

# 2020

## Ophthalmology Residency Match FAQs

# FAQs



**Q** What are the important deadlines to participate in the match?

**A** The timeline for the ophthalmology residency match has been altered this year to take into consideration the challenges that applicants and programs may face in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Important deadlines for the 2020-2021 match cycle include:

**JUL 1:** Applicant registration opens.

**SEP 15:** Target date for application completion. This is not a firm deadline, but a suggested target date; applicants are responsible for contacting programs for their individual deadlines.

**OCT 26:** This is the first date that interviews may begin.

**JAN 25:** Rank list submission due date. Rank lists cannot be submitted or modified after this date.

**FEB 1:** Match results made available to applicants, residency programs, and medical schools.

A complete [timeline](#) with these deadlines can be found on the SF Match website under the “timetable” tab.

**Q** Is there an advantage to getting my application in before September?

**A** There is no advantage to submitting your application before September. Programs will not have access to applications prior to September 1, so no review of applications will occur before then. In addition, no interview invitations will be extended until mid-October. We recognize that many students’ education has been significantly disrupted this year and want everyone to have the time necessary to complete their applications thoroughly.

**Q** Will the ophthalmology match day be delayed because of COVID-19?

**A** In response to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the upcoming match cycle, the ophthalmology match cycle has been extended and match day has been delayed. All rank lists from applicants and programs must be submitted by noon (PST) on January 25, 2021. After this deadline, rank lists will be locked, and no changes will be allowed. Match results will be made available to programs, applicants, and US medical schools through SF Match on February 1, 2021 (the original date was in mid-January).

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**Q** What if I have not been able to take the USMLE Step 1 due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

**A** In general, a Step I score is required as part of a complete application, but we understand that the pandemic may have affected the ability to take the exam for a few students. If you are in this situation, please contact the SF Match directly with documentation of your circumstances. After appropriate review, it may be possible for your application to be released to programs, provided that you can upload your Step 1 score later in the cycle.

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**Q** What do I do if I haven't taken my USMLE Step 2 yet?

**A** While applicants do have to provide a USMLE Step 1 score as part of a complete application, Step 2 (CK or CS) is not necessary at the time of application submission. Programs understand that testing schedules have been altered because of the COVID-19 pandemic, creating challenges for applicants to complete testing as intended this year. Should your Step 2 CK or CS scores become available during the application process, you may have USMLE release your scores to SF Match, but this is completely at your discretion. There are no adverse effects within the match process if you do not submit Step 2 scores.

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**Q** Moving forward, will the USMLE Step 2 CK replace the USMLE Step 1 as the most critical exam for Ophthalmology applicants?

**A** Both examinations are seen as part of a holistic applicant profile, which includes many other factors such as scholastic performance, leadership and service positions, research, and unique life experiences. A single exam alone is inadequate to portray applicants' unique characteristics and strengths.

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**Q** What is the difference between an "integrated" program, a "joint" program and a "traditional" program?

**A** These program distinctions refer to the relationship between the PGY-1 year and the remainder of the ophthalmology residency (PGY 2-4 years). In a "**traditional**" program, the PGY-1 year and the ophthalmology residency are completely separate and may occur at different institutions. For a traditional program, ophthalmology is not required in the PGY1, but is offered by many programs as an elective. In a "**joint**" program, the PGY-1 year is completed at the same institution (or affiliated institution) as the ophthalmology residency, is overseen by the Program Director for the preliminary year (often either internal medicine or general surgery), and is required to incorporate ophthalmology rotations into the PGY-1 year. An "**integrated**" program is similar to a "joint" program except that the ophthalmology program oversees the PGY-1 year, so the ophthalmology Program Director would be responsible for your training for all 4 years. Both joint and integrated programs incorporate 3 months of ophthalmology into the PGY1 training. The ACGME has mandated that all ophthalmology programs in the US transition to either a joint or an integrated program by July 1, 2023.

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**Q** How do I apply to the different types of programs?

**A** The ACGME has required that by July 2023, all ophthalmology programs provide a PGY1 in either an integrated or a joint format. Thus, over the next several years, the traditional programs will be converting to one of these types. During this period, students will need to utilize both the NRMP and the SF Match.

A minority of programs will be *integrated* by July 1, 2021. Ranking them in the SF Match is all that is required; their PGY1 is part of the residency program and the NRMP is not utilized for these programs.

Even though all years of training occur at the same institution, ranking *joint* programs must be done with both systems, using the NRMP for the PGY1 year (which is under the department

of medicine or surgery), and the SF Match for the PGY 2-4 residency.

Ranking programs with a *traditional* PGY1 (which can be performed anywhere) also requires using the NRMP for the PGY1 training and the SF Match for the ophthalmology residency portion.

Since the majority of applicants will be applying to a mix of traditional, integrated, and joint programs, they will need to participate in both matches. In the unlikely event that applicants would apply to and rank only integrated programs, then only the SF Match would be required.

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**Q How many letters of recommendation are required? How many need to be from ophthalmologists?**

**A** SF Match uses a Central Application Service (CAS) to distribute completed applications to residency programs online. Applicants are required to complete a CAS application and provide required documents. Among the required documents are three letters of recommendation, at least one of which must be from an ophthalmologist.

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**Q Will letters of recommendation from other specialties be more acceptable to programs for this cycle?**

**A** Three letters of recommendation are needed for your application, one of which must be from an ophthalmologist. The other two may be from persons of your choice. Common writers include professors or preceptors from other rotations or a basic science course, research mentors, community or academic service supervisors, or prior employers. The best letters are from those who know you well and can vouch for your character, knowledge, and skills.

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**Q Should applicants apply to more programs this cycle to make up for the lack of away rotations?**

**A** Away rotations are not required to successfully match and may or may not have any effect on an applicant's competitiveness. Although there are many challenges this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this should not alter the number of programs to which you apply.

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**Q Is there a limit to the number of programs I can apply to this year?**

**A** No, you are free to apply to as many as you wish. As you make this decision, please refer to the information on the [AUPO](#) and [SF Match](#) websites and confer with your faculty advisor in order to determine the best number.

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**Q When will interview invitations go out?**

**A** October 12, 2020 is the first date that interview invitations can be extended. Additional invitations may be offered by programs after this date. Residency programs will be using an Interview Scheduler managed by SF Match. Applicants will be limited to a maximum of two interviews per day, but obviously this may not be possible in many cases due to the length and timing of each individual program's interview schedule. An applicant must release one interview slot in order to schedule an interview with a different program at the same time; in other words, scheduling more than one interview during the same time period is not permissible.

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**Q Will the interview season be later this cycle?**

**A** The first date on which interviews may be held is October 26, 2020. The final date for interviews is January 18, 2021.

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**Q Will interviews be performed in-person or by video conferencing?**

**A** The AUPO has directed that all interviews, including those for local students, will be conducted virtually for this match cycle.

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**Q Is there a limit to the number of interviews I can do this year?**

**A** Each applicant may do a maximum of 20 interviews this year and can schedule a maximum of two on any given day, provided their hours do not overlap. A recent three-year analysis showed that the mean number of interviews per applicant was 9.29. In addition, historical data show that interviewing at more than 10 programs is associated with a 90% success rate of matching.

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**Q Will virtual sessions (other than interviews) be conducted by programs this year so that applicants can meet program faculty and residents as well as introduce themselves to programs they are highly interested in?**

**A** All programs are developing the best approach to showcase what makes them special. There will likely be a variety of virtual programs and materials developed for this purpose, but their content and length will be determined by each program individually.

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**Q If I have a virtual interview, can I visit the program afterwards in person to get a better feel for it?**

**A** We recognize the difficulty that applicants may have in evaluating programs without the benefit of being there in person. Official in-person visits to a program following a virtual interview are not allowable per Match guidelines, but applicants may reach out informally to individuals who are not involved in resident recruitment. In many cases this may be sufficient to address the applicant's questions. If, however, an applicant chooses to make an unofficial

visit to a program, there should be no contact between individuals who are formally part of the residency training program or selection process. Applicants should also understand that any such visit would have no effect on their competitiveness to match at that program.

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**Q What do I do if I have not completed my away rotations before my application is due?**

**A** All programs understand the significant disruption in medical education due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including inability for many students to participate in away electives, as well as ongoing changes in schedules at many schools. It is important to understand that away rotations have never been necessary to successfully match into an ophthalmology residency.

The CAS application contains a section where applicants list electives and related activities in which experience in ophthalmology has been gained. Future rotations may be included, along with the planned location and dates. Completing all ophthalmology rotations before submitting an application to SF Match is not necessary.

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**Q Will lack of ophthalmology electives be viewed less negatively this year?**

**A** Although an elective in Ophthalmology is strongly recommended, multiple electives or away electives are not required to successfully match in Ophthalmology. All programs understand the challenges students have faced due to the pandemic, and inability to participate in multiple or visiting electives will not negatively impact your application in any way.

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**Q What should I do if my medical school does not have an associated ophthalmology department?**

**A** Reaching out to your Dean of Student Affairs and expressing your interest in a career in Ophthalmology is recommended. He or she will be critical in supporting you in this endeavor.

Many schools have affiliations with outside Ophthalmology departments or practicing ophthalmologists in the community. In addition, alumni at your institution who have become ophthalmologists are an important resource.

The [AAO medical student webpage](#), the [AUPO medical student resources webpage](#), and the [SF Match](#) website also contain valuable resource materials. The AUPO supports students from schools without ophthalmology departments performing visiting clerkships at outside institutions. Furthermore, some institutions will be offering virtual clerkships. Visiting the websites of the programs that you are interested in will be a good resource. You can also reach out directly to the Medical Student Educator or Residency Program Director at institutions you are interested in.

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**Q** **Without away rotations, networking and mentors will be critical for success in the match. How can students without home departments or programs develop a mentor or networking base?**

**A** Your institution's alumni who matched in Ophthalmology are a good resource; your Student Affairs office will likely have this information. Attending any webinars offered by the AUPO and AAO, and reaching out to local ophthalmologists, or other ophthalmologists via social media are ways to develop networks. Many institutions may offer virtual opportunities to engage with their department.

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**Q** **Are there resources and information available to help me decide if ophthalmology is right for me?**

**A** Many resources are available to assist interested individuals in the decision to pursue a career in ophthalmology. The Residency Program Director, Medical Student Education Director, faculty members, and residents in the Department of Ophthalmology at your medical school can offer information about the specialty and career advice. A rotation in ophthalmology at your home institution or, if your school does not have an ophthalmology department, an away rotation can provide valuable exposure

to the field. The following websites are additional resources for those who are considering residency training in ophthalmology:

[Ophthalmology Resources for Medical Students \(American Academy of Ophthalmology\)](#)

[Medical Student Resources \(Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology\)](#)

[Ophthalmology Residency \(SF Match\)](#)

[Minority Ophthalmology Mentoring \(American Academy of Ophthalmology\)](#)

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**Q** **What is an underrepresented in medicine group (URiM)? Does ophthalmology have information for me as someone who identifies as an URiM?**

**A** Underrepresented in medicine (URiM) individuals include those who identify as Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, and/or Native American (American Indian/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian). The CAS application offers an opportunity for applicants to indicate whether they are a member of an URiM group, although applicants are free to decline to provide this information. The Minority Ophthalmology Mentoring program was developed as a collaborative effort between the American Academy of Ophthalmology and Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology. The purpose of this program is to increase diversity in ophthalmology by helping URiM students become competitive ophthalmology residency applicants. Students receive one-on-one mentorship, valuable guidance in medical career planning, networking opportunities and access to a variety of educational resources. Additional information about the [program](#) is available.

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**Q** **How does the new Interview Scheduler work?**

**A** The interview scheduler is an exciting addition to the SF Match system this year. This resource provides a convenient, consolidated tool to schedule and manage the process of inviting applicants to interview while provid-



ing applicants an easy interface in which to manage the invitations they receive. Applicants can accept or decline interview invitations or switch a confirmed interview invitation as long as another date is available. Confidentiality will be maintained in this system. Applicants will be able to view only their individual interview schedules and not those of other candidates or programs. Programs will be able to view only their own list of interviewees, and not those from other programs.

In-depth training will be provided in July and August via webinars (live and on-demand) and written materials.

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**What is new in the SF Match System this year?**

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The new SF Match portal has been redesigned from beginning to end with features designed to enhance the user experience with new controls and features for applicants. New system features are outlined below:

- **Customizable Personal Statement**  
Applicants have the option to create multiple versions of personal statements and assign a different version to each program to which they apply.
- **Customizable Selection for Letters of Reference**  
Applicants can request and receive an unlimited number of reference letters and assign any desired set of 3 letters to individual programs.
- **Active Personal Information**  
Applicants can update their personal information throughout the match cycle. Personal information includes contact information, education, employment, exam scores, achievements, honors, awards, and publications.
- **Document Storage**  
All documents uploaded are automatically stored in the applicant's file cabinet and can be used in any other SF Match specialty that is part of the Central Application Service (CAS).

- **Information Management**

- Programs have access to updated personal information in real time.
- Applicants can update applications any time during the process.
- Returning applicants can re-use documents already stored with SF Match.
- Applicants have the ability to enter up to 20 different publication types in the research section.
- The system provides real-time reminders of items missing to assist applicants.

Detailed instructions will be provided for you once you are registered in the system on or after July 1, 2020.

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**Will ophthalmology programs develop an ophthalmology specific exam so that students have an opportunity to take an objective and standardized exam?**

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Objective exams are viewed as an opportunity for students from smaller schools to shine relative to applicants from well-known institutions.

The AUPO has no plans to create an ophthalmology-specific standardized exam as part of the application process. Examination scores are viewed as an important part of the application but are not the only factor in assessing how well an applicant may perform as a resident. Clinical rotation grades and evaluations are also extremely important in assessing applicants' clinical acumen and knowledge base as well as learning more about an applicant's other abilities such as teamwork, professionalism, ethical behavior, and interpersonal/communication skills. Letters of evaluation can also serve as important sources of information regarding an applicant's unique characteristics and abilities.