

2021–22

Ophthalmology Residency Match FAQs

FAQs



Q What are the important deadlines to participate in the match?

A Important deadlines for the 2021-2022 match cycle include:

July 1: Applicant registration portal opens.

Sept 1: Beginning on September 1, application forms, along with supplementary material (e.g., recommendation letters, USLME scores) will be released to programs to which candidates apply. Programs will be notified when applications are complete and ready to review. Additional supplementary material may be uploaded at any time, and programs will be notified of these additions in real-time.

Oct 18: Programs begin to extend invitations to interview to applicants. Interview invitations will continue to be sent on a rolling basis at the discretion of individual programs.

Nov 1: Interviews begin. **All interviews will be virtual this year.**

Jan 7: Final day of interviews.

Jan 12: Program deadline to submit rank lists.

Jan 13: Optional live program visits begin.

Jan 25: Last day for live program visits.

Feb 1: Applicant deadline to submit rank lists.

Feb 8: Match results made available to applicants, residency programs, and medical schools.

A complete timeline with these deadlines can be found on the SF Match website under the “timetable” at sfmatch.org, as well as on the AUPO website at aupo.org on the Programs and Services/Medical Students page.

Q Is there an advantage to getting my application in before September?

A There is no advantage to submitting applications before September. Programs will not have access to applications prior to September 1, so no review of applications will occur before then. In addition, no interview invitations will be extended until mid-October.

Q What is new on the application this year?

A The biggest change is the personal statement. In order to increase diversity within the

profession and to obtain a more holistic review of applicants, the former one-page personal statement has been replaced. Each applicant will now be required to provide a shorter, autobiographical statement. The application will also contain a list of several short personal essay questions, and applicants will be asked to choose two of them to answer.

In addition, the demographic portion of the portal will include a query regarding gender identification in order to assess diversity in the profession. This question is completely optional, and **answers will not be provided to programs**, but will be used by the SF Match for demographic purposes only.

Q What if the COVID pandemic made it impossible to take the USMLE Step 1 exam?

A In general, a Step I score is required as part of a complete application, and applicants should have a chance to take the exam given the current waning of the pandemic. Applicants who have been unable to take Step 1 should contact the SF Match directly with documentation of circumstances.

Q What is the process to follow if Step 2 has not yet been taken?

A While applicants do have to provide a USMLE Step 1 score as part of a complete application, completion of Step 2 (CK or CS) is not required at the time of application submission. The timing of Step 2 is up to the applicant, after consultation with medical school advisors. If Step 2 CK or CS scores become available during the application process, candidates may, at their discretion, enter the new information in “Personal Information” and upload the document. There are no adverse effects within the match process if Step 2 scores are not submitted.

Q Moving forward, will the USMLE Step 2 CK replace the USMLE Step 1 as the most critical exam for Ophthalmology applicants?

A Both examinations are seen as part of a holistic applicant profile that includes many other factors such as scholastic performance, leadership and service positions, research, and unique life experiences. Any single exam alone is inadequate to portray applicants’ unique characteristics and strengths.

Q What is the difference between an “integrated” program, a “joint” program, and a “traditional” program?

A These program distinctions refer to the relationship between the PGY-1 year and the remainder of the ophthalmology residency (PGY 2-4 years). In a “traditional” program, the PGY-1 year and the ophthalmology residency are completely separate and may occur at different institutions. For a traditional program, ophthalmology is not required in the PGY-1, but many programs offer it as an elective.

In a “joint” program, the PGY-1 year is completed at the same institution (or affiliated institution) as the ophthalmology residency. However, the Program Director for the preliminary year is not from the ophthalmology department, but from either internal medicine or general surgery (or other supervising department). In a “joint program”, ophthalmology rotations are incorporated into the PGY-1 year.

An “integrated” program is similar to a “joint” program except that the ophthalmology program oversees the PGY-1 year, so the ophthalmology Program Director is responsible for training for all 4 years. Both joint and integrated programs incorporate 3 months of ophthalmology into the PGY-1 training. The ACGME has mandated that all ophthalmology programs in the US transition to either a joint or an integrated program by July 1, 2023.

Q What is the process to apply to the different types of programs?

A The ACGME has required that by July 2023, all ophthalmology programs provide a PGY-1 in either an integrated or a joint format. Thus, over the next several years, the traditional programs will be converting to one of these types.

Some programs will be **integrated** by July 1, 2021. Ranking them in the SF Match is all that is required; their PGY-1 is part of the residency program, and the NRMP is not utilized for these programs.

Even though all years of training occur at the same institution, ranking **joint** programs must be done with both systems, using the NRMP for the PGY-1 year (which is under the department of medicine or surgery), and the SF Match for the PGY2-4 residency.

Ranking programs with a **traditional** PGY-1 (which can be performed anywhere) also requires using the NRMP for the PGY-1 training and the SF Match for the ophthalmology residency portion.

Since the majority of applicants will be applying to a mix of traditional, integrated, and joint programs, **they will need to participate in both matches**. In the event that an applicant chooses to apply to integrated programs exclusively, then only the SF Match would be necessary. **Given the competitiveness of the application process, applying solely to SF Match by choosing integrated programs only is risky and not recommended.**

Q How many letters of recommendation are required? How many need to be from ophthalmologists?

A SF Match uses a Central Application Service (CAS) to distribute applications to residency programs online. Applicants are required to complete a CAS application (Personal Information and Additional Information forms) and upload all additional requested documents. Among the required documents are three

letters of recommendation; at least one of these letters should be from an ophthalmologist, if possible.

Q Will letters of recommendation from other specialties be more acceptable to programs for this cycle?

A Three letters of recommendation are needed for a complete application, one of which should be from an ophthalmologist. The other two may be from persons of your choice. Common writers include professors or preceptors from other rotations or a basic science course, research mentors, community or academic service supervisors, or prior employers. The best letters are from those who can vouch for a candidate's character, knowledge, and skills.

Q Should applicants apply to more programs this cycle to make up for any decrease in away rotations?

A Away rotations are not required to successfully match and may or may not have any effect on an applicant's competitiveness. Whether or not an applicant completes an away rotation (either in-person or virtual) should not alter the number of programs to which a candidate decides to apply.

Q Is there a limit to the number of programs to which a candidate can apply?

A No, applicants are free to apply to as many as they wish. In making this decision, please refer to the information on the [AUPPO](#) and [SF Match](#) websites. Also, candidates should confer with their faculty advisor to determine the best number.

Q When will interview invitations go out?

A October 18, 2021 is the first date that interview invitations can be extended. Additional

invitations may be offered by programs after this date. Residency programs will be using the SF Match's integrated Interview Scheduler. Applicants will be limited to a maximum of two interviews per day, but this may not be possible in many cases due to the length and timing of each individual program's interview schedule. An applicant must release one interview slot in order to schedule an interview with a different program at the same time; in other words, scheduling for more than one interview during the same time slot is not permissible.

Q How much later will the interview season be this cycle if it all?

A The first date on which interviews may be held is November 1, 2021. The final date for interviews is January 7, 2022.

Q Will interviews be performed in-person or by video conferencing?

A The AUPO has directed that all interviews, including those for local students, will be conducted virtually again for this match cycle.

Q Is there a limit to the number of interviews I can do this year?

A Each applicant may do a maximum of 18 interviews this year and can schedule a maximum of two on any given day, provided the hours do not overlap. A recent three-year analysis showed that the mean number of interviews per applicant was 9.29. In addition, historical data show that interviewing at more than 10 programs is associated with a 90% success rate of matching.

Q Will virtual sessions (other than interviews) be conducted by programs this year so that applicants can meet program faculty and residents as well as introduce themselves to programs they are highly interested in?

A All programs are developing the best approach to showcase what makes them special. There will likely be a variety of virtual programs and materials developed for this purpose, but the content and length will be determined by each program individually. A number of programs are likely to offer virtual open houses for applications over the summer and fall to meet some faculty and residents and learn more about their program.

Q Is it possible to visit a program in person after a virtual interview in order to get a better feel for it?

A This year SF Match is piloting a new post-interview process. Interviews will conclude on January 7, 2022, and programs must submit their rank lists by January 12, 2022. Starting the following day, January 13, until January 25, programs have the option to hold in-person open houses **only for those applicants who interviewed there**. An applicant may reserve a slot for an in-person visit any time after being interviewed, but the program will not know the name of the applicant reserving the slot until after program rank lists have been submitted.

These sessions will be a maximum of 4 hours in length and may include tours of facilities where residents will train, tours of the city or town where the program is located, and social sessions with residents and faculty. Candidates will not be interviewed and coercive activities toward applicants are prohibited. Importantly, **these programs will have already submitted their rank lists, but applicants do not submit their lists until February 1**. Consequently, these live visits should be a relaxed, pressure-free opportunity for applicants to further evaluate programs. They are completely optional for both programs and applicants and will be scheduled in advance through the SF Match, just as the interviews are.

Q What if away rotations are not completed before applications are due?

A All programs understand the significant disruption in medical education due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including inability for some students to participate in away electives, as well as a maximum of one away elective this year. Away rotations have never been necessary to successfully match into an ophthalmology residency.

The CAS application contains a section where applicants list electives and related activities in which experience in ophthalmology has been gained. Future rotations may be included, along with the planned location and dates. Completion of all ophthalmology rotations before submitting an application to SF Match is not a requisite.

Q What if a medical school does not have an associated ophthalmology department?

A Applicants are encouraged to first reach out to the Dean of Student Affairs and express interest in a career in Ophthalmology. He/she/they will be critical in supporting applicants in this endeavor. Many schools have affiliations with outside Ophthalmology departments or practicing ophthalmologists in the community. In addition, alumni at the institution who have become ophthalmologists are an important resource.

The [AAO medical student webpage](#), the [AUPO medical student resources webpage](#), and the [SF Match website](#) also contain valuable resource materials. The AUPO also favors students from schools without ophthalmology departments performing visiting clerkships at outside institutions. Furthermore, some institutions will be offering virtual clerkships. Visiting the websites of the programs will be a good resource. Reaching out directly to the Medical Student Educator or Residency Program Director at institutions that are of interest is another option.

Q Without away rotations, networking and mentors will be critical for success in the match. How can students without home departments or programs develop a mentor or networking base?

A Each institution's alumni who previously matched in Ophthalmology are a good resource; the Student Affairs office will likely have this information. Attending webinars offered by the AUPO, SF Match and AAO, and reaching out to local ophthalmologists directly, or other ophthalmologists via social media, are ways to develop networks. Many institutions may offer virtual opportunities to engage with their department.

Q Are there resources and information available to help applicants decide if ophthalmology is the right fit?

A Many resources are available to assist interested individuals in the decision to pursue a career in ophthalmology. The Residency Program Director, Medical Student Education Director, faculty members, and residents in the Department of Ophthalmology at medical schools can offer information about the specialty and career advice. On the SF Match website, key characteristics for all participating residency programs are listed (see URL below). A rotation in ophthalmology at home institutions or, if a school does not have an ophthalmology department, an away rotation can provide valuable exposure to the field. The following websites are additional resources for those who are considering residency training in ophthalmology:

[Ophthalmology Resources for Medical Students](#) (American Academy of Ophthalmology)

[Medical Student Resources](#) (Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology)

[Ophthalmology Residency](#) (SF Match)

[Minority Ophthalmology Mentoring](#) (American Academy of Ophthalmology)

Q

What is an underrepresented in medicine group (URiM)? Does ophthalmology have information for someone who identifies as an URiM?

A

Underrepresented in Medicine (URiM) individuals include those who identify as Black or African American, Hispanic, or Latino, and/or Native American (American Indian/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian). The CAS application offers an opportunity for applicants to indicate whether they are a member of an URiM group, although applicants are free to decline to provide this information. The Minority Ophthalmology Mentoring (MOM) program was developed as a collaborative effort between the American Academy of Ophthalmology and Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology. The purpose of this program is to increase diversity in ophthalmology by helping URiM students become competitive ophthalmology residency applicants. Students receive one-on-one mentorship, valuable guidance in medical career planning, networking opportunities and access to a variety of educational resources. [Additional information](#) about the program is available.

Personal information includes contact information, education, employment, exam scores, achievements, honors, awards, and publications.

- **Document Storage**

All documents uploaded are automatically stored in the applicant's file cabinet and can be used in any other SF Match specialty that is part of the Central Application Service (CAS).

- **Information Management**

- Programs have access to updated personal information in real time.
- Applicants can update applications any time during the process.
- Returning applicants can re-use documents already stored with SF Match.
- Applicants have the ability to enter up to 20 different publication types in the research section.
- The system provides real-time reminders of items missing to assist applicants.

Detailed instructions will be provided once an applicant is registered in the system on or after July 1, 2021.

Q

What are enhanced features in the SF Match System?

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The new SF Match portal has been redesigned from beginning to end to enhance the user experience with new controls and features for applicants. New system features are outlined below:

- **Customizable Personal Statement**
Applicants have the option to create multiple versions of personal statements and assign a different version to each program to which they apply.
- **Customizable Selection for Letters of Reference**
Applicants can request and receive an unlimited number of reference letters and assign any desired set of 3 letters to individual programs.
- **Active Personal Information**
Applicants can update their personal information throughout the match cycle.

Q

How does the Interview Scheduler work?

A

The Interview Scheduler provides a convenient, consolidated tool to schedule and manage the process of inviting applicants to interview while providing applicants an easy interface in which to manage the invitations they receive. Applicants can accept or decline interview invitations or switch a confirmed interview invitation as long as another date is available. Confidentiality will be maintained in this system. Applicants will be able to view only their individual interview schedules and not those of other candidates or programs. Programs will be able to view only their own list of interviewees, and not those from other programs.

The post-interview live program visits will also be scheduled through a centralized SF Match

platform similar to the Interview Scheduler. Dates and times for such visits will be available on the platform and applicants may sign up at their convenience. Programs will receive the names of those applicants scheduled to visit them only after they have turned in their rank lists.

In-depth training will be provided in July and August via webinars (live and on-demand) and written materials.

Q **Will ophthalmology programs develop an ophthalmology specific exam so that students have an opportunity to take an objective and standardized exam? Objective exams are viewed as an opportunity for students from smaller schools to shine relative to applicants from well-known institutions.**

A The AUPO has no plans to create an ophthalmology-specific standardized exam as part of the application process. Examination scores are viewed as an important part of the application but are not the only factor in assessing how well an applicant may perform as a resident. Clinical rotation grades and evaluations are also extremely important in assessing applicants' clinical acumen and knowledge base as well as learning more about an applicant's other abilities such as teamwork, professionalism, ethical behavior, and interpersonal/communication skills. Letters of evaluation can also serve as important sources of information regarding an applicant's unique characteristics and abilities.