2025–26
Ophthalmology Residency Match FAQs

Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology

sfmatch
Residency and Fellowship Matching Services

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

A Important deadlines for the 2025–2026 match cycle include:

July 1: Applicant registration begins at **https://sfmatch.org**.

Sept 2: Beginning on September 2, 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 24: Anticipated MSPE letters are released.

Oct 15: First interview release date. Additional invitation batch releases occur on October 22, 29, and November 5. Interview batches will be released at noon EST.

Oct 27: Programs may begin to interview candidates. ***All interviews will be virtual this year.***

Dec 19: Final day of interviews.

Jan 2: Program deadline to submit rank lists by 12:00 pm (noon) Pacific Time.

Jan 5: Optional live Open Houses begin.

Jan 20: Last day for optional live Open House visits.

Jan 22: Applicant deadline to submit rank lists by 12:00 pm (noon) Pacific Time.

Jan 29: Match results made available to applicants, residency programs, and medical schools. Log in is required.

A complete timeline with these dates can be found on the **SF Match website** on the Ophthalmology Residency timetable at **https://sfmatch.org**, as well as on the AUPO website at **https://aupo.org/ programs-services/medical-students** on the Programs and Services/Medical Student Resources page.

Q

Is there an advantage to submitting my application before September 2?

A

Programs will not have access to applications prior to September 2, so no review of applications will occur before then. If your file is not complete by September 2 you may upload data at any time and it will be available to programs in real time.

Q

What is new on the application this year?

A

To address the challenges faced by applicants and programs, Ophthalmology has established a new timeline for releasing interview invitations for the 25-26 match. Instead of the traditional period during which invitations can arrive at any time, interview invitations will be issued in four batches on October 15, 22, 29, and November 5. Applicants will be able to sign up for interviews immediately upon receiving the invitation from a program. Programs may choose to release interviews all at once or in different batches, and they may only extend invitations according to the number of interview slots available. Applicants may cancel interviews at any time. Additional information is available in the separate **Interview Release FAQ** found on the **SF Match website** as well as on the AUPO website at **https://aupo.org** on the Programs and Services/Medical Student Resources page.

Ophthalmology will continue its preference signaling with the number of signals increasing from 7 to 10. Additional information is available in the separate **Preference Signaling FAQ** found on the **SF Match website** as well as on the AUPO website at **https://aupo.org** on the **Programs and Services/Medical Student Resources** page.

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 enter the exam details in the Personal Information form and upload the 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

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 responsible 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 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 15. 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 unique. 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 19, and programs must submit their rank lists by January 2. Starting on January 5, 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 2.

Importantly, these programs will have already submitted their rank lists, but *applicant rank lists are not due until January 22 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 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 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:

Medical Student Resources (Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology)

Ophthalmology Resources for Medical Students (American Academy of Ophthalmology)

Ophthalmology Residency (SF Match)

Vision Mentoring Program (American Academy of Ophthalmology)

Q **What are the 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. The Personal Information Form includes contact information; education; employment; medical exam scores, licenses and certifications; 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 the Personal Info Form and upload additional documents, deemed acceptable by CAS at any time.

  – 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.