



## Applying to Veterinary School: An Introduction

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**Remember, there is no proven formula for acceptance!** There *is* a way to prepare yourself in an organized and intelligent manner so that you have a handle on the different aspects of application. Read on for details, and good luck to you!

### Preparing for veterinary school

**grades/ coursework** » Of course, your grades must be as high as you can get them. Many schools list average GPAs of successful applicants on their web sites (for example, Cornell lists 3.7, while Penn lists 3.56). Vet schools will calculate your inclusive GPA, which means that they will include the original grades for any courses you have repeated. You should consider this when deciding whether or not to repeat a course—for example, raising an F to an A will still make a significant difference to your GPA, but raising a B to an A may not be worth the effort. (And by the way, please don't get F's!) Don't only try to get as many A's as you can; also enroll in courses that show you can handle academic challenges. Schools can tell if you took electives that gave you "easy A's" or if you chose to take several difficult courses even though you weren't required to. Also remember to take prerequisites into consideration (below).

**prerequisites** » This is an important area to research before deciding where to apply. Some schools require Animal Nutrition (like Florida State), some require Cell Biology (Tennessee), some require Microbiology (Cornell) and some require all three (Michigan State). Some schools require more humanities than others and some require labs that other schools don't. Pitt Pre-vet is hoping to post a detailed guide to prerequisites on the Pre-vet web site ([www.pitt.edu/~sorc/prevet](http://www.pitt.edu/~sorc/prevet)) before the year is over. We will also provide Bio advising with a binder about the applications process. To do your own research, [www.aavmc.org](http://www.aavmc.org) is a helpful link. Under "Applying to Veterinary School" choose "College Specific Requirements" and then "College Specifications." Click on any college listed for brief details on admissions, deadlines, and entrance requirements. Many schools also have details posted on their web sites.

**hours of animal experience** » Most veterinary schools require some sort of animal experience. This may include volunteering (for example at rescue leagues or wildlife centers), animal care/ husbandry internships, working at pet shops, pet sitting, dog walking, etc. The more animal contact the better.

**hours of veterinary experience** » Vet experience is different from plain old animal experience. Most schools prefer that you have worked for a vet for at least a year. Observation/ shadow studies are good too, but work is best. Different schools have different averages and/ or requirements. For example, Ohio State University requires 80 hours with one vet. Penn recommends at least 500 hours of combined vet and animal experience, while successful Cornell applicants claim an average of 1,335 hours. Get as much quality experience as you can, and research the averages/requirements of your favorite schools.

**community activities/ organizations** » Schools want to see your dedication to veterinary medicine, but they also want to see that you have a life outside your love for animals. They want to see a well-rounded list of experience that shows you have a personality and other interests beyond animals. Examples of helpful activities include (but are in no way limited to): honor societies/ frats, non-animal-related volunteering (museums, hospitals, orphanages, senior citizens' centers, kids' camps/sports, etc), various campus organizations, and artistic endeavors (drawing/ dance/ music/ writing).

**research** » Involve yourself in some sort of research, no matter what position you take. If you can secure a position that leads to your name being mentioned in a scientific paper, all the better.

## **The application process**

**when to apply** » If you do not want to skip a year between undergraduate and veterinary school, remember that you must be ready to apply by the end of your junior year/ beginning of your senior year. VMCAS applications are ready to fill out by May (junior year), although the deadline is early October (senior). VMCAS does not forward any application materials to colleges until September, so you may want to use the summer after your junior year to gain additional experience before sending in your application.

**choosing schools** » Research the schools you're applying to and figure out which have accepted the most students in your state (and in your academic range) in the past. Your best bet is probably your in-state school, so make sure you at least meet that school's minimum requirements.

**GRE** » The Graduate Record Exam is the exam that most veterinary schools prefer to look at when evaluating a standardized testing score. Some schools will also accept an MCAT score, but most students opt to take the GRE. The GRE is taken on a computer at a testing center. Your score appears on the computer screen after you finish (except for your essay score, which is mailed to you). As long as you register far enough in advance, you can schedule your test for almost any date you'd like. Remember that you cannot take the GRE twice in one month, and leave enough time to re-take it if you must.

The GRE has three sections: Verbal, quantitative and analytical writing. Verbal consists of analogies, sentence completions and reading comprehension; quantitative deals with math problems on topics ranging from geometry to algebra; analytical writing consists of two essays. Verbal and quantitative sections are each worth 800 points, and analytical writing is scored out of 6. Many schools provide averages for GRE scores of past successful applicants—for example, Penn's average is around 570 verbal and 700 math (<http://www.vet.upenn.edu/admissions/faq.html>). Depending on the strength of the rest of your application, you may want your GRE score to be significantly higher than the average for your school of choice. The best way to study is to start well in advance (6 months or more) and to practice, practice, practice.

**VMCAS** » The Veterinary Medical Colleges Application Service (VMCAS) provides students with an online application that can be forwarded to a number of schools. The online VMCAS application is convenient because you only need to enter your information once and it is forwarded to however many VMCAS affiliates you are applying to. (VMCAS affiliates include the top-ranked schools of Penn, Cornell and Colorado State, in addition to most U.S. veterinary schools.) The VMCAS application asks you to provide detail about veterinary experience, animal experience and employment experience, as well as honors and awards, extracurricular/ community activities, academic coursework and a personal statement. You must also register evaluations with VMCAS, which can be completed on paper forms or online.

**schools unaffiliated with VMCAS** » Certain schools prefer not to receive any information from VMCAS, and so these schools will require that you re-enter all of your information—from date of birth to details and hours of animal experience. You will need to have your evaluations sent directly to these schools, which include some U.S. schools (such as Tufts University) as well as many international schools.

**application fees** » VMCAS charges you a fee (around \$90 per school) for the materials that the application service will send to VMCAS-affiliated schools to which you're applying. These materials include all of the information you fill out on the VMCAS site as well as the evaluations you register through VMCAS. (VMCAS will NOT forward your transcripts to your schools of choice.) In addition to VMCAS fees, you will also need to pay application fees for most schools. These usually range from \$45-60 per school.

**personal statement** » Your personal statement is your chance to really stand out and show schools that you are unique. You should have your statement read by a few trusted people, possibly including one vet and/ or someone who is familiar with the admissions end of the spectrum. Your statement should include your veterinary goals, but don't get too specific with your plan. Schools want to see that you understand realistic possibilities—for example, not everyone can become a zoo vet. In your statement, try to focus on your interests in medicine and science rather than how much you love to cuddle with animals. Schools get a million essays that should actually be titled "How I can say 'I love animals' in 200 different sentences." Stand out, and show that your veterinary goals are backed by more than just a childhood fantasy!

**supplementals** » Some schools ask for your supplemental right off the bat, so that the supplemental deadline is close to the VMCAS deadline (beginning of October). These schools include Colorado State and Cornell. Other schools will simply ask that you turn in your VMCAS, and if they like your VMCAS they will invite you to complete a supplemental application. These schools usually notify you in late October to November, and include Ohio State University, University of Madison-Wisconsin, and Virginia Polytech. The last and simplest type of school asks for no supplemental at all—an example is University of Pennsylvania. All schools will ask that you have copies of all college transcripts forwarded to their offices.

**interviews** » Depending on the school, interviews can start as early as November or December. Some schools will let you know via email or post if you are not qualified enough to enter the applicant pool, and they will do this as soon as possible for your convenience and comfort. Once a school has selected you and notified you of the interview date, you must usually confirm your interview within 48 hours. Interview dates are seldom negotiable; if you can't make your interview, the school will often re-schedule you as the very last interview (if that is convenient for you). Of course, this puts you at a significant disadvantage.

You can find sample interview questions online by searching via Google or another effective search engine. Some schools include sample interview questions on their web sites.

**accepting admission** » Now for the best part, which comes when you're finally done! You sit back and wait to hear from schools. If you get accepted, most schools require that you submit a non-refundable fee to reserve your spot in their incoming class. This is a good fallback method if you are granted acceptance to one school while you're still waiting to hear from your favorite school. If you are not accepted anywhere, never fear: Many extremely intelligent veterinarians were not accepted into school on their first try. You can often contact schools to which you were not accepted to schedule a post-rejection interview, in which you are offered constructive feedback for re-application. It is a difficult task to make your application significantly more impressive in just half a year, so consider carefully before deferring acceptance from one school in order to reapply to another. Remember that acceptance into any veterinary school is a major accomplishment. Once you get in, don't forget to pat yourself on the back for all your hard work!