

10 Things to think about before applying to a Physician Assistant (PA) School

1. Your grades matter!

- ✓ Study hard in school and learn the material. The average undergraduate GPA is 3.58 for those accepted to PA school.

2. Any undergraduate degree is acceptable as long as the prerequisites are taken.

- ✓ Passionate about social work or business? That different base of knowledge could make you a very well-rounded PA and science majors don't have a preferential admission status.

3. Research the various program prerequisites.

- ✓ One of the more difficult things about applying to PA school is choosing where to apply and keeping the prerequisite requirements straight. Develop a system and streamline your prerequisites, taking the courses that apply to the most number of programs. There is no reason to take a class just for one school you are applying to!

4. See a physician assistant in action.

- ✓ Ask to shadow a PA. Not only will it help to make sure that it is a good fit for you, it will enhance your application to PA school.

5. Do you love talking to people?

- ✓ Not all PAs spend the bulk of their job interacting with patients, but the majority do. If talking with people isn't your favorite, look into specific specialties that have less interaction and make sure to observe a PA in action (#4).

6. Find a school that aligns with your goals.

- ✓ Do you think you would love to work in a rural area? Participate in international medical missions trips? Want to focus in primary care? Many schools have an emphasis. If yours correlates with theirs, you are likely to be more satisfied in the program.

7. Consider your method of paying for school.

- ✓ PA school is expensive. There is a wide range of costs in programs, but they all amount to a lot after factoring in the cost of living. Look into scholarships, the military, and National Health Corps as methods to help offset the cost without taking out major loans.

8. Take the GRE seriously.

- ✓ Although the GRE isn't always required (See #3), if it is, it should not be taken lightly. Study for it using a prep book or course. When you get your results back, look at how you did in comparison to others. Do not hesitate to take it again!

9. Get "in the trenches."

- ✓ Schools love to see (and regularly require) that you have some experience working with patients in healthcare prior to PA school. Not only can it help guide your career choices, it can provide much needed income and encouragement for both you and the patient.

10. Choose references wisely.

- ✓ Ask references with whom you have interacted/worked with multiple times. The more they know you, the better their reference can be. It is painfully clear when a reference is just listing your resume. Ask them to speak honestly and give examples, if possible. Above all, make sure they are a fan of you!