

2024–25

Ophthalmology Residency Match FAQs

FAQs



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

A Important deadlines for the 2024–2025 match cycle include:

July 1: Central Application Service (CAS) registration portal opens.

Sept 3: Beginning on September 3, application forms, along with supplementary material (e.g., recommendation letters, USMLE/COMLEX 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.

Sept 25: MSPE letters are released.

Oct 8: 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 22: Programs may begin to interview candidates. ***All interviews will be virtual this year.***

Dec 2: Last date for programs to send interview invitations.

Dec 20: Final day of interviews.

Jan 3: Program deadline to submit rank lists by 12:00 pm (noon) Pacific Time.

Jan 4: Optional live Open Houses begin.

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

Jan 28: Applicant deadline to submit rank lists by 12:00 pm (noon) Pacific Time.

Feb 4: 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 Is there an advantage to submitting my application before September 3?

A Programs will not have access to applications prior to September 3, so no review of applications will occur before then. If your file is not complete by September 3 you may upload data at any time and it will be available

to programs in real time. Interview invitations cannot be extended prior to October 8. Interviews may be extended up to December 20.

Q What is new on the application this year?

A This year will be the first year the ophthalmology match uses “preference signaling,” a system where applicants can indicate a higher level of interest in a certain number of programs by submitting a “signal” to those programs at the time of application submission. Applicants will have seven signals that they can send. Applicants are not required to send signals and are encouraged to talk with their faculty advisor to determine the best approach. Please visit the FAQ on the [Medical Student Resources](#) page of the AUPO website for more detailed information about preference signaling.

The AUPO acknowledges that applicants may use AI assistance in formatting or composing portions of their application. Applicants that use AI assistance are required to disclose this on the application. Using AI assistance without disclosure will constitute a match violation.

Q Are USMLE Step 1/COMLEX Level 1 and USMLE Step 2 CK/COMLEX-USA Level 2-CE required?

A Applicants must upload a USMLE Step 1 score or COMLEX Level 1 report to complete the application. In addition to providing these results, applicants will be asked to report the number of times the exam has been taken. The completion of USMLE Step 2 (CK) or COMLEX-USA Level 2-CE, however, is not required at the time of application submission. The timing of Step 2/Level 2 is up to the applicant, after consultation with medical school advisors. If Step 2/Level 2 has been taken before submission, applicants must upload a Step 2/Level 2 score report.

Some training programs require a USMLE 1 score report in addition to COMLEX level 1. The applicant should review the requirements of each program prior to applying.

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 In 2023, the ACGME required all ophthalmology programs in the US to become either integrated or joint programs. All programs fall into one of these groups.

In an “integrated” program, the ophthalmology program supervises the PGY-1 year; therefore, the ophthalmology program director is accountable for training throughout all four years. In a “joint” program, the PGY-1 year is completed at the same (or affiliated) institution as the ophthalmology residency. However, this training year is supervised by a preliminary year program director from another department (often internal medicine or general surgery).

Both joint and integrated programs incorporate 3 months of ophthalmology into the PGY-1 training. Residents will be adequately prepared to start ophthalmology residency regardless of which type of intern program they train in.

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. To increase the chances of a successful match, applicants are recommended to apply to a combination of integrated and joint programs.

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: An applicant who successfully matches into an ophthalmology program with a joint PGY-1 year is guaranteed a position in the joint internship but is NOT automatically matched into that position. Applicants should contact each joint 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. Three letters of recommendation are required; where possible, at least one should be from an ophthalmologist. Other sources of letters include professors or preceptors from clinical rotations or medical school, research mentors, community or academic service supervisors, or employers. The best letters are from those who can vouch for a candidate's character, knowledge and skills.

Q Do all programs I apply to need to receive the same 3 recommendation letters or can some of my programs receive different letters of recommendation?

A Applicants can upload more than 3 letters of recommendation to the portal and are able to assign different recommendation letters to any given program.

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 8. Programs may extend further invitations after this date on a rolling basis. The final date that programs may extend invitations is December 2. 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 opportunities are there to learn more about a program?

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 virtual 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 as a Live Open House. Interviews will conclude on December 20, and programs must submit their rank lists by January 3. Starting on January 4, programs have the option to hold in-person open houses **only for those applicants who interviewed with them**. 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 3rd.

Importantly, these programs will have already submitted their rank lists, but **applicant rank lists are not due until January 28 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.

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.

Q Can I contact a program to express my interest, either before or after interview invitations have been sent out?

A Communication preferences differ by program. Some allow direct communication while others prefer not to receive direct messages.

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

A Away rotations have never been mandatory 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 such as ophthalmology experiences that have been or will be gained can be listed on the application in a section also known as the Required Supplemental Form.

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 web-](#)

[page](#), 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 also offer 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 spe-

cialty 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 1.

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 Open House 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.

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 2024–2025 ophthalmology residency match cycle. Applicants are not required to register with Acuity Insights or take any of their assessments this year.