



Medical Student Newsletter

Optimize Your Match Series

Optimize Your Match – Part 1

By: Amy Voet, Senior Advisor of the ASA-MSC

This article is the first of a 4 part series geared toward allopathic and osteopathic medical students on how to optimize matching in an anesthesiology residency. At this point you are on the home stretch of your 3rd year of medical school. Now is the time to start making some decisions about how you want to plan your 4th year. Do you want to do any audition rotations at your home institution or as a visiting medical student? Have you thought about where you might want to end up? Have you started working on your CV and personal statement? Do you have any letters of recommendation? If you are an osteopathic student, have you thought about whether you will apply allopathic, osteopathic or both?

The Audition Rotation (Clerkship):

Anesthesia usually falls under the surgery subspecialty or as an elective when fitting it into your schedule. There are advantages and disadvantages to doing an audition rotation. Some of the benefits are: you will gain clinical experience, it can serve as an extended interview, you have the opportunity to impress upon the program and key faculty your enthusiasm for the program, whether you will fit in with their residency, you will have the chance to meet with current residents and you should be able to gain a strong letter of recommendation. Some of the negatives: be careful not to “waste” an elective on a program you have no chance of matching at, it may be difficult to set yourself aside among other qualified applicants and finally, the dreaded thought you may end up looking worse in person than on paper. It is best to talk with your faculty advisor if you have one and also speak with current anesthesia residents or 4th year medical students that have recently gone through the process. To be eligible for an audition rotation you must first apply for one. To improve your chances of an audition rotation you must apply early. Most of the programs will have the information on how to apply and the dates the applications are accepted on their websites. The information is usually listed under graduate medical education, visiting students or clerkships. It is typical for the application period to open around the beginning of April however; it is different for every

institution. Keep in mind that it may take your school some time to process their part of the application. Take this into consideration to prevent delays in submission of your application. Don't feel shy about contacting the institutions for information via email or telephone. Other things to remember are: try to time the rotation to get a good letter of recommendation out of it, be careful about scheduling the rotation during interview season (sometimes this cannot be helped) and be aware that doing an audition rotation does NOT always guarantee you an interview.

Where Should I Go? Categorical vs. Advanced?

A good place to start researching programs is online. Allopathic programs can be found on FREIDA at www.ama-assn.org. This is an excellent resource and you can use the resource whether you are a member or not. If you are a member of the AMA you can create folders to save programs as you go. Osteopathic programs can be found on the AOA website www.opportunities.osteopathic.org. There are many ways to start narrowing the programs: categorical vs. advanced, region, state. A categorical program is 4 years and includes both the internship year (aka: post graduate year or PGY-1) and 3 years of anesthesia. An advanced program is only the 3 anesthesia years and requires you complete the PGY-1 year before you start. You can apply for both the categorical and advanced. There are a couple of advantages to going the categorical route. First, you don't have to worry about doing a separate match for the internship year. Second, some programs have started to integrate the internship year throughout the first couple of years of the residency giving you the opportunity to do anesthesia much earlier. Third, even if the PGY-1 is not integrated you will still complete the internship at the same institution and will already know the hospital, some of the people and the record system when you begin anesthesia in the 2nd year.

CV, Personal Statement, Letters of Recommendation (LOR) and ERAS

NOW is the time to start working on your CV, personal statement and LOR.

The CV should include your education, relevant employment, teaching experience, research/publications/presentations, licensure/certifications, extracurricular activities and professional memberships/affiliations/awards. You want your CV to highlight your accomplishments for maximum impact. Have multiple experienced professionals review your CV.

The personal statement is one thing you have complete control over. Don't underestimate the importance of a strong statement. Use this statement as an opportunity to sell yourself and your strengths. Manual dexterity, skilled at procedures, meticulous, warm and caring, ability to make quick decisions and the ability to stay calm in stressful situations are a few of the qualities that make an excellent anesthesiologist. Use your personal statement to enhance your application not mirror your CV. Start your statement with a hook and showcase your growth throughout medical school. Be sure to demonstrate why anesthesia is the clear choice. Plan on writing multiple drafts and be sure to have an experienced professional review your statement. Finally, be sure you comply with the rules of the length of the statement.

Letters of recommendation are very important. Each program may have different requirements for letters so be sure to read the program specifics. The maximum number of letters submitted through ERAS is 4. Typically the letters must be from a physician, NOT a resident. Start gathering letters early so you will have most of them done by September 1st when you can submit your ERAS application. To waive your right or not to waive your right...that is the question? There is a general consensus that waiving the right to see the letters gives a more candid and credible review of the applicant. If you do waive your right to see the LOR you are showing that you have confidence in yourself and the letter writer. If you do not waive your right to view the LOR you do have the opportunity to review it and potentially decide not to use the letter. Keep in mind this can send the message that you had some concerns over what might be said in the letters and you may have to answer questions about why you didn't waive your rights in your interviews.

Stay on task. The time will start flying by and before you know it ERAS will be open. The ERAS application opens in July and the applications are usually sent out September 1st. Be prepared to have your application finished and ready to be released to programs when it's permitted because programs begin downloading information as soon as it's available to them. The ERAS application is very large, but if you have everything finished ahead of time, it will significantly reduce the amount of time you spend on it. Typically the application will be what's on your CV. I recommend cutting and pasting from your CV/word document so that it has been spell/grammar checked. Your personal statement can also be cut and pasted into the application but must be done in a plain text format. If you don't use plain text or something similar the formatting interferes and it will get jumbled around and there will be strange characters dispersed throughout the essay. Be sure to view your application before sending it to check for such mistakes. It is imperative that your application have virtually no mistakes.

Osteopathic vs. Allopathic

Osteopathic medical students have the option to apply for both osteopathic and allopathic residency programs. It is highly recommended that you take USMLE step 1 to be competitive at the allopathic programs. Some programs will accept COMLEX but in my experience most of them prefer to have USMLE because it allows them a better comparison between candidates. If you decide to apply allopathic be sure to still register for the AOA matching service. This allows you the opportunity to fill an open osteopathic spot in the unfortunate event you don't match allopathic.

Look for the next installment of "optimizing your match" in our summer newsletter where I will go over more information about the NRMP, ERAS and the interviewing process.

Good luck to all of you!

Amy Voet

Optimize Your Match: Part 2

By: Amy Voet, Senior Advisor ASA-MSC

The first installment of “Optimize Your Match” went over getting organized for 4th year, putting together your CV, starting your personal statement and preparing for the ERAS application. This next installment is brief and will supply information about registering for the match and different options for osteopathic medical students.

By now you should have your CV and personal statement well on its way to finished. You should have a basic plan for your 4th year with some backup options in case you don't get your first choice of rotations.

Information about the **allopathic match** can be found on the NRMP website at <http://www.nrmp.org> . The website covers everything you need to know about the match and the algorithm, couples matching, policies and a schedule of important dates. They also have links to other important information.

Information about the **osteopathic match** can be found at <http://www.natmatch.com/aoairp/index.htm>. This website contains information about the osteopathic match and policies as well important dates (which differ from the allopathic match). Osteopaths have the option to register and participate in both the MD and DO match with one caveat. The DO match happens before the MD match. If you choose to participate in the DO match and you do indeed MATCH, you must withdraw from the allopathic match and are not permitted to participate. If you do not match in the DO match, you are then eligible to continue on for the MD match. If you are a DO student, you should always register for the osteopathic match, even if you have no intention of participating in it. This enables you to scramble into a DO program in the unfortunate event you don't match allopathic.

Through June you should continue to work on your CV, put the final touches on your personal statement and send reminders for letters of recommendation you are still waiting for. Keep in mind if you want to use your step 2 board scores on your application you must take boards sooner than later. The ERAS application typically opens July 1st and the applications are typically sent out to programs to which you have applied to starting September 1st. Remember the programs begin to download the applications on the first day they are released, and will begin inviting candidates for interviews, thus it behooves you to have your application complete at that time.

Look for the next installment of “Optimizing Your Match” in the fall when I will go over tips for interviewing and “audition rotations”.

Good luck on boards!

Amy Voet

Optimize Your Match: Part 3

By: Amy Voet, D.O., M.S.

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The previous 2 articles went over getting prepared for the submission of your ERAS application and gathering information about the match. This article will focus on the next steps: audition rotations, interview invitations, the interview itself and post interview.

By now September 1st has come and gone and hopefully you have submitted your completed ERAS application. Now, the painstaking wait begins. If you are planning to do some audition rotations you should be sure to research the programs thoroughly before you go. Recognize the full advantage of an audition elective, and plan to maximize your experience. The audition elective serves as an extended interview. It allows you to work in the field and gather clinical experience while getting to know the program, the attending and residents. Use this time to seek out information. If you are interested in a fellowship specialty, be sure to discuss this interest and specialized opportunities that may be available. Meet all the key decision makers, volunteer to do a presentation if the subject arises and ask for additional reading material if you have a special interest in something. You will also have the chance to meet some of the residents. They are a great resource. They can introduce you to attendings, answer questions about the program, give you advice about who to speak with and can also be your advocate. Don't underestimate the influence attendings, residents and other administrative staff can have during the decision making time. It is common practice for programs to interview you during your rotation, so be sure to bring interview clothing with you so you are prepared for whatever happens.

The interview invitations will begin to be extended soon. Be sure to check the website daily for communication from programs and to check that the programs have received the available downloads. It is imperative to contact programs and schedule interviews as soon as the invitations are extended because interview slots fill quickly. Interview invitations usually begin to slow down by the end of October as most of the interview spots will have been filled. It is acceptable to contact programs during this process so feel free to follow up on your application with a phone call or an email to programs you are very interested in. Once you have an interview scheduled, be sure to take the time to prepare by researching the program very thoroughly. I cannot stress enough the importance of being knowledgeable about the program for interview day. The more prepared you are the more at ease you will be and the better you will perform.

Interviews are typically broken down into traditional versus behavioral. There are usually a few standard questions that are asked during interviews and these are the ones that are easily prepared for. For example, "Tell me about yourself", "Why anesthesia?", "Why our residency program?", and "Where do you see yourself in 5 or 10 years?" are exceedingly common traditional questions. Some common behavioral questions are "Tell me when you had to deal with a difficult attending", "Describe a time when you had to deal with an angry or upset patient" or "Tell me about a patient that left an impact on you". These behavior based questions help the interviewer learn how you may react to a future situation based on a past

experience. According to “The Successful Match” by Drs. Katta and Desai, a good acronym to use to answer these types of questions is STAR.

- S-** Situation (describe the situation in detail)
- T-** Task (What was the task or obstacle)
- A-** Action (What action did you take)
- R-** Result (What was the result)

Be prepared to answer questions about anything unique on your application which may set you apart from the other applicants, as it is a nice break for the interviewers to have something different to talk about. Keep in mind if you are casting your application net wide, away from familiar geographical locations; be able to explain what the draw is to the area. Programs like to know you really want to attend their program and are not just “playing the number game”. Be aware of conversation type interviews. They can feel informal so be careful not to become too relaxed and forgot to convey important information about yourself. There will always be questions that come from left field but that is rarer than the norm. Always prepare with mock interviews. Practicing your answers is a must, there’s no excuse for being unprepared for an interview. This is what makes or breaks the deal. Inevitably you will be given the opportunity to ask questions, usually ad nauseum. I highly recommend writing down a minimum of 10 specific open ended questions about each program. You can ask general questions about the program, education, clinical duties, research opportunities, teaching opportunities and mentoring programs are good places to start. I personally carried a pad folio into the interviews so I had something to jot things down on and had reference to my questions in case I spaced out. There will be applicants that carry pad folios and others that won’t, either way is acceptable. It is definitely a red flag if you don’t have any questions to ask. The best place to start your research about a program is on the internet. Usually there is ample information located on the programs websites. Now that you have prepared for the interview it will be a breeze.

Interview day starts long before you sit down with your first interviewer. The moment you arrive in the airport and step onto the plane you should be on your best behavior. You never know who you are sitting next to. Typically you will be invited to a dinner the night before the interview. It is a good idea to attend. This gives you the opportunity to ask questions that you may not feel comfortable asking the day of the interview. The residents are usually willing to discuss the pros and cons of the program fairly candidly. On interview day: arrive early, be dressed appropriately/conservatively, be courteous to everyone you come into contact with, be enthusiastic, shake hands firmly and stand and sit with good posture. All of these things will convey friendliness and self confidence. The interview day can be long and tedious, be sure to maintain a positive attitude throughout the entire process. Put the cell phone away! It is fine to check messages during breaks but try to stay focused on the task at hand. You never know who is watching. When the interview is over, be sure to thank everyone and show your sincere gratitude.

After the interview I highly recommend evaluating each program and yourself immediately after your visit because they begin to all run together. If you felt you could have done better, do not beat yourself up. Ask yourself if you could have been more prepared for certain questions or

how you could have improved your performance and work on it for the next interview. Write down your impression of the program, pros and cons and even specific conversations you had during your interview and with who. Not only will this help you when you go to rank your programs for the match, it will help you personalize your thank you notes, which are always appreciated. The next and final article will go over the match, some statistics about the anesthesia match, contacting programs post interviews (do's and don'ts) and your final rank list.

Have a questions?

Ask Amy

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Optimize Your Match: Part 4

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The final article of the series will go through contacting programs after the interview, the final rank list and the match. The interview season is well underway at this point. As I mentioned in the 3rd article, after each interview, it is a great idea to write down your impression of the program, pros and cons and even specific conversations you had during the interview. This will help you when you go to put together your final rank list and it will help you write personalized thank you cards and letters to program directors.

The three basic rules for post interview communication are: 1. Thank every program for the opportunity to interview (whether by email, hand written notes or a letter). 2. Plan on how to communicate and what to say to the program directors of your top choices. 3. Plan on how to respond to programs who initiate contact with you after an interview.

The most effective thank you letters contain information that includes a statement of appreciation for the opportunity to interview, enjoyment of the meeting, expression of interest in the position, reason why you would be a good fit, reference to a conversation during the interview and an indication of an intent to rank highly only if plan to rank the program in the top 3 (this is purely optional). Thank you letters to directors should follow business letter format. Avoid being informal, misspellings or making it too long.

It is common for program directors or other faculty to contact applicants via email, phone or mail. They encourage you to "stay in touch" if they are interested in ranking you. They may also call you directly to attempt to get a feel for how you will rank them. The most important thing to remember is NOT to lie. If you truly intend to rank the program first, you can tell them. If you are not sure but know you will rank them highly you can communicate that as well. Do not tell a program for which you have no intension of ranking highly, that you are going to do so. The community is a much smaller than you think, and program directors do talk with each other.

Interview season typically finishes at the end of January. The programs must turn in their rank list by 9 pm Eastern Standard Time on January 31st. The rank list opens for students on January 15th to begin entering programs and closes on February 22nd at 9 pm Eastern Standard Time. If you plan to write a letter to the program director with your ranking intentions, be sure to get it in before January 31st. This can make it difficult if you are interviewing right up to the end of month. This is why I have strongly and continually recommended writing down information about each program right after the interview.

Making your rank list should be fairly easy if you follow the criteria you have set for you and your family (if you have one). Never rank a program you don't want to attend but DO rank every program you would consider attending. Don't wait until the last minute to certify your rank list to avoid any problems that may occur at the last minute. Finally, don't be naïve and believe everything you hear from program directors. There are many accounts of programs being less than truthful when making informal commitments to candidates. So once again, rank all programs you are considering attending regardless of informal commitments.

Match day is 3 weeks after the rank list closes in February. March 12th 12 pm Eastern Standard Time applicant matched and unmatched communication will be sent out and a list of unfilled positions will be available. March 13th is the scramble, March 14th all programs must finalize their new acceptance list and March 15th at 1 pm Eastern Standard Time the Match list is released.

I hope this series of articles has helped take the mystery out of the match and will help you move forward through the process with some confidence. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me with questions.

Good luck to everyone this year!

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