

Getting into Dental School

Dental school is a type of graduate professional school, with 65 dental schools located in the United States. Four years of study and multiple licensing exams stand between students and their dental degrees. So you decided that you still want to be a dentist? Great! You've probably decided you that mouths, teeth, and blood don't scare you. You might be wondering what you need to do to get into dental school. It's a long process, but this guide is here to aid you along the way.

Undergraduate Education



Most dental schools require a four-year degree to enter. Your undergraduate major doesn't matter, so long as the required coursework detailed by schools of your choosing is completed. Common prerequisites include:

- General chemistry with lab and organic chemistry
- Biology, microbiology, and biochemistry
- Psychology and sociology

Each school may have different requirements. AP credit isn't usually accepted in place of prerequisites, but that isn't a hard and fast rule. Furthermore, some schools recommend certain courses like upper level science, or artistic classes that they feel will prepare you for their curriculum. Make sure to check out the websites of schools you're interested in.

Application Dates

A good rule of thumb for applying to dental school is to have your application in before the end of July. Applicants apply to schools through the AADSAS system, where you'll designate the schools you want to send your application to after filling out information about yourself. Schools typically interview candidates from September until March, and the first day acceptances can be sent out is December 1st.

Application Tips

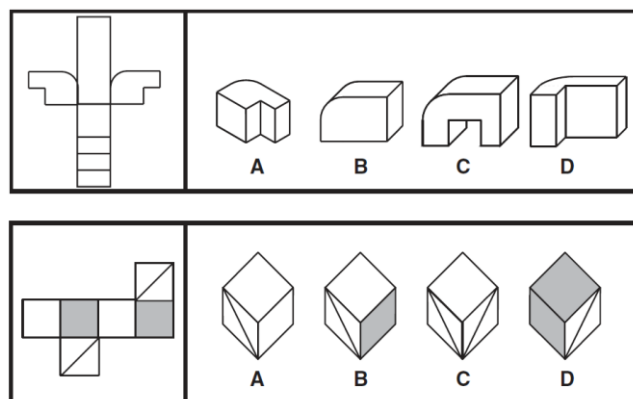
Dental schools look for well-rounded applicants. They expect meaningful extracurricular activities along with good grades and DAT scores. We'll cover the DAT in the next section. Meaningful extracurricular activities could include work experience, research experience, volunteering, and leadership roles. All schools require a minimum number of shadowing hours, so once again, you should familiarize yourself with each school's varying requirements.

The DAT

All schools require you to take the DAT. The DAT is a five-hour exam that tests you on a variety of subjects. DAT subject include:

- PAT (perceptual ability test)
- Biology, general chemistry, and organic chemistry
- Math and reading

Applicants usually take the exam at least a few months before applying to schools. The exam costs over \$400 dollars, and study materials cost even more. Below is an example of some PAT questions. Can you figure out the folded object?



Shadowing Dentists



Does this look interesting to you? In order to know whether or not you want to be a dentist, you have to shadow one. Shadowing gives you a look at the ins and outs of the profession. Dentists can share their insight with you and offer valuable advice. Here are some ideas for setting up a shadowing experience:

- Visiting local dental offices
- Reach out to your family dentist
- Consider shadowing a specialty like orthodontics

Remember to be polite and respectful while shadowing. It's good practice to cap your shadowing at 15-20 hours unless a dentist invites you for more.

Interviewing

If you manage to get an interview, then congratulations! You should plan ahead with your class schedule, since you might need to take time off to travel. Scheduling mock interviews and reviewing your reasons for pursuing dentistry are good ideas for interview preparation. Dress for success like the students below!



Costs

Many people don't realize the cost of applying to dental school. While dentistry is a financially rewarding career, it requires investment.

- The DAT exam costs over \$400.
- Study materials can cost another \$300.
- The AADSAS application system charges \$100 for each school applied to.
- Each school requires a supplemental fee of usually \$100.
- Travel costs include Uber and Lyft, plane flights, and hotel bookings.
- Start saving up!

Many schools cost upwards of \$100,000 a year with tuition, fees, and living expenses. Student loans are available, but expensive. In-state school tuition might be half as much as out-of-state schools!



Keep at It

Getting into dental school is a long process. According to the ADEA (American Dental Education Association, in 2013, 12,162 students applied to dental schools, and only 5,796 ended up enrolling in a program.

You might feel discouraged or ready to give up. You could even find yourself interviewing at schools and second-guessing your goals. As with any impactful life choice, give yourself time and information in order to make to best decision for yourself. Good luck!

The primary audience of this technical description is pre-dental students, or any person looking to start on a pre-dental path.

The context of use I imagined for this document is within a guide site like the American Dental Association, the American Dental Education Association, or as a handout at a Pre-Dental Club meeting.