



HOW TO GET INTO VETERINARY SCHOOL

A GUIDE BASED ON YOUR QUESTIONS!

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

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This eBook is written from the perspective of The University of Florida's College of Veterinary Medicine admissions team. Every CVM has different requirements and recommendations. Therefore it is critical to contact each school regarding your application and questions about their program.

This text provides general guidelines for those applying to the Veterinary Medical College Application Service (VMCAS) application and general veterinary admissions processes for schools accredited by the American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC). Where did the questions come from? From you! As the pre-vet advisor for UF's College of Veterinary Medicine, I have held more than 1,000 meetings with pre-vet hopefuls. The content is based on the most commonly asked questions I receive from students in your shoes, many of which now walk the halls of veterinary schools around the globe.

Remember, there can be exceptions to recommendations and not all advice will work for everyone.

Be sure to contact your colleges every year to see if requirements and recommendations have changed. This edition is written for the 2019-2020 application cycle.

Enjoy and Go Gators!”

-Alex

A NOTE FOR PARENTS/ EMOTIONAL SUPPORT HUMANS

Hello!

By reading this book, you are showing interest and investment into your student's future! I am so happy to know that our pre-vet students have a strong network of support before they arrive to our facilities. This book can help you help them navigate the sometimes daunting process of professional school and the veterinary application.

For parents of children younger than 10th grade, is earlier always better? I receive many calls from parents saying they know they need to start early, which is great! But so many requirements can change by the time your child gets ready to apply to vet school that it may be better to focus on what you can control now. Think about which high school and undergraduate programs will provide them with the most opportunities (e.g clubs, research, volunteering and a variety of upper-level coursework.) **And don't rush it.** One of the most common concerns the admissions committees have are applicants who don't have enough life experience.

Since this is professional school, it is important that your student do this with you, but also on their own. I encourage you to let them make the phone calls, send the emails and setup the appointments with professionals who will help them on their journey. If they want you to come along, wonderful! But let them take the reigns. It is in their best interest to let them take the lead during this journey, as you won't be handing them scalpels in surgery suites.



HELPFUL VETERINARY DEFINITIONS

Animal Groups in Veterinary Medicine

- Small Animal**- primarily cats and dogs.
- Companion Animal**- typically refers to dogs and cats but can also include other animals that owners keep as pets.
- Large Animal**- typically refers to animals that would be found on a farm including sheep, goats, cattle, and pigs. This can sometimes include exotic animals that are not kept as pets or farm animals.
- Mixed Animal**- includes both small and large animal groups.
- Equine**- usually referred to separately outside of Large Animal and Farm Animal and only includes horses.
- Food Animal**- refers to animals, such as cattle, that humans use for food or food products.
- Exotics**- any animal that is not categorized in small, large or farm animal groups. This can include pocket pets, zoo animals, aquatic animals, and wildlife.
- Wildlife**- refers to any animal that is found in the wild and does not have an owning person or organization. Wildlife support is typically run through non-profit organizations or government entities.

Types of Veterinary Employment Experiences

- Industry**- typically referred to those food, medical and pharmaceutical organizations that do not focus on clinical practice. These organizations may have sales, recruitment, educational, research or another focus.
- Clinical Practice**- clinical practices, including both private and corporate hospitals, are the most common type of practices. In these, DVMs see animal patients that clients bring in for treatment or wellness.
- Private Practice**- has a DVM that treats and/or diagnoses animal patients that are owned by an individual or a group of individuals.
- Public Practice**- entails a DVM that treats and/or diagnoses animal patients that typically do not have an owning person or organization. Typically these are managed by a nonprofit or government entity (ex. Humane Society).
- Corporate Practice**- typically referring to clinical practices that are owned by a company or organization.
- Research**- the systematic investigation into and study of materials and sources in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions in veterinary medicine.

Additional Terms to Know

- Animal welfare**- the state of the animal; the treatment that an animal receives is covered by other terms such as animal care, animal husbandry, and humane treatment.
- Diversity**- understanding and appreciating interdependence of humanity, cultures, and the natural environment. Practicing mutual respect for qualities and experiences that are different from our own. Recognizing that personal, cultural and institutionalized discrimination creates and sustains privileges for some while creating and sustaining disadvantages for others; building alliances across differences so that we can work together to eradicate all forms of discrimination. (<http://www.qcc.cuny.edu/diversity/definition.html>)
- Euthanasia**- the act of putting an animal to death or allowing it to die by withholding extreme medical measures.
- First-Generation College Student**- any student who is the first in their immediate family to go to college.
- Holistic Admissions**- a university admissions strategy that assesses an applicant's unique experiences alongside traditional measures of academic achievement such as grades and test scores.
- Non-traditional student**- any student who has not applied to vet school during their junior year of college to begin vet school right after college ends.
- One Health**- recognizes that the health of people is connected to the health of animals and the environment. It is a collaborative, multisectoral, and transdisciplinary approach.
- Prerequisite course**- a required course to be eligible for vet school.
- Zoonosis**- a disease which can be transmitted to humans from animals.

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FOREWORD:

DO I EVEN WANT TO GO TO VETERINARY SCHOOL?

Notice the title is not, “Do I even want to be a veterinarian?”

The first thing I ask students when they say they want to be a veterinarian is, “how do you know?”

If the answer is, “because I love animals,” I stop them right there.

Almost everyone loves animals, but not everyone should be a veterinarian. To become a veterinarian you must first go to veterinary school. So my follow-up question is, “do you love science?”

For four years, in addition to your required undergraduate coursework, you will go through a strenuous science and practice-based curriculum. You will learn what a p wave represents in cardiology and how to identify an eosinophil cell in a horse. Your goal is to become a doctor of veterinary medicine and doctors are stewards of science, research and continued education. So you’ve got to love science first.

The second question I ask, surprisingly, is “do you like people?” I’ve heard folks give a lot of ratios, but the one I use the most is this: veterinary medicine is more like 80% people and 20% animals. The people are who bring your patients into the clinic. The people are your technicians and support staff that you need to give your patient the best care possible.

The people are the fellow veterinarians you work with to create comprehensive treatment plans. The people are the public you educate about zoonotic diseases, food safety and animal welfare.

So, if you can answer yes to loving science and liking people, then we can talk vet school.

And of course, a healthy love of animals is helpful.*

Exceptions to the recommendation: there are branches of veterinary medicine that deal less with people, but there will always be people.

**Note: veterinary medicine is for students who understand the realities of the profession including: student mental health and wellness, student debt, veterinary salary and the understanding that we can't save every animal.*



CHAPTER 1:

KNOW YOUR SCHOOLS

Q ■ HOW MANY SCHOOLS SHOULD I APPLY TO? ■ DOES IT MATTER WHEN I TURN IN MY APPLICATION?

According to the AAVMC, applicants should consider the “Three Cs” when choosing a program: Cost, Culture and Climate.

Cost is the actual tuition and cost of living. Most programs provide breakdowns of their tuition on their websites. You can explore scholarships that the colleges provide for students or seek scholarships outside of your CVM. Some students choose to take out professional school loans. Schools typically have a different tuition for in-state vs. out-of-state residents. Check out: vetschoolbound.org to find out your best tuition options.

Culture is the attitude and “vibe” of the school. Do your perspective CVMs’ values align with your own? Does it seem like a school you will feel comfortable, welcomed and enjoy for four years? Find out what the school is known for through website exploration and connection with current students or alumni. Culture can also include how the program is different from others. Does the college offer extracurricular support like tutors, career/financial aid advisors and mental health counselors? Do they have opportunities for research, certificate and dual-degree programs?

Climate is the physical location and weather of your CVM. What is the town like? How about the weather? If you know you love the snow, you can narrow your schools down to that climate. Consider if the location has what you need. Access to an airport? Close to family?

After you've narrowed down your top schools, it's time to check on the requirements. Does the school have minimum requirements for GPA, test scores and veterinary hours? Do they have specific requirements for letters of recommendation? Keep track of these requirements (and always check to see if there are updates/changes) so you know you are eligible for each school and don't waste money on schools for which you are ineligible.

The AAVMC publishes the Veterinary Medical School Admissions Requirements book ([VMSAR](#)), that includes a comprehensive overview of all AAVMC accredited institutions. You can also look at their website for general info about each program:

<https://www.aavmc.org/data/files/vmcas/geninfo.pdf>

So how many schools should apply to?

This is completely up to you. On average, students apply to five or six schools. Some schools may have opinions on how many schools you apply to, so you may want to ask those questions ahead of time. In general, I advise applying to schools you would attend if you received an offer. Otherwise, you are wasting your time/money/effort and the admissions committee's and team's time/effort.

Does it matter when you turn your application in? VMCAS opens up every summer, generally from early May to mid-September. However, some schools may take applications throughout the year. Find out the critical deadlines through programs' websites. You may hear the term "rolling admission," which means the sooner you turn your application in, the faster you hear an answer. It can also mean that by turning your application in faster, you will be compared to a smaller pool of applicants, which can help get you a seat in the class. Many med schools have a rolling admission. Since pre-vet and pre-med have similar prereqs, you will find many pre-med students in your courses. I advise you to follow the lead of other pre-vets and pre-vet advising, as pre-med is a different professional path. Contact your vet schools to see if they have a rolling admission.



CHAPTER 2:

ACADEMICS



Q ■ WHICH COURSES SHOULD I TAKE? ■ WHEN SHOULD I TAKE THE GRE?

Your overall GPA is comprised of prerequisite courses and any other courses you took at an upper-level institution (not high school, unless you dual-enrolled). Veterinary schools may have other GPAs they consider (e.g. science, last 45, physics/chem).

You have to ask yourself—do I want to get my foot in the door, or do I want to impress the admissions committee?

Getting your foot in the door looks like meeting minimum GPA requirements. However, once they see your GPA, what will they see on your transcripts?

Impressing the admissions committee means showing that you can handle a veterinary school curriculum, comprised of upper-level science courses requiring critical thinking and a strong understanding of science.

Challenge yourself by taking a rigorous course-load in undergraduate school. What does rigorous mean? It's different for every admissions committee. I tend to recommend a semester course-load of more than 12 credits, including two science courses.

Exception to the recommendation: If you work part-time, have family obligations or health issues, participate in multiple clubs and extracurricular activities, then perhaps you won't have more than 12 credits in that semester. Every applicant is different and applying to veterinary school is extremely competitive. Just know that you will have applicants in your cycle who are able to manage academics and extracurricular activities.

Choosing a degree plan: There are many degree options when applying to vet schools. Most programs do not require a bachelor's degree.

	PRO	CON
NON-DEGREE SEEKING (STATE OR COMMUNITY COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inexpensive • Great for non-traditional students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potentially can't take upper-level/prereq courses • Won't have a degree
AA/AS (STATE OR COMMUNITY COLLEGE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inexpensive • Can transfer to University 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less options for upper-level science courses • Less opportunities for extracurricular activities
BACHELOR'S (COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY) *RECOMMENDED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Earn a four-year college degree • Opportunities for upper level courses and extracurricular activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take courses you don't need to go to vet school • Not required for vet school
MASTER'S (UNIVERSITY)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research experience • Mentoring • Boost GPA • Hold master's status 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes more time and money • Not required for vet school
PHD (UNIVERSITY)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research experience • Mentoring • Boost GPA • Hold doctoral status 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes more time and money • Not required for vet school

Does your major matter? Some majors make the transition to vet school easier because the prerequisites are included (like biology or animal science). However, choosing a non-traditional major (e.g. psychology, engineering, journalism) can add to the diversity of a candidate, as long as they complete their prerequisite courses at a high-rate of success. Check with each program to see if they have a preference for majors.

Students often ask about online courses. Again, you'll want to check with each program to find out their policy. Remember, your veterinary curriculum will take place in-person and online courses do not prepare you for this style. Vet school is a full-time job and students will need to learn to work within a structured schedule for lectures, wet labs and clinical experience.

When choosing courses, choose courses that will help while in veterinary school. Upper-level science courses similar to vet courses will help (e.g. neurology, virology and anatomy, as well as prereqs for other vet schools you're not considering). The AAVMC publishes a graph of all prerequisite courses: <https://www.aavmc.org/data/files/vmcas/prereqchart.pdf>. While

this is subject to change, these courses will always benefit pre-vet students. Consider taking courses outside of "science" and look into public speaking, interpersonal communications and stress and anxiety management to help with the social side of veterinary medicine.

Week 10	2nd-Year	Fall 2019	Last Update 6/3/2019		
Time	Monday Oct-21-19	Tuesday Oct-22-19	Wednesday Oct-23-19	Thursday Oct-24-19	Friday Oct-25-19
1st 7:30-8:20	Therio New Auditorium	Begin 8:30am			
2nd 8:30-9:20		Cardiopulm EXAM New Auditorium			Endocrinology New Auditorium
3rd 9:30-10:20			Endocrinology New Auditorium	Endocrinology New Auditorium	Toxicology New Auditorium
4th 10:30-11:20	Therio Lab Group B2 Hall A		Therio Lab Group A2 New Auditorium	Wellness Luncheon Banfield	Radiology New Auditorium
5th 11:30-12:20	Radiology Lab Group A	Microbiology New Auditorium	Radiology Lab Group B New Auditorium	10:30-12:30pm	
Lunch	Computer Lab		Computer Lab		
7th 1:00-1:50	Lunch 1:20 - 2:00	Toxicology New Auditorium	Lunch 1:20 - 2:00	CLS Path New Auditorium	CLS Path New Auditorium
8th 2:00-2:50	Therio Lab Group B1 Hall A		Therio Lab Group A1 New Auditorium		
9th 3:00-3:50	Clinical Skills Group A		Clinical Skills Group B New Auditorium		
10th 4:00-4:50	Farms, 2-5pm		Farms, 2-5pm		

Example of a first-year veterinary schedule

Note on dual-enrollment and AP courses: I'm seeing more and more students want to finish their prereqs in high school. I caution this for a few reasons:

1. If you complete your AA in high school, you'll start undergrad as a "junior." This means you will have one year before veterinary school applications open to show what you can do in "college."
2. Many veterinarians do not allow shadows/volunteers until students turn 18. If you finish most of your courses in high school, you will not have as much time in undergrad to show your veterinary experience.
3. If you start a "sequence" in high school, whether AP or dual-enrolling, and then try to finish it in undergrad, you may be in for some unwelcome surprises. A sequence is any course that has two parts (e.g. Biology 1 and 2, Chemistry 1 and 2). In high school, your class size will be smaller and potentially less challenging because you'll have more one-on-one opportunities with your teacher.
4. Life experience and opportunities in undergraduate school are extremely important to admissions committees and this time should not be rushed!

I know that undergraduate school is becoming more and more competitive and having a high weighted GPA is important. Think about taking your "general education requirements" as AP/IB/dual-enrollment courses to boost your GPA. Or, see if your undergraduate institution will allow you to retake some of these courses when you start your freshman year. Then you have an opportunity to refresh your knowledge at the college level and have a smooth transition into undergrad.



Standardized Tests:



WHEN SHOULD I TAKE THE GRE?

Many CVMs require a standardized test to be considered for admission, typically the GRE (or MCAT). However, you will see more CVMs move away from standardized testing due to a holistic admissions approach.

Recommendations for when to take these tests can be found in test prep books like [The Princeton Review](#), [Kaplan](#) and [ETS](#). Check on each program's website for when they want to see test scores and if they will superscore (using the best section of each test date, if you took the test multiple times). There are some free online resources available. When seeking these resources, check with your classmates to see what worked well for them! Check with the CVMs and find out how important the standardized test is to the admissions process. How you prepare and spend your money on these tests can look very differently if a school only puts 5% on the weight of this exam vs. 50%.

CHAPTER 3:

GAINING VETERINARY EXPERIENCE

- Q** ■ HOW MUCH EXPERIENCE DO I NEED?
■ DO I REALLY NEED LARGE ANIMAL EXPERIENCE?

How do you know if you want to be a veterinarian? Spend time with them!

Students often ask, “how much experience makes me competitive?” That answer depends on each school, as some require a set number of hours. However, the goal should be to have a firm understanding of the profession and what the field actually looks like, versus what we think it looks like or what we’ve seen on TV.

Taking time to explore more than typical clinical practice helps students know the full profession. These experiences include: mobile veterinarians, research, academia, government, shelter med and conservation.

Let’s talk quantity vs quality. Students want to know how many hours they need to get into vet school. Some programs have minimum requirements to be considered for admission. No matter what the requirement, you want quality hours. You want to put your hands on some animals. You want to get to know that veterinarian. If cleaning kennels will eventually get you that experience, then clean kennels. But if all you’ll ever do is clean kennels, start seeking other opportunities.



How should you define your veterinary experience? Most students breakdown their experience into these categories: shadowing, volunteering, intern, paid. Shadow means you stand and watch, no interaction with any animals. Volunteering typically means you get to work with the vet and animals but you aren't paid. An intern has the same responsibilities as a volunteer, but it's usually for a set period of time, like over a summer or a semester and they may have a more outlined plan of projects and responsibilities. Paid experience is most valuable because you will gain the most responsibility and opportunities with the veterinarian.

	Pro	Con
Paid	More responsibility, save money for vet school	N/A
Intern	Responsibility, set hours and expectations	No salary, could be a short-term experience
Volunteer	Hands-on experience	No salary, less responsibility than paid
Shadow	Observation and opportunities to get to know a veterinarian	No salary, no hands-on experience

Remember, in all of your experiences, your goal should be *mentorship*.

You want to become close with your supervisors to learn, try new experiences and to potentially earn a letter of recommendation.

HOW DO I GET EXPERIENCE?

1. Start with who you know. If your family has a veterinarian, begin with them. If they are not hiring or do not take volunteers, ask them who they know who might!
2. Use resources. Pre-veterinary clubs are great ways to stay up-to-date with opportunities. Plus, if you have friends in clubs who have volunteered at a clinic, you already know that there is a chance!
3. Call! I recommend students create an excel spreadsheet with 30 clinics they have googled and are willing to travel to. Include details like the phone number and the practice manager's name (if you can find it on the website). That way, you are organized and ready to go when you start making your phone calls. I don't recommend email, as folks are busy and you won't get an immediate response (unless their website explicitly states that volunteers should email). A quick, polite and professional phone call to the practice is all you need to find out if volunteering is an option. Some clinics don't take volunteers. For whatever reason, it's common. Move on to the next!

Example of spreadsheet:

Clinic Name	Clinic Manager Name	Phone Number	Accepts volunteers?	Next steps

Note: I do not recommend walking into a practice with a resume to ask if you can volunteer. Clinics are very busy and it shows respect for their time, and yours, by making a connection by phone first.

If you are considering a particular path in vetmed, make sure you gain experience in that area before you write about your goals in an essay or bring it up in an interview. For example, a student who claims they want to become an aquatic animal veterinarian, but have no aquatic animal experience, makes no sense.

Be sure that your application and your experiences add up.

Many pre-vet students have family members in the veterinary field. While these connections may allow you to begin working in a clinic earlier or provide more hands-on opportunities, students should seek other opportunities outside of their family. Be sure to avoid letters of recommendation from family members!

Some programs may require, or strongly recommend, certain experiences (e.g. large animal, research, etc). Even if it is not required, your application will be more attractive by having a variety of diverse experiences. So to answer the question, yes, I recommend getting large animal (and other) experience.



CHAPTER 4:

GAINING EXTRACURRICULAR EXPERIENCES

Q. DO I NEED RESEARCH? Q. SHOULD I STUDY ABROAD?

Do you need research? Should you study abroad? What kind of experience does an admissions committee want to see?

The six experiences on VMCAS are:

- Veterinary experience (with a veterinarian)
- Animal (no veterinarian involved)
- Employment (not animal related)
- Extracurricular activities
- Research
- Volunteer (not animal related)

I advise you to avoid using your own animal experiences when you log your hours. For example, you would not log the hours where you took care of your own dog. However, if you show dogs at official competitions, this would be appropriate because it is an established organization.

Note: each school may differ in opinion on how to categorize your experience. For example, if you are doing research with a veterinarian, do you put that experience under veterinary or research? If you are working at a veterinary hospital as a receptionist, but sometimes come in contact with the veterinarian, do you put that under employment or veterinary? You will need to contact your CVMs to find out their opinion on distinctions.

Students often ask what experiences will make them stand out? Instead of focusing on standing out, focus on showing that you are ready to go to vet school based on the experiences you've had. Students should pursue experiences that will provide them with teamwork, leadership, decision-making, responsibility, communication skills and an understanding of diversity and inclusion.

Many students participate in team sports during undergrad. These experiences can mold leadership, communication and teamwork skills, and can also help with your exposure to diversity and opportunities to create inclusive experiences.

Not into sports? Joining clubs that are not animal-related and seeking leadership positions provides opportunities to develop important social skills that admissions committees need to see.

When it comes to study abroad--I see a lot of students seek this opportunity, thinking it will give them an edge for vet school. My advice is if you want to do it--do it. But don't do it because you think it gives you an edge. So many students study abroad that it doesn't necessarily stand out, but it can provide lovely memories and opportunities that you can use in an essay or in an interview.



CHAPTER 5:

ESSAYS

Q. WHO SHOULD PROOFREAD MY ESSAYS? Q. HOW AM I DIVERSE?

I see many students fear the essay, whether it's from fearing they are not great writers or (think) they don't know what to write. I say, approach the essays with gusto! This is your only opportunity let the admissions committees really get to know you. Your grades are black-and-white, your letters of recommendation are out of your hands, your experiences are chunked into small boxes of text. Essays are your time to say, "this is who I am and this is why you want me."

For some, this is hard. Selling ourselves is not something everyone feels comfortable with or has practice doing on a daily basis. So it's time to get comfortable! Here are some options for feeling more prepared to write about yourself:

- Keep a journal
- Get a "question of the day" book
- Read some books focused on getting to know yourself better (recommendation: [You Are A Badass](#) by Jen Sincero)

Who should proofread your essays? I recommend having a friend or professor who enjoys editing and is well-versed in grammar and syntax to proofread for readability and flow. Then, ask a veterinarian to check for veterinary content. Some colleges offer career resource offices or other programs that will edit essays.

Note on nontraditional students: some students are worried that because their path is a little different, they have less of a chance of getting accepted. Let this work for you! If you are older, write about how your life experiences have prepared you for vet school. If you've had a different career path, write about how you know vetmed is for you, because you've tried something else!



Diversity and inclusion is important in all professions and classrooms. It is particularly important in veterinary medicine because the field is quite homogenous--many veterinarians look the same.

Here are some resources for understanding diversity and inclusion:

https://soundcloud.com/user-893333314/s1e2-the-veterinary-fruit-salad-exploring-diversity_prevet-pawscast

<https://www.avma.org/KB/Resources/Reference/diversity/Pages/default.aspx>

https://www.hsvma.org/diversity_issues_in_veterinary_medicine

Identifying how you are diverse and being able to share these parts of yourself in essays and interviews will help an admissions committee feel excited about admitting you into their program. They will see that you can help their school reach new heights in vetmed!



CHAPTER 6:

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Q. WHO SHOULD WRITE MY LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION? Q. HOW DO I GET A GOOD LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION?

VMCAS requires three letters of recommendation, but programs may have other requirements and recommendations of types letters they want to see. For example, some may request letters from a professor, veterinarian and a professional outside of the veterinary field.

Recommenders receive an evaluation form from VMCAS asking to rate the student on a scale from “excellent” to “poor” on qualities like: reaction to criticism, time management, self-awareness, emotional stability and personal/social maturity. Make sure you are selecting professionals who not only support you going to vet school, but have seen you behave in a professional and ethical manner!

The recommender also selects how well they know the applicant: very well, moderately well or minimally well. Make sure you are asking professionals who know you at least moderately well.

Note on recommendations: I recommend TO WAIVE YOUR RIGHT OF ACCESS TO THE EVALUATION. This means you won't see your letter. Why is this important? If a student wants to see their letter, it may mean they feel something negative will be revealed. Whether or not that's the case, admissions committees want to read a letter from a professional who is completely honest about the candidate and they may not feel comfortable being honest if they know the student will see their evaluation.



Formula to ask for a letter of recommendation:

1. Identify someone who you would like to write a letter.
2. Towards the beginning of your relationship, ask the professional if they ever write letters of recommendation and what previous students have done to earn a strong letter.
3. When you have done what they said in response to step 2, approach the professional and ask, “Do you feel comfortable writing me a strong letter of recommendation to veterinary school?”

(If they say yes) Thank the professional and tell them you will send an email with your resume, more information about your relationship (e.g. amount of time you’ve worked together and details about special projects), links to the programs you’re applying to, etc. This is your time to provide all the information your recommender needs so they can write the most comprehensive letter possible.

(If they say no) Thank them and ask them what you can do to improve!

4. (If using VMCAS) Let the professional know they will receive an email from VMCAS, asking them to fill out an evaluation form as well as the option to upload a personal letter (encourage them to do so).

CHAPTER 7:

THE INTERVIEW

- Q** ■ HOW DO I PREP FOR AN INTERVIEW?
- Q** ■ WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST MISTAKES PEOPLE MAKE IN INTERVIEWS?

There are many types of interviews from multiple-minis (MMI) to behavioral. Go to each school's website to find out what type of interview they have so you can prepare. I don't often recommend seeking advice from other pre-vet students when it comes to program specifics, but this is a time when it can help! Websites like Student Doctor Network or the APVMA Facebook group can provide a better understanding of what each school's interview process was like, specifically, what questions were asked of applicants. Remember, you're only getting a tiny snapshot of that school's program when you ask another candidate.

I recommend setting up a Google Alert on your email to read articles about what's going on in veterinary medicine so you can stay up-to-date on current veterinary issues. Interviewers may ask your opinions on ethical issues or hot-topics in vetmed. Not sure what a Google Alert is? Google it.



What to wear? Students should dress professionally, as this is a professional school interview. There are loads of resources online for what to wear on an interview. Some schools have career offices that have closets of professional wear for students to borrow. When deciding if you should cover up any tattoos, piercings or other body modifications, I recommend contacting each school and getting their opinion on it. But, at the end of the day, you want to be accepted for who you are.*

Another tip: Film yourself practicing your answers. While you don't want to seem rehearsed, you do want to feel prepared. Filming will help you notice your pace, volume, tone of voice, eye contact and any distracting habits you want to reduce (e.g. playing with hair, twirling in a chair, saying "umm", etc).

**Exception to the recommendation: You do not want to distract from your interview. If your clothing or body choices (e.g. tattoos) are distracting, you may want to consider adjusting this. The interview should be about you, not how you look.*



A big mistake I see in interviews is when students cannot answer ethical/current event questions in vetmed. For example: not knowing the difference between animal rights vs. animal welfare, their opinion about trap-neuter-return programs, or how veal is harvested. We want our future vets to know that veterinarians play an important role in human and animal welfare. Learning about these topics will show your interest in the field and get you excited about the role you can play!

Another mistake is when students can't evaluate their experiences and articulate them to an admissions committee. Here is a common interview question: "Tell us about a time when you made a mistake?" This question is important because it helps us evaluate a student's self-awareness as well their lived experiences.

Here are some questions you want to be able to answer for an interview:

<http://veterinaryteam.dvm360.com/8-must-ask-questions-veterinary-hospital-hires>

<https://www.colorado.edu/career/2018/01/11/frequently-asked-professional-school-interview-questions>

Enjoy these personality tests to help you get to know yourself better in order to answer essay and interview questions:

<https://examinedexistence.com/the-dope-4-personality-test-which-bird-are-you/>

<https://www.16personalities.com/free-personality-test>

CHAPTER 8:

HOW TO APPROACH SENSITIVE TOPICS

Q. DOES THIS LOOK BAD? SHOULD I TALK ABOUT THIS?

Students may worry that certain parts of their application “look bad.” Here are some common concerns:

- Red flags on their transcript (e.g. repeated courses, withdrawals, low grades, low course loads, etc)
- Not “enough” veterinary hours
- Missing certain types of hours (e.g. large animal, paid experience, research, etc)
- Not having a letter from a specific type of recommender (e.g. professor)

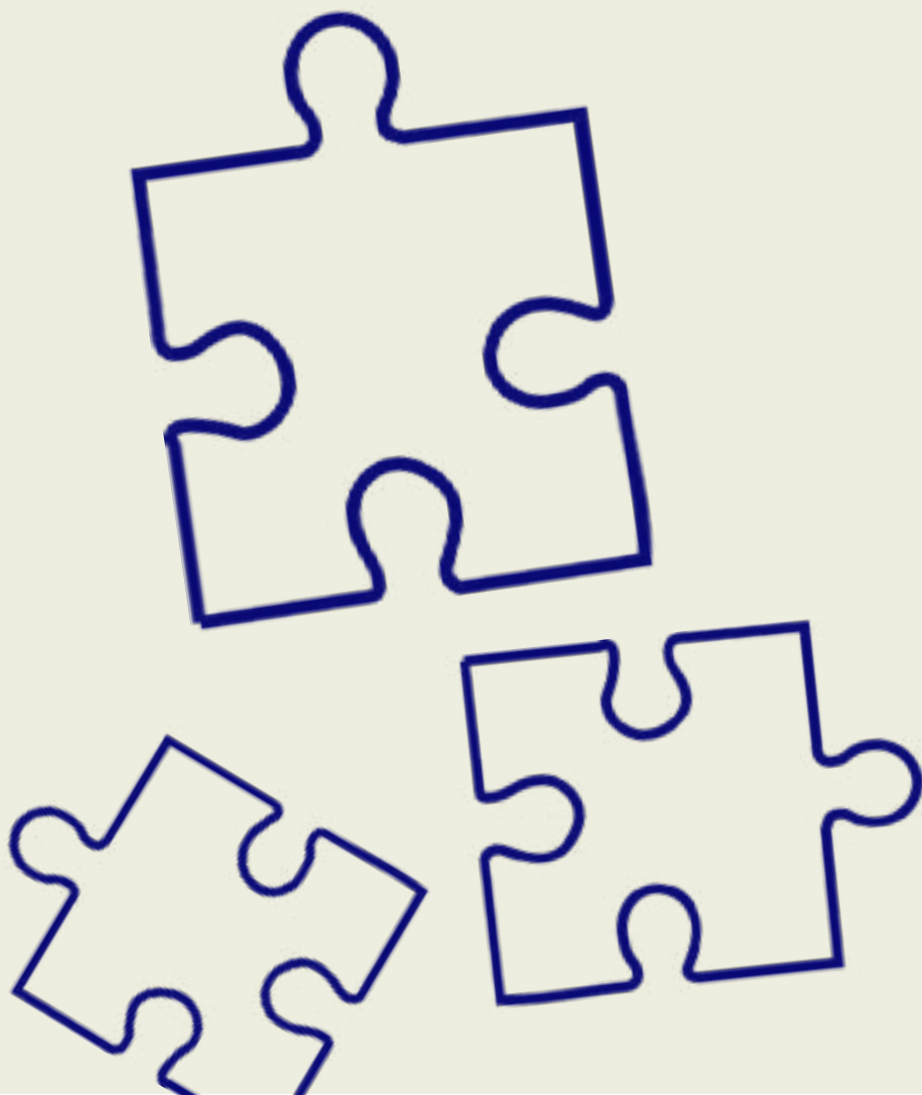
You can make any experience work for you! Here’s how the above concerns can be flipped in your favor:

- I have been through academic ups and downs and have made significant improvement in my grades.
- Instead of having copious amounts of veterinary hours, I managed my time with vet hours and multiple extracurricular activities.
- I was unable to gain much large animal experience because I live in a city. However, I have diversity and variety in my hours from multiple small animal clinics.
- While I do not have an academic letter from a professor, I made sure to create strong bonds with other professionals.

When it comes to sensitive topics, like mental health issues or sexual orientation, it is completely up to you if you want to write about this in an essay or bring up in an interview.

I tend to advise students that if they are comfortable talking about these subjects, they can and should. It will help the admissions committee get to know them better and can benefit the profession as a whole. Students with these experiences can reach clients and other classmates that their peers (who do not have those lived experiences) cannot.

It is important to consider the climate of veterinary medicine as it relates to mental health and diversity. Students who are aware of the complexities of these issues (and their relation to them) show maturity, professionalism and empathy. These are all qualities that the admissions committee will be looking for in veterinary medicine candidates!



CHAPTER 09:

UNDERSTANDING THE ODDS

Q. WITH EVERYTHING I'VE TOLD YOU, DO YOU THINK I'LL GET IN? **Q.** IS IT OK TO APPLY MORE THAN ONCE?

I never know if a student will get into vet school. I see students who are well-rounded, have “everything” and sometimes they still don’t get in. And I’ve seen other students who I think could use another year of experience or social development, and they are accepted on the first try.

When students ask me if I think they’ll get in, I always say “I have no idea.” Admissions processes are incredibly complex and there is no perfect formula for getting into vet school. So I tell students:

Plan to apply more than once.

In the United States, there are more than 6,000 applicants each cycle for about 3,000 seats. Veterinary school is competitive. This means, it’s normal and natural to apply more than one time.

Feeling discouraged? Watch this: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mhkBURj8_aY

Show why your experience matters. If you decide to get a minor in Business, tell me why an admissions committee should care about that. Same goes for study abroad, multiple vet experiences, etc. Tell us why we want a student who has these experiences.

Sometimes, the odds of getting in depend on who else is applying. Every applicant cycle and pool is different. The year you apply may be a competitive year for your program and it might not work out. Keep going. Show resilience. Don’t give up.

CHAPTER 10:

ADVICE FROM VETERINARY STUDENTS

Below, you'll find advice from current veterinary students. Answers have been edited for length and clarity, but their passion and enthusiasm for the readers remain.

Find who you are outside of this profession. Discover what you enjoy outside of that to stand out during applications. Keep yourself sane during classes, and grow close with people outside of the field you might not have met otherwise! - Julia E.

I think everyone should work on a farm for at least a summer. I did everything from bail hay, drive the tractors, help with the cows, tend to the pigs and chickens, sell the produce at market, etc. It gives you a whole new appreciation, perspective, and value of hard work.- Michelle C.

I did research in a dairy science lab for about 5 semesters during undergrad which led to second authorship on a paper that was published in a journal. - Meghan W.

Even before the application opens, do research on potential vet schools you want to apply to. When the application opens, start it immediately and work on it in chunks. When I did it, I had my resume open on another window and would cut and paste my activities into VMCAS. - Eric L.

I went to Zambia, Africa one summer and worked with a local vet. Not only was it a cultural experience, but I also got a ton of hands-on experience. We vaccinated hundreds of dogs, cats, chickens, goats, pigs, and cattle. We also did herd management, de-horned, trimmed hooves, removed tumors, and castrated piglets. If you have the opportunity to travel and integrate veterinary medicine, DO IT! - Ashlyn S.



I would say the one thing that made my application stand out was playing softball. This experience included community service, leadership, and the ability to deal with different personalities and adversities.- Je Leah N.

Some of my most useful experiences were volunteering and shadowing at various facilities. From shelters to high-end private clinics to rescue facilities. I had a job at SeaWorld which required me to get on a microphone and address thousands of guests every day. Now I feel prepared for most situations and rarely get overwhelmed or feel I am completely in uncharted territory. - Stephen L.

I took a gap year before applying because I really wanted to have time to focus on applications and the GRE. I also had seven years of vet tech experience under my belt. Having all that experience made me super comfortable in my interview and answering questions felt natural.
-Michelle H.

If I could go back to undergrad I would definitely seek out more research opportunities. During my undergrad I was afraid that if I sought out too many extracurricular activities my grades would suffer. Now I realize that the experience I would have gained would have far outweighed the unlikely negative effects on my grades. – Thomas C.

If you don't get in on that application cycle, don't fret. Make sure you sit down with a few people/advisors/mentors and go over how to make your application better for next cycle. Take the challenge to get more experience and become more knowledgeable in the field. I never wanted time off between undergrad and vet school. Now having the 2 years in between, I have been SO grateful for the time to experience life post-grad, gain lots of vet experience, and build more connections. – Shelby C.

AFTERWORD:

DO I STILL WANT TO GO TO VETERINARY SCHOOL?

I've done this long enough to know that if this is your passion, it's not going anywhere. If I had a dollar for every time someone said, "I've always wanted to do this," I could pay off your student loans.

I believe there is enough time and enough veterinary schools to reach your dream if you are strategic, open-minded and patient when applying to your programs. Perhaps the most important quality in an applicant, is practicality. Someone who is not only realistic about the profession, but is realistic about themselves and their strengths. Make sure this is what you want to do and if it is, go for it!

I hope this guide was helpful and gave you some answers to your questions. Remember, this is from one opinion/perspective/experience. You must chat with professionals from each school to which you wish to apply. Be wary of advice from bias sources. Learn to sell yourself.

And try not to listen to pre-med students... because that's a completely different animal.

-Alex

RESOURCES:

[AAVMC](#)

[APVMA Facebook Page](#)

[AVMA](#)

[PreVet Pawscast](#)

[Student Doctor Network](#)

[Veterinary Career Advisor Network](#)

[Veterinary Medical College Application Service](#)



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