

A Guide to Preparing for Dental School

Maybe you already know that you have a strong interest in dentistry but don't know where to start. It's never too early to begin preparing. Below are a few guidelines to help you plan your coursework and get in touch with mentors and other professionals who can help you along the way. Keep in mind this guide offers a general timeline for preparation.

Many successful dental students have been non-science majors or pursued other careers before deciding dentistry was right for them. In fact, the guide can be used at any point in your academic or professional career. It is also helpful if you are not completely sure that dentistry is where you want to focus your energy and will help you decide if attending dental school is a commitment you want to make.

For High School Students

- Take science and math classes, including chemistry, biology, and algebra. If available, take Advanced Placement (AP) level coursework.
- Talk to people in the field. Call local dentists or contact the dental society in your city or town to find people who can help answer your questions. Contact your local dental society through the American Dental Association's (ADA) website at www.ada.org/ada/organizations/local.asp. Information on the ADA's mentoring program can also be found at www.ada.org/public/careers/beadentist/mentoring.asp.
- Exhibit 2-4 of this guide contains information on special programs offered by dental schools that introduce students to dentistry while in high school.
- Check out ExploreHealthCareers.org (EHC) "Meet a Dentist page at www.explorehealthcareers.org/en/Career.1.aspx.

COLLEGE YEAR 1

Fall semester

- Meet with prehealth advisor and plan coursework
- If your school doesn't have a prehealth advisor, look into obtaining a copy of the ADEA Official Guide to Dental Schools. Although most schools require a minimum of one year

of biology, general/inorganic chemistry, organic chemistry, and physics, specific requirements vary from school to school.

- Complete required pre dental coursework Spring semester
- Think about volunteer or employment opportunities in dentistry for the summer like shadowing a dentist or volunteering in a community health clinic.
- Complete required coursework and register for the fall semester.
- Research prehealth enrichment programs at Explore Health Careers: <http://www.explorehealthcareers.org> Also look into the Summer Medical and Dental Education program for college freshman and sophomores at www.smdep.org. Prehealth enrichment programs can help you decide if a career in dentistry is a good fit and help you prepare for the application process.

Summer

- Complete an internship or volunteer program
- If necessary attend summer school

COLLEGE YEAR 2

Fall semester

- Schedule a time to meet with your prehealth advisor
- Attend prehealth activities
- Join your school's pre dental society if one is available
- Complete required coursework
- Explore community service opportunities through your school (doesn't necessarily need to be health-related). If possible, continue activities throughout undergraduate career.

Spring semester

- Look into paid or volunteer dental-related research opportunities
- Complete second semester coursework and register for the fall

Summer

- Complete a summer research or volunteer dental-related program
- If necessary attend summer school
- DAT preparation

COLLEGE YEAR 3

Fall semester

- Meet with prehealth advisor to make sure coursework completion is on schedule
- Discuss dental schools
- Complete coursework and register for spring semester
- Visit ADEA's website at www.adea.org/DAS/AADSAS/default.htm to learn about applying to dental school
- Place order for the ADEA Official Guide to Dental Schools
- Research schools

Spring semester

- Review each dental school's required documents early in the semester
- Identify individuals to write letters of recommendation
- Take the DAT late spring or early summer
- Prepare to submit AADSAS application. Applications become available on or around June 1.
- Complete coursework and register for the fall
- Schedule a volunteer or paid dental related activity

Summer

- Take the DAT if you have not done so already
- Prepare for school interviews in the fall
- Budget time and finances appropriately to attend interviews
- Participate in volunteer or paid opportunity
- If necessary attend summer school

COLLEGE YEAR 4

Fall semester

- Meet with prehealth advisor and complete coursework
- Attend interviews with schools
- Notification of acceptances begins December 1

Spring semester

- Apply for federal financial aid

Summer

- Relax and get ready for the first semester of dental school!
- Attend school's open houses or events
- Prepare to relocate if necessary