

Interview before the interview: How premeds can ace the AAMC VITA

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Getting a complete picture of a medical school applicant is more difficult during a pandemic that largely prevents the in-person interview process. Because of that, some medical schools are utilizing an additional video interview tool as part of their admissions process.

A new tool, put forth by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), will give schools more chances to learn about applicants and give applicants additional time to trumpet their qualifications. The Video Interview Tool for Admissions (VITA) aims to measure a premed's competencies for entering medical schools. It is being used by 45 MD-granting medical schools during the 2021 admissions cycle.

How it works

The VITA is being used by about a quarter of medical schools as an extra tool in admissions. Every medical school—even those using the VITA—will still include person-to-person interviews with medical school admissions faculty through platforms such as Zoom. More than 9,000 applicants have already completed a VITA.

Students who apply to a school that is using the VITA and advance to the interview stage of applicant selection will receive an invitation to the platform. Six questions are presented to interviewees in text prompts on a computer screen, and applicants record a video response. Unlike person-to-person interviews through platforms such as Zoom, there is no human interviewer.

Applicants have one minute to read and reflect on each question and up to three minutes to record a response (and only one chance to record it). All six questions can be completed in one or numerous sittings—as long as they are completed by the deadline a medical school requires.

Questions on the VITA are designed to explore a candidate’s journey to applying to medical school and five of the 15 core competencies for medical schools, such as social skills, teamwork, cultural competence, reliability and dependability, and resilience and adaptability.

Learn what medical schools are looking for beyond high MCAT scores.

How it will be used

The AAMC does not score the VITA, and the organization has yet to determine if the tool will be used beyond the 2021 admissions cycle. How the VITA is used now will depend on the medical school.

At Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, the VITA is being used to augment person-to-person interviews, which take place in the multiple mini-interview (MMI) format. VITA interviews will be scored by members of Rutgers’ admissions committee as they would be if they were prompts during an in-person interview. “What VITA did was it gave us an opportunity to have even more reliability in our process,” said Carol A. Terregino, MD, senior associate dean for education and academic affairs at Rutgers. “We have different people review and rate each answer. By having multiple observations, you are more likely to get a truer result.”

The University of Michigan Medical School plans to be use the VITA differently. The school conducts a holistic review that doesn’t include quantifying interview performance.

“It’s just an additional portion of a holistic review,” said Steven Gay, MD, assistant dean for admissions at University of Michigan Medical School. “It helps us to verify and confirm the information we are seeing throughout the entire application process.

“It’s like everything else. It’s just part of the process. It carries no greater or less weight than anything else [in admissions]. It’s there and useful to add additional information to the things we find important in selecting our students.”

As far as taking the VITA, it's likely to feel strange for applicants to answer a question with no one on the other end, in the moment. Dr. Terregino offered this advice: Answer VITA prompts as though you are speaking to someone in real time.

“The successful applicant—whether they are doing VITA, MMI or a traditional interview—is an applicant that has had enough life experience and also thought about it and how it applies to their medical school journey,” Dr. Terregino said. “They are coming into an interview thinking about what they’ve learned and how they can grow from it.”

Have peace of mind and get everything you need to start med school off strong with the AMA.