

Eleven Steps to Become the Strongest BS/MD Candidate

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the author of

BS/MD Programs-The Complete Guide:
Getting into Medical School from High School

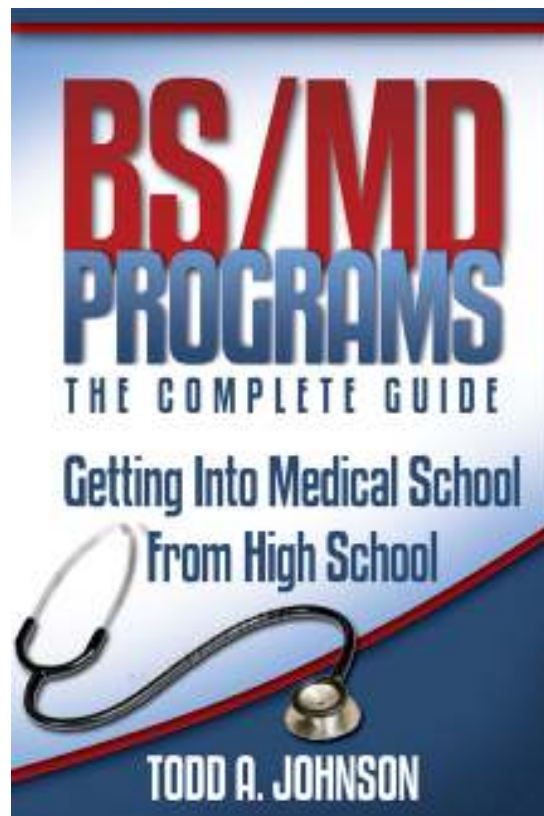


Table of Contents

<u>Introduction.....</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>Step 1- Good grades.....</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>Step 2- Good test scores.....</u>	<u>6</u>
<u>Step 3- Volunteer.....</u>	<u>8</u>
<u>Step 4- Doctor shadowing.....</u>	<u>10</u>
<u>Step 5- Research</u>	<u>11</u>
<u>Step 6- Maturity.....</u>	<u>12</u>
<u>Step 7- Leadership.....</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>Step 8- Passion.....</u>	<u>14</u>
<u>Step 9- Compassion.....</u>	<u>15</u>
<u>Step 10- Choose the right program.....</u>	<u>16</u>
<u>Step 11- Medical school interview.....</u>	<u>17</u>
<u>Step 12- Find regular colleges.....</u>	<u>18</u>
<u>Get Help.....</u>	<u>19</u>

Introduction

You have heard how difficult it is to get admitted to BS/MD programs. Admit rates of 1 or 2% are not uncommon. Everyone is smart, has good grades and good test scores. So, why do some people with good, but not great, grades and test scores get admitted while others with perfect grades do not?

I'm Todd Johnson and in the last 12 years, I have helped hundreds of students find, and get accepted to, BS/MD programs. While no one can be guaranteed admission to a BS/MD program, from my experience there are 11 steps a student can take to make themselves the strongest possible candidate. Ready to learn what those 11 steps are? Good, let's get going.

Step One. Get good grades in the right classes

You are going to be competing with some of the strongest students in the country if you want to be a strong BS/MD candidate. Most programs require that students have a 3.8 unweighted GPA to even be considered for the program. Accepted students generally have even higher GPA's. The strongest students will have perfect, or near perfect, grades. Grades of "C", even in a tough course, will probably eliminate you from serious consideration. A few "B"s might be acceptable but the fewer the better.

For high schools that give class rankings, the programs will often require that the student be in the top 10% of the class. The most successful students are usually in the top 5% of their class and, for the most competitive programs, the students are typically in the top 1%.

The strength of your school may be a factor for some of the programs. If you are in the lower portion of the top 10% of your class but you have a very competitive high school that sends many students to the top colleges, you may still be competitive for many of the programs.

However, grades alone are not sufficient. BS/MD programs also look very carefully at what classes you took to get those grades. You will want to have taken the most rigorous class schedule available at your high school. At least a year of biology, chemistry and physics will be expected as will Calculus AB. The majority of the students I work with will have taken Calculus BC before they graduate. Don't think you only have to worry about math and science courses. BS/MD programs like to see students that have 4 years of English, 4 years of a

single foreign language, 4 years of history or social studies in addition to 4 years of math and science.

Although AP classes are not required for the BS/MD programs, the vast majority of students will have taken many AP classes and exams. The average student I see has taken 6 to 7 AP classes by the time they graduate. Most of the AP scores, particularly in the math and science subjects, will have scores of 5 and 4. For students in an IB program, the strongest candidates will get the full IB diploma.

Finally, it is not unusual to see students with a certain amount of college credits from courses they have taken while in high school. Again, these are not required, but many of the people you are competing with will have such credits.

Step Two. Get good test scores

After grades, the second most common requirement for admission consideration is a certain test score. Most commonly, BS/MD programs want to see a minimum of 1,400 on the critical reading and math sections of the SAT or a 30 on the ACT. Those students taking the ACT should be aware that many programs require the Writing Section for students submitting the ACT.

The most competitive candidates will have close to a 1,500 on the SAT. For those programs that require all three sections of the SAT, they will most commonly want a minimum score of 2,100 and competitive students will be higher than a 2,200. Typical ACT composite scores to be a competitive student are 33 to 34.

Every college will accept either the SAT or ACT but some of the BS/MD programs have been slow to follow that lead. There are a handful of programs that require the SAT and at least one that strongly prefers the ACT. Students should investigate possible programs before taking either test to see if the programs they have an interest in have a testing preference.

Several programs also require SAT subject tests even if the student is submitting the ACT. Some programs don't state any preference for which subject test to take but other programs do have a preference. The most common requested SAT subject tests are Math Level 2 and Chemistry.

Most BS/MD programs do not super score the SAT and rely on the best score from a single setting. Students should take practice tests before taking the actual tests to minimize the number of tests they need to take.

Alright, you need to be smart. But many smart students fail to get accepted into a BS/MD program. What distinguishes the smart student that gets in from the smart student that doesn't? It's the rest of the package. So let's take a look at the remaining steps.

Step Three. Volunteer Your Time

BS/MD programs like to see students who are concerned about others. Why? Because it shows that you have the compassion to be a good physician. And how do you show that? Volunteering. It doesn't matter what type of volunteering you do but you need to get out there doing something to help others.

How many hours do you need? There is no right number of hours. Some high schools will have their students keep track of their hours volunteering and that is fine but is not necessary. When you report your volunteer efforts on the college application they want to know in general terms how long you have done that volunteer activity and how many hours per week.

Length of volunteer effort can make a difference. BS/MD programs would rather see students who have volunteered their time over a long period of time than a student who only volunteers when it is easy. The student who volunteers 2 hours a week for 3 years will be viewed more favorably than the student who volunteers 150 hours in the summer before senior year.

Some of that volunteer activity needs to be in the health care field. Note that I didn't say it all has to be health care related. Contrary to popular belief, health care volunteering isn't just done in hospitals. Clinics, nursing homes, assisted care facilities are all perfectly acceptable locations to volunteer your time. And they are not only acceptable, they are just as good as volunteering done in a hospital.

What you do to volunteer is not as important as the volunteering itself. I have had successful BS/MD candidates who worked in the gift shop at the local hospital or who would transfer patients from one location to another within the hospital. Other successful candidates spent time in a nursing home just talking with residents, reading to residents or playing a musical instrument.

After grades and test scores, volunteering is probably the most important factor involved with BS/MD admissions.

Step 4. Do Doctor Shadowing

Doctor shadowing is a critical requirement for BS/MD programs. Why? BS/MD programs are concerned about admitting students that have some understanding of what life is like as a physician. A great way to show that you have this understanding is by shadowing a doctor.

A common question is how a student finds a doctor to shadow. I will often advise students to talk to their family doctor to see if that doctor will allow the student to shadow their activities. Even if that doesn't work your doctor may know someone you can shadow.

Medical schools don't care what kind of doctor you shadow. If you have an interest in a particular medical specialty and can arrange to shadow that kind of specialist, great. But don't worry if that doesn't work out.

There is also no specific amount of time that needs to be spent on the shadowing. If you can shadow the doctor for at least several days that is best. If you have the opportunity to shadow several different physicians, that may carry more weight in showing your understanding of the life of a physician.

Step 5. Get Research Experience

The students who are the most successful in getting admitted to BS/MD programs generally have some type of research experience on their resume. Most commonly this occurs during the summer before junior or senior year of high school at a local university where the student volunteers their time working with a professor in some field of science.

To arrange this type of research experience you can try contacting biology or chemistry departments at local universities to find a professor that might need some research help. Explain that you have an interest in becoming a physician and are willing to provide whatever help the professor might need. Because these types of opportunities are limited, I would recommend that you begin looking for a research position in January of the summer before you wish to start.

Step 6. Show Maturity

Medical schools know that a great deal of maturity is required to successfully complete medical school. This is particularly true for students who are declaring an early intention to attend medical school through a BS/MD program. You will need to communicate your maturity to the medical schools to be competitive for BS/MD programs. How do you do this?

There are many ways to show that you are mature. This may be shown through your activities and in particular longevity with these activities because it takes a level of maturity to continue with an activity. Leadership in the activity also shows that you have some maturity. You may also show maturity by having held a job and by the essays you write for your applications.

Step 7. Show Leadership

BS/MD programs like to admit students that are leaders. How do you show leadership? The easiest way is to become a leader in a club or organization that you belong to. You can also show leadership by becoming a class officer in your high school class.

One of the best ways to show leadership is to start a club, particularly one that involves volunteer activity. For example, one of my students started a club at her high school that arranged volunteers for a nursing home. This not only shows leadership but also ties in with Step 3, volunteer activities.

Step 8. Show Passion

BS/MD programs want to see students who have a passion to become a physician. One of the programs concerns is that a student will change their mind about becoming a physician. The more you can show your passion, the greater your ability to communicate that you are sincere about becoming a physician.

You can show your passion in various ways. Your classes and grades show your passion. Your activities and the depth of those activities that relate to science and health care show your passion. Volunteering in a health care setting for a period of time greater than a year shows your passion. Doctor shadowing shows your passion. The essays you write for your college applications can also show your passion. It doesn't matter how you show your passion, but it must be communicated to the BS/MD programs.

Step 9. Show Compassion

While it is great to be able to show that you have the passion to become a doctor, unless you can also show that you also have the compassion to be a caring doctor, your application to BS/MD programs will be doomed.

The best way to communicate your compassion is through your volunteer activities. But showing compassion is not just about having a certain number of hours of volunteer time. BS/MD programs are much more impressed with the student who has consistently volunteered for several years than the student who starts to volunteer the summer before senior year. Volunteering an hour or two a week since sophomore year will carry more weight than the student that tries to show their compassion at the last minute.

Health care related volunteering is the most important type of volunteering because not only does it show that you care about other people, it also helps show that you have the passion to become a physician.

Passion and compassion with one activity. Can't beat that.

Step 10. Choose the Right Program

Although there are many BS/MD programs not all of them is right for every student. Some programs have a particular focus while others are only for students in a particular state. There are programs that waive the MCAT for students in the program while others require the MCAT with a set minimum score. Different programs have different requirements to advance from the college to the medical school.

You will be the strongest candidate at the BS/MD program that best fits you. A common question on the medical school supplements is to tell why you are interested in that particular program. Figure out what programs fit you best and not only will the admissions process be easier but you will be a stronger candidate.

Step 11. Prepare for the Medical School Interview

The final step in the BS/MD application process is the medical school interview. Not all applicants will be offered an interview with the medical school and only those who have an interview are still being considered for the program. While it is good news if a student get an interview, not all the students who interview will be offered a position so it is important to be well prepared for the interview.

There are a variety of questions that may be asked during a medical school interview. The most common type of question asks why you are interested in becoming a physician. You should have an answer for this question before your interview because it is almost always asked. Other types of questions may include questions about your extracurricular activities, your interest in that particular BS/MD program and why you want to attend a BS/MD program.

Preparation is key to the successful interview and I always recommend that a student do a mock interview before the actual medical school interview.

Step 12-Find Colleges with Strong Pre-Med Programs

Wait a minute. I told you there were 11 steps to be the strongest possible BS/MD applicant. This is true but there is a final twelfth step that is just as critical as the first eleven.

As I told you when we started, there are no guarantees for admissions to BS/MD programs. Every student, even the strongest, has to consider the possibility that they will not be accepted into a BS/MD program. If that happens, your goal of becoming a physician does not go away. You simply need to find another route. And the most common route for all physicians is attending four years of college followed by four years of medical school.

On average 45% of students who apply to medical school from college are accepted. However, the acceptance rate differs dramatically from college to college. Your goal, as an alternative to the BS/MD program, is to find those colleges that will provide you with the strongest opportunity to attend medical school.

Get Help To Become the Strongest Candidate.

Congratulations! You now know the 11 steps you need to complete to become a strong candidate for BS/MD programs. Want even more information about BS/MD programs? My book "[BS/MD Programs-The Complete Guide: Getting into Medical School from High School](#)" provides more detailed information on BS/MD admissions including information about each of the BS/MD programs in the country.

If you are interested in personally working with me to become the strongest possible candidate for BS/MD programs, there are various ways I can help including:

- Help identifying those programs where you will be the strongest candidate
- Help determining which volunteer activities would be best for your particular interests
- Help with the applications to identify the best essay topics for you based on your background. After you write your essays I then help edit the essays to make sure your essay is as strong as it can be.
- Help you organize your activities to best showcase your strengths.
- Help you with mock interviews and an understanding of the 10 categories of questions that may be asked by the medical school interview.

I start working with students as young as 8th grade to help them become the strongest possible candidate for a BS/MD program. If you are interested in discussing in more detail how I can help, I offer a free half hour consultation to

discuss your particular needs. Give me a call at 952-449-5245 or drop me an [email](#).