate coursework while parenting. The

foundation seeks to help mothers successfully maneuver through college; connect them with mentors who can provide them with guidance; help them secure educational scholarships and financial assistance for childcare; and provide enriching opportunities for their children to participate in. These are just a few of the things I wish were available to me as a college mom, and I hope to use my personal journey as inspiration for others.

**Accepted: Where are you currently going to med school? What year are you?**

**Shantrice:** I am currently a first-year medical student at Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta, GA.

**Accepted: Why did you choose your school? How did you know it would be a good fit?**

**Shantrice:** My primary selection factors when deciding what school to attend were location, mission, and availability of resources (counseling services and academic support). Originally I was scheduled to attend a school out of state; however, due to personal circumstances I withdrew my acceptance. Luckily, within the same timeframe I was accepted into my first choice school, Morehouse School of Medicine. It was my first choice because [their mission really aligns with my current views and future career goals](#). I attended undergrad within walking distance from my school and I grew up not too far from the area as well so my familiarity with the community and the surrounding city was very comforting. Living the majority of my life in underserved communities, I found it very refreshing that their mission emphasizes service to underserved urban and rural communities. As a non-traditional student it was also very important for me to look at what resources are available outside of the classroom. It has been a few years since I have experienced the rigor of graduate level coursework and I was very happy with the options available for support in the areas of emotional/mental and academic aid. It also was a big plus that Morehouse SOM does an exceptional job preparing students to successfully pass USMLE Step 1 exam on their first attempt and match into residency slots.

**Accepted: What motivated you to pursue a career in medicine?**

**Shantrice:** As cliché as it sounds, it has always been my dream to become a physician. In the early “green” stages of my journey towards medicine, it was my fascination with the tools physicians used and what seemed to be their magic healing powers that lead the five-year-old me to declare to my grandparents that I wanted to be a doctor. This was a desire that stuck with me through my grade school years. It was not until I was much older that I was able to really

understand the gravity of being a physician and the impact that adequate/inadequate healthcare could have on a person's life. Over a span of two decades I have witnessed the effects of cancer, diabetes, CAD (coronary artery disease), CHF (congestive heart failure), CKD (chronic kidney disease), COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), strokes, and countless more medical conditions. And many of these health challenges were faced by one person: my grandmother.

To say that I was exposed at an early age to a combination of normal and abnormal medical conditions, that many students only first hear about from "Clinical Correlates" in medical school, would be an understatement. While seemingly undesirable, my family's health conditions were some of my most significant and medically motivating experiences I have had. Due to my grandparents' limited education, I was looked to as their "medical translator."

I learned to read and discern lab results, I researched medical conditions and I became their mini medical dictionary. I also learned about patient/doctor interactions. Not all of our experiences were as pleasant as my childhood fantasy of what I imagined a physician to be like! However, this only sparked a greater desire for me to become a physician and embody traits that I would want in a physician that cares for my family members.

Since then, I have learned that pursuing medicine is not an easy process. It is demanding, requires long hours, endless studying and the reward is not always as glamorous as the concept. However, as my life has progressed all of my experiences have converged to solidify my end goal.

**Accepted: What unexpected challenges did you face while going through the application process? How did you overcome those challenges?**

**Shantrice:** An unforeseen challenge I experienced during a previous cycle was not setting aside enough time to [submit my application and additional material in a timely manner](#). I found myself meeting deadlines but literally submitting at the last minute. When I did not receive any interview invites at the end of the application cycle I was not surprised. Having scores/grades that left me feeling very un-Rockstar-like, I knew that I wanted to submit my applications as early as possible the following cycle.

Last year I had quite a few things going on, from working to summer enrichment opportunities, having a child out of school for the summer and preparing to retake the MCAT. With so many competing factors, [I set deadlines for myself](#) and created a firm application and study schedule.



For days that I worked or had other activities, I had a specific time during breaks that I utilized for applications, I pre-wrote secondary essays when possible, and set aside enough time to have my essays proofread before submitting my application. This freed up so much time and provided me with sufficient time to submit my essays within days of receiving the secondary.

Two challenges that I faced which I did expect, were [applying with multiple MCAT scores](#) and my uncompetitive undergraduate GPA.

No one ever dreams of taking the MCAT more than once, let alone twice or any additional attempt after that. Yet, the reality is, it does happen and it happened to me. A lot of applicants hate to hear this but the only way to overcome an uncompetitive MCAT score is to take the test again but with a different mindset. I suffered from severe MCAT anxiety and a lack of confidence, and both factors hindered my performance. I tried self-study, group-study, a test prep course – you name it, I tried. My biggest regret is having sat for the MCAT knowing I was not ready, merely because I wanted to meet a medical school application deadline. However, when I stopped putting so much pressure on myself, my whole outlook changed, my self-confidence was improved ten-fold and I saw the greatest improvement in my scores.

In regards to my grades, I had exhausted many of the traditional backup options for students who complete college with an [uncompetitive GPA](#), such as my participation in post baccalaureate classes and a Master of Science program. Despite doing well in my coursework and earning a M.S. degree, my undergraduate GPA still showed inconsistency and academic vulnerability.

Being rejected after finally securing medical school interviews in a previous cycle, left me feeling very defeated, like I could not overcome this roadblock. However, after self-reflection and dialogue with admissions personnel, I realized it was my delivery and not my package that ultimately cost me earlier entrance into medical school. I was so astounded that someone wanted to interview little old me, someone with my stats, that my lack of confidence hurt me.

During my next round of interviews, I did a better job at expressing my strengths and weaknesses. I was able to give my interviewers more background information on why undergrad was such a roller coaster for me. I felt more comfortable speaking my truth. And, I was able to specify points of growth and a trend of upward academic improvement. When you are chosen to interview, the school has seen your grades, scores, read about your activities and so on. And they picked you despite any blemishes that may be on your applications. The interview is your opportunity to show them what is beyond the electronic application, showcase

who you are and why you would be an asset to their school and a great physician in the future. I did have an improved MCAT score to add to my application, but my confidence and ability to convey my maturity and what I learned from my setbacks was my biggest improvement.

**Accepted: How do you balance motherhood and med school?**

**Shantrice:** Before entering medical school, I assumed I would be able to apply the same strategy I employed as a working mom as I transitioned back to being a student mom. Once my semester began earlier this summer, I realized that our routine would not be sufficient. The rigor of medical school was a lot different from what I experienced during graduate school and undergrad. And having a child who was on summer break while I was preparing for exams, case studies, and learning loads of new information was interesting!

Now that the school has started back for my son, we are learning to balance his school assignments and activities with my studying, school assignments, and exams. We try out different routines and make adjustments as needed.

My son is at an age where he more or less understands that my school work is a lot different from his, but he's still at an age where he is still very dependent on me. It is important that during the week when we get home that we have dinner together, and complete homework and bedtime activities uninterrupted. On the weekend we have allotted time to go to a movie, go to the park, or any other activity of his choosing.

So far, this routine has provided me with an ideal level of satisfaction with my school-life balance. I am also grateful to have family near to spend time with him when I have to stay at school late or study for an upcoming exam.

As he gets older, his school work will increase in the level of difficulty, and as I progress through my program, my studies will become more complex. Therefore, the main factor that helps us maintain balance is remaining flexible to change as we advance through life.

**Accepted: Lastly, do you have any tips for applicants who feel defeated from the med school application journey?**

**Shantrice:**

- Have faith in yourself and do not allow the “process” to deter you from pursuing your passion.
- Whether you are a traditional applicant currently in undergrad applying for the first time, a reapplicant applying for the umpteenth time, or a non-traditional student embarking on a new journey, remain true and congruent to yourself!
- Don’t compare yourself to others. My personal journey toward medical school has been very unorthodox. I maintained a full time job throughout undergrad, I was a parent while in school, and experienced tons of other life factors that were not typical for a student seeking to enter into medical school. I constantly compared myself to other applicants and other students that graduated with me but were already years ahead of me into their medical careers. Once I realized there are several routes that take you to the same destination, I was able to find value in my unique path and life experiences.
- Have confidence in yourself and confidence in your dreams. Sometimes when you experience so much adversity it can be hard to really believe in yourself and believe that achieving your goals is within your reach. You must overcome the fear that is holding you back. Once this happens you will be able to reach your full potential. Have patience because everything may not fall into place all at once.
- Be strategic with the schools you apply to because every school is not looking for that “Diamond in the Rough” applicant, during initial screening they may not look beyond measurable criteria (GPA and test scores) or the school may just not be the best fit for you. The application process can be expensive and time consuming. Every school has a different approach to how they filter out applicant. So do your due diligence and thoroughly research schools and/or seek advice about every step of the process.
- Lastly, **APPLY EARLY**, only take the MCAT when you are absolutely ready (academically and mentally), and take advantage of medical enrichment opportunities. Sometimes the application process can be so daunting that your reasons for pursuing medicine become overshadowed. So visit open house events, attend pre-medical conferences, participate in summer enrichment programs, shadow physicians from a variety of specialties, and volunteer in areas unrelated to medicine (that have a strong emphasis on service to underserved populations). Having a variety of truly meaningful experiences will not only

enhance your application, it will give you a better idea if a career of lifelong service to others is truly for you.

You can follow Shantrice's journey on her [youtube channel](#). Thank you Shantrice for sharing your experience and advice – we wish you much success!

## Conclusion

You've taken an important step towards overcoming your less-than-ideal test scores and grades and increasing your chances of a med school acceptance by reading *Applying to Medical School with Low Stats: What You Need to Know*.

Now it's time to move from general tips to personalized advice tailored just for you. Here's how it works:

1. [Explore our medical school admissions consulting & editing services](#) and find the option that best suits your needs.
2. You'll be paired with an admissions expert who will work with you 1-on-1 to help you discover your competitive advantage and use it to get accepted to your dream school.
3. Shoot us an email letting us know when you've been accepted. It makes our day!

Need help figuring out which service is best for you? [Click here for more guidance](#).

**<<IT'S TIME TO GET ACCEPTED! >>**