

2023–24

Ophthalmology Residency Match FAQs

FAQs



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

A Important deadlines for the 2023–2024 match cycle include:

July 3: Applicant registration portal opens.

Sept 1: Beginning on September 1, application forms, along with supplementary material (e.g., recommendation letters, USMLE 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 10: Programs begin to extend interview invitations to applicants. Interview invitations will continue to be sent on a rolling basis at the discretion of individual programs.

Oct 23: Interviews begin. **All interviews will be virtual this year.**

Dec 22: Final day of interviews.

Jan 4: Program deadline to submit rank lists by 12:00 pm (noon) Pacific Time.

Jan 5: Optional live Open Houses begin.

Jan 25: Last day for optional live Open House visits.

Jan 30: Applicant deadline to submit rank lists by 12:00 pm (noon) Pacific Time.

Feb 6: Match results made available to applicants, residency programs, and medical schools. Log in is required.

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 Are the Acuity Insights (formerly Altus) assessments (Casper, Duet) being used for this match cycle?

A No; they will not be used for the 2023–2024 ophthalmology residency match cycle. There is no requirement for applicants to register with Acuity Insights or take any of their assessments this year.

Q Is there an advantage to submitting my application before September 1?

A Programs will not have access to applications prior to September 1, so no review of applications will occur before then. If your file is not complete by September 1 you may upload data at any time and it will be available to programs in real time. No interview invitations will be extended until October 10, and invitations for interview may continue through December 22.

Q What is new on the application this year?

A Questions around visa sponsorship and immigration status have been simplified to ensure clarity regarding applicant needs for sponsorship.

The format of the research section is being revised to make it easier for programs to quickly determine type and status of applicant research activities.

Applicants will be required to submit Step 2 scores if the exam has been taken. Step 1 results are still required and the question asking about the number of times taken will be retained.

Q Are USMLE Step 1 and USMLE Step 2 CK required?

A Applicants must upload a USMLE Step 1 score report as part of a complete application. In addition to providing Step 1 results, applicants will be asked to report the number of times Step 1 has been taken. The completion of Step 2 (CK), however, 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 has been taken before submission, applicants must upload a Step 2 score report.

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 and a “joint” 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 “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. Since the ACGME has mandated that all ophthalmology programs in the US transition to either a joint or an integrated program by July 1, 2023, all programs fall into one of these categories.

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. Applicants are recommended to apply to a combination of both integrated and joint programs to increase opportunities for a successful match.

Integrated programs: Applicants who successfully match into an ophthalmology program with an integrated PGY-1 year are automatically matched into the program's integrated intern year. Applicants do not need to enroll in NRMP as they are already matched into the affiliated integrated program.

Joint programs: Applicants who successfully match into an ophthalmology program with a joint PGY-1 year are NOT automatically matched into the joint intern year. Applicants should contact their ophthalmology residency program for guidance on how they should proceed to be matched into the joint PGY-1 year. This may include the need to participate in the NRMP match.

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 Required Supplemental 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 Are letters of recommendation from other specialties acceptable?

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 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 [AUPO](#) 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 The first date interview invites can be released is October 10, 2023. Programs may extend further invitations after this date on a rolling basis. All residency programs will be using the SF Match's integrated Interview Scheduler to send invitations. Applicants may schedule more than one interview per day as long as the schedules do not conflict. Reserving more than one interview within the same time slot is not permitted nor allowed on the Interview Scheduler. In order to arrange an interview with a different program at a conflicting time, an applicant must release one interview slot.

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 15 interviews this year. 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.

The interview scheduler will allow a maximum of 15 interviews. To substitute one interview for another, one interview must be released. Interview scheduling outside of the SF Match portal is not permitted and may result in penalties to both programs and applicants.

Q What are opportunities for future applicants and programs to meet or get to learn about each other?

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. Programs may offer meet and greet events, etc. for applicants prior to interview season to meet some of their 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 Yes. This year SF Match will continue a post-interview in-person visitation opportunity. Interviews will conclude on December 22, 2023, and programs must submit their rank lists by January 4, 2024. Starting on January 5 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 after being interviewed using the SF Match scheduling platform, but the name of the applicant reserving the slot will not be released to programs until AFTER the program rank lists have been submitted on January 4th.

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 re-interviewed and coercive activities toward applicants are prohibited.

Importantly, these programs will have already submitted their rank lists, but **applicant rank lists are not due until January 30 at 12:00 pm (noon) Pacific Time**. 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.

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

A Away rotations have never been necessary to successfully match into an ophthalmology residency and remain completely optional. Given the desire of many applicants to partake in an away rotation, many will not have completed them until the interview process is underway. If applicants have information from an away rotation that they would like to include in their file, e.g., research conducted/presented, awards, etc., they may add them at any time.

In addition, specialty electives and related activities, in which ophthalmology experience has been gained, is part of the Required Supplemental Form. 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. 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](#) all contain valuable resource materials. The AUPO also favors students from schools without ophthalmology departments

performing visiting clerkships at outside institutions. Furthermore, some institutions will also be offering virtual clerkships. Visiting the websites of the programs will be a good resource. Reaching out directly to the Director of Medical Student Education or Residency Program Director at institutions that are of interest is another option.

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, Director of Medical Student Education, 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, Pacific Islander, 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.

Q What are enhanced features in the SF Match System?

A The SF Match portal has been designed from beginning to end to enhance the user experience with controls and features for applicants. Some of the enhanced 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. 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.
- 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 3, 2023.

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 SF Match's Open House 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 recommendation can also serve as important sources of information regarding an applicant's unique characteristics and abilities.