



The Emergency Medicine Applicants FAQ

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Frequently Asked Questions of the Emergency Medicine Applicant, with Sample Answers

Considering a Career in Emergency Medicine(EM)

What is a typical day/night like in the ED?

The emergency department is an ever changing and expanding realm to practice in, no two days or locations are the same. If you are at a major trauma center, then you will likely see a large variety of medical cases mixed in with trauma and pediatric cases. In community centers you will see a similarly wide range of patients and care and transfer depending on your hospital's resources. There will likely be several emergent cases where patients require immediate care or they will die. The majority of cases, will be urgent, requiring care in an expedited fashion but not in danger of losing life or limb immediately.

What are some of the major pros and cons to a career in EM?



There are many pros to a career in EM: the broad scope of EM practice, the ability to perform a vast array of procedures, the opportunity to care for critical patients and work in a team environment. Schedule flexibility, relative absence of home call, and the opportunity to leave work in the workplace are additional frequently cited benefits.

The cons of a career in EM are important as well: dealing with death and emotionally wrenching cases is common, scarce resources can make it difficult to always do the right thing for your patients, violent or abusive patients and those with alcohol and drug dependence are frequently encountered. Shifts can be high stress and very busy. We never close- the flip side of schedule flexibility often means EM physicians work nights, evenings, weekends, and holidays.

The pros and cons to a career in EM frequently overlap. For example you will see things in the ED that many people can never imagine or will never witness- this can be good and bad. When considering EM as a career choice keep in mind your personality and what you envision your life after residency will look like. Many EM physicians will tell you that there is no such thing as “not worrying about patients” once you leave - we all want the best outcomes for our patients and sometimes we go home and worry too. Lastly, academic emergency medicine has its own set of pros and cons in comparison to community practice.

Applying to EM

How many away rotations should I do?

It is recommended to pursue one away rotation in addition to a home rotation. Ideally you will obtain a Standardized Letter of Evaluation (SLOE) from both programs. This is a standard letter created by EM educators that establishes the credentials of the author, their relationship to the applicant, and compares the applicant to the wider applicant pool. The away rotation can be at a site where you would like to end up or at any program to gain experience.

What will set me apart in a positive way during my EM Clerkship? How can I be a star in the ED?

Be positive and proactive. Pick up a variety of patients and don't be afraid to ask or answer questions. Take advantage of any extra learning opportunities such as



attending resident conference. Some programs may offer a faculty advisor. Strongly consider meeting with this person as they can give good advice and also be an advocate for you. Doing well on your EM clerkship is important. Programs cite EM clerkship grades, as a very important factor in selecting applicants to interview ([2016 NRMP Program Director Survey](#)). Clerkship Directors in Emergency Medicine (CDEM) is a great resource including their blog that has timely discussions for students as well as curricula– available at [CDEM blog](#). Ultimately it is important to be sincere and be yourself.

Do I need to have publications or research to apply in EM?

While research experience is welcomed it is not necessary for a successful application. In the [2016 NRMP Program Director Survey](#), program directors rated the importance of “involvement and interest in research” 3.2/5, with 1 being “not at all important” and 5 being “very important”. This is the second lowest rating of importance of all the rated factors. Looking at the survey may help you best understand what program directors in EM value highly.

How many letters of recommendation do I need?

In EM we use a standardized letter of evaluation, called a SLOE. This letter establishes the credentials of the writer, their experience with you and compares your application with the rest of the applicant group. Goal is to have two SLOEs. Programs cite letters of recommendation within the specialty of EM as a highly important factor in selecting applicants to interview ([2016 NRMP Program Director Survey](#)); in fact SLOEs rival the importance of USMLE Step scores. On [EMRA match](#), programs list how many SLOE(s) they expect to consider an application for interview.

Who writes a SLOE (Standardized Letter of Evaluation)?

SLOEs can be written as a “Group SLOE” (from the Clerkship Director, Program Director) or from an individual. Usually you will have a SLOE from your home school (combined Clerkship Director and the Program Director). Ideally you will also have one combined SLOE from your away EM rotation. A third letter of recommendation from another EM faculty member with whom you have worked closely (could be on an EM rotation or on a special rotation such as Toxicology, EMS, etc) can be added. Third SLOEs are NOT needed, but may be beneficial if you have red flags in your application, or had a particularly challenging rotation at one of your sites.

What is a competitive Step 1 and Step 2CK Score?



Each program will have a different cut-off for what they consider “competitive”. Based on the [2016 NRMP Program Director Survey](#) results, a USMLE Step 1 and 2CK score above 230 is a level at which many programs will grant interviews, but this is highly variable. Realize the decision to interview an applicant is multifactorial and scores alone will not guarantee an interview. Many programs will not interview applicants with a failed Step 1 or Step 2 score. A failed USMLE exam usually warrants a back-up/parallel plan and should be discussed with your faculty advisor.

Preparing an ERAS Application

How many residencies should I apply to?

You should apply to enough residencies to obtain a reasonable number of interviews and programs to rank. For example, the 2016 NRMP Charting Outcomes in the Match showed that those who matched in EM ranked 12 programs, on average (versus 5 for unmatched applicants). This suggests that depending on the strength of your application (USMLE Step Scores, EM Clerkship Performance, SLOEs etc) and competitiveness of programs you are applying to, you should consider applying to at minimum 15-20 programs. 25-30 applications is the right amount for mid range applicants. Less competitive applicants should make targeted applications but there is a rapidly diminishing return beyond 40 applications and higher number of applications alone may not improve your chances to match. This question truly requires an individualized answer from an advisor before ERAS applications are due.

How should I address weaknesses in my application?

A big pitfall for applicants is assuming program directors will not notice a weakness in their application. It is best to address these head on so that you can explain the circumstances and how you remedied or compensated for the issue. This can include low Step scores, failed classes, or interruptions in your medical school course work. The personal statement is the perfect place to address this. Most applicants begin their personal statement with an experience that relates to their interest in EM, continue with why they are a good fit for EM, and finish with where they see their career in EM going. An explanation of a weakness fits well after explaining your fit.

Who should review my personal statement?

It is ideal to have a faculty mentor or advisor review your personal statement. At minimum someone should review your personal statement to ensure there are no major grammatical or spelling errors.

When should I have my ERAS complete and submitted?

It is generally recommended to submit your ERAS application when the submission date opens, but do not be overly stressed if you cannot get everything in on September 15th. Within a week or so of the opening date is reasonable. Many programs do not review applications and/or send interview invitations for a few weeks. Do not wait to submit your application until all your letters are in.

How much detail should I go into when describing things in my ERAS application? How big/small should an experience be to include/exclude?

When putting together your ERAS application most students start working from a pre-created CV. When considering what to include keep in mind that those activities relevant to emergency medicine are important to highlight. It is helpful to include some brief details of your activities to highlight the depth of your role or certain character attributes. Make sure to highlight what you learned from each experience, or how it made you a better person. This is what program directors are really looking for. When applying outside of your current region it can be helpful to reference a job or educational experience in the distant region you are applying to. The following is a list of common items included in a CV or ERAS application.

1. Leadership roles
2. Research
3. Work experience
5. Honors/Awards: AOA, humanism society, etc
4. Teaching experience
5. Volunteer activities
6. Membership to local/school, regional, national organizations

The Standardized Video Interview

What is the Standardized Video Interview?

The Standardized Video Interview (SVI) is a pilot project being performed by the AAMC to improve the residency application process. It was voluntary in the 2017 Match and required for 2018. It is designed to evaluate applicants' communication skills. Applicants sign up for a time in June and July to be recorded on any device with an internet connection and a camera. Applicants are asked 6 questions with time to read each question and three minutes for a response. These videos are then reviewed and scored by trained third party raters. Those scores (along with the applicant videos) are

then provided to the EM residency program directors to which the applicant has applied as an assessment of applicants' behavioral competencies.

Do I get to see my SVI score?

Yes, you will receive your score with data to illustrate the distribution of scores for all applicants who completed the interview.

What do programs do with my SVI score?

This is the first year programs have access to your scores and videos. It is unclear how your SVI score will affect your application, but AAMC and CORD are working together to better understand the SVI's impact and usefulness.

Post-ERAS but Pre-Interview

How many interviews should I go on?

For most candidates, 10-12 interviews is a good target. NRMP data show a 95% match rate with 10 interviews, a 99% match rate with 12 interviews, and rapidly diminishing returns above 12 interviews. Doing more than 12 interviews becomes costly, exhausting, and does not benefit you. Concentrate your efforts on the 10-12 interviews you are most interested in.

When can I start to reject interviews?

Theoretically you can start to reject interviews at any time, however most applicants end up accepting interviews and canceling at a later date. It is okay to cancel an interview as long as you give advance notice of at least 2 weeks and respect each program's cancellation requests. Most programs have waiting lists and another student will benefit from your cancelled interview. Before sending out applications, it is a good idea to know how many interviews you are aiming to do. It is also a good idea to know which region or program you are most interested in. Develop a priority list for accepting and scheduling interviews. If you hit your desired number of interviews and have received invitations from your top programs perhaps you can start declining interviews. Each applicant is individual and some applicants will need more interviews than others to increase the chance of a successful match; beyond that number there is no benefit, and only expense, to doing "extra" interviews.

What can I expect during the residency interview (general)?

In general, most residency interview days include an introduction from the program director and/or program leadership, a program overview, an emergency department tour/site tour, and formal interviews. In addition, many programs host a dinner the night before or after the interview. Of course each program will be unique.

The purpose of the interview is two-fold, for the program to get to know you and for you to get to know the program. The interview is a time to showcase yourself and really bring to the table your strengths and what you have to offer. Think about how you can help the interviewer get to know you in a short amount of time. What is important for you convey about yourself if you only have a few minutes?

Every program has a different formal interview process. In general most have a series of questions they ask in order to get to know you better and get a feel for your personality. Are you easy to talk to? Professional? Can you think on your toes or do you get flustered easily? In addition they may want to ask you about your application or personal statement. If you have any irregularities in your application or something that stands out they may ask you to clarify or explain. Programs are also interested in knowing why you chose to interview there. Is it because of location? Something the program has to offer? Think about why you chose to interview there. Be honest, but think ahead about how your answers will be perceived. Bounce them off of your advisor if you are unsure.

It is not uncommon to be asked, “Do you have any questions?” It is a good idea to review the residency website in advance and come with a series of questions that cannot be easily answered from their website. In addition consider reviewing the bio of the faculty you will be interviewing with. This will help formulate specific questions and show that you really are interested. Programs want to showcase themselves and are excited to help you get to know what they have to offer.

Each program puts different weight into the pre-interview dinner attendance. Some applicants are unable to attend due to clinical duties or travel plans but it is generally assumed that applicants will attend. The pre-interview dinners are a great time get to know the residents and have questions answered and may be more helpful in making decisions about the program than the actual interview day.

Post-Interview

What are the important factors to consider when ranking programs?



Rank programs in YOUR order of preference, not based on where you think you may fall on their rank list. It may be helpful to create a list of programs where you are interviewing and keep it updated with order of preference. You can add facts or likes and dislikes about the program to keep things fresh in your mind. Important factors to consider are location, program type (i.e. 3 year or 4 year program), and your personal experience during the interview process. Did you like the program? The city? If you match there do you see yourself being happy? If you are thinking you may want to go into academics or applying for fellowship do you see this program helping you obtain those goals?

Who should review my rank list?

That is a very personal question and a rank list is a very personal and individual decision. Some students are overwhelmed with too much input, others like everyone's perspective. Above all else you should rank programs in the order you liked them. EM physicians, especially those in academics or advising roles are in a good position to give feedback; this can help make sure you are ranking programs within your reach as well as on either end of the spectrum. Each person, whether it is your mom, your friend, or your advisor will likely have different advice or a different perspective. Discussing your rank list with a few people may help cement your thoughts.

Is a second look helpful and if so does it help me to pick or the program or both?

This question is also very individual. Not all programs offer a second look so that is something you will want to find out in advance. Many times your questions about a program can be answered via email. When considering a second look think about your motivation. Is it to demonstrate a sincere interest in a program? Perhaps just an email or note can accomplish that. Are you applying to multiple programs in the same region and are genuinely struggling with that decision? Perhaps a second look will help you. Programs, and even persons within programs, have differing opinions regarding the necessity of "second looks"; if you are considering, contact the program.

Do "thank you" notes/cards matter? Handwritten, or email? Is it true that I should just "be myself" and not stress about this if I'm inherently not a thank you note type of person?

It is hard to say if a thank you note matters. If you are genuinely interested in a program then a personalized thank you note may be helpful and set you apart from the rest. If you are not a thank you note type person perhaps verbally express your sincere

interest during your interview. Alternatively, an email expressing your interest is reasonable. A thank you message of some type will certainly not hurt you.

