

Dear Future Veterinarian,

Most veterinarians (or aspiring vets) I've talked to have wanted to be a veterinarian since they were young, myself included. Starting at 10 years old and loving puppies and kittens, I always told people, "I want to be a vet when I grow up!" when asked what my future holds. However, I never exactly knew how to get there. Being a first generation college student, I had a rocky start. I wasn't exactly sure what to expect out of college in general, let alone the path I should take that would lead me to being a doctor. Additionally, it's not ideal that a lot of undergraduate schools don't have pre-veterinary advisors that could guide students along the twists and turns of this intricate path. I wrote this as if I was writing to my past self, in hopes that she would be at ease on this academic journey. From one student to another, I'm hoping these tips will help you reach the goal you've been working so hard for.

All the best,

Alexis Massey

General tips for getting accepted into vet school

- 1) Get experience as early as possible. Schools LOVE this. Diverse experience is even better. Due to that fact a wide variety of species will be studied in vet school, they would like you to have some exposure to different kinds of animals and environments. Aside from working/shadowing at a clinic or hospital, volunteering is a minimal-commitment option that can be very unique. There are plenty of volunteer opportunities: horse farms, the aquarium, a research lab, the zoo, animal shelters, etc.

Additionally, working at an animal hospital or clinic is great due to the fact that it shows that you know what you're getting into (long hours, physical and emotional strain, emergency situations, difficult clients, ethical dilemmas) – all of this builds the **qualities** they're looking for: stamina, adaptability, attention to detail, self-discipline, resiliency, teamwork, etc. While the field of veterinary medicine is not just playing with puppies all day, it is an extremely rewarding career with endless paths.

Note: Be sure to keep track of your experiences to put on your VMCAS application!

- 2) Academically Prepare. You don't apply to vet school until (or after) your junior year of undergrad, and you can major in basically anything...but there are certain classes that have to be taken for certain schools (although most vet schools do have majority of the same pre-requisites). Most pre-vet students major in biology because a lot of the courses match with veterinary school's requirements. These course requirements can be found on each school's site under their admissions requirements – A grade of C or higher must be achieved in all courses. Making sure you know what you have to do academically will help so much with staying on track.

Testing Required for Vet School: As of right now, there are only two tests required to get into vet school, the **GRE** and **CASPer**. Some schools may not even require them at all.

CASPer is a more holistic test where you're given scenarios and asked to respond. It measures traits such as communication, professionalism, ethics, etc.

The **GRE** is a 3 hour standardized test that tests your analytical writing, quantitative reasoning, and verbal reasoning. Don't worry, it's not as scary as it sounds! I took about 2-3 months to prepare using Magoosh online test prep. However, there are *several* efficient and free resources that will help you succeed. My Scores weren't genius level but they got me in! Verbal Reasoning: 150, Quantitative Reasoning: 145, Analytical Writing: 5/6.

- 1) Grades do matter, but don't stress! I am nowhere near a genius, I have gotten my share of C's, and have even had to retake one or two courses. This was during the beginning of my undergrad studies, and I also had some personal things going on. However, I found my areas of weakness and improved my study habits, mental health, and finally stopped procrastinating (mostly).

I graduated from Rutgers with 3.6 GPA and Cum Laude Honors, and in the middle of a pandemic! If I can, you surely can. Veterinary schools understand that things happen, even if your GPA is a little lower, don't give up and make up in other areas such as having more experience or studying hard for the GRE. However, do not take this as an opportunity to lax in your studies, save yourself the trouble and study for that biochemistry test instead of going out!

- 2) Do NOT give up: Can you imagine working years for something and getting rejected? That's exactly what I (and many others) have gone through. I got rejected from the 3 schools I applied to in 2019. This is not to discourage you in any way, but to make you aware of the reality that vet school is VERY competitive. There are only 30 vet schools in the U.S, and thousands of applicants applying to a school with only a couple hundred seats. A rejection letter is not saying you're not smart enough, or didn't work hard enough, but just that the timing isn't right. In the unfortunate chance that you do get that heartbreaking email, use it as a chance to get more experience and grow, or even to relax before starting school again. Even during this last cycle, I applied to 6 schools and received a couple more rejections before getting accepted into the University of Pennsylvania (Penn Vet) and Ross University. You WILL get in.

Actually Applying to Vet School:

Overall:

1. Complete courses (or plan to complete) before starting vet school.
2. Take Standardized Tests (GRE and/or CASPer) and send scores to school.
3. Actively work on your **VMCAS** application (Usually opens in January and closes in September for classes starting the following year). You should give yourself plenty of time and work on this application as early as possible.

Thankfully, actually applying to vet school isn't that bad! There is one application (**VMCAS**) that has 4 different sections including your **personal information, academic history, supporting information, and program materials**. The most important sections are supporting information and program materials. This application is very user friendly and keeps everything organized. It is \$220 for the initial school you add to the application, and \$100 for each school afterwards. There is a reimbursement program you can apply to.

Supporting information is where you put your 3 main personal statements, letters of recommendation, experiences, and achievements.

Program materials is where you select your schools, see the schools specific requirements, and match the courses that you entered in the academic history section.

VMCAS 3 Personal Statements

Now comes everyone's favorite part, essays. There are 3 main questions asked in the supporting information section of the VMCAS. Each essay has a 2,000 character limit including spaces (300-400 words).

My overall tips for these essays include: Don't use fluff or fillers! You only have so much space to sell yourself, try to keep it short (concise) and sweet. Also, try to throw in personal examples when applicable to showcase your skills/knowledge.

- 1. There are many career choices within the veterinary profession. What are your future career goals and why?**

After graduation, do you want to go into general practice? Work in a lab? Teach at a university? Maybe even go into a residency (3 additional years) and become board certified? There are so many things you can do with your doctorate of veterinary

medicine. Don't forget to answer the "why!" Are there any experiences that had an impact on you?

2. In what ways do veterinarians contribute to society and what do you hope to contribute?

Veterinarians are integrated in various parts of our everyday world. Aside from caring for our pets, they inspect food animals for pathogens and zoonotic diseases, conduct research to advance technology and medications, veterinarians even helped develop the Covid-19 vaccine. Be sure to discuss these great contributions!

3. Consider the breadth of society which veterinarians serve. What attributes do you believe are essential to be successful within the veterinary profession? Of these attributes, which do you possess and how have you demonstrated these in the past?

Use this to show off! Veterinarians must be adaptable, thorough, dependable, have incredible time management skills, possess physical and emotional stamina, be compassionate and ethical, have emotional intelligence, etc. What experiences have you been through (personal and professional) that exhibit these characteristics?

There may be one or two additional questions that a specific school asks for which will show up in the "program materials" section. One of the questions might be "Why do you want to attend this school?" In this case, be sure to talk about how the school will help you reach your career goals. Talk about the curriculum and clinical aspects, as well as more holistic facets such as diversity in the school, clubs, etc.

Interviews!!

What an exciting time it will be to see that email saying you're invited for an interview!! Now how do you prepare?

- I prepared by reviewing my experiences and essay questions above. This way, I was familiar with everything I'd done over the years and was ready for questions.
- I also researched the school and asked questions on specific aspects to show my interest. For example, in my UPenn Interview I saw they had a dual program (VMD-PhD), so I asked "I see you have a dual program that students can enroll in, do you find that many incoming students are choosing this path?" etc.
- If they ask you to explain low test scores/grades, say what happened and then focus on how you grew from it. It's all a learning experience.

- I prepared to answer other questions. Some might include:
 - How would you overcome challenges in this field? (Mental health challenges, debt, etc.)
 - Tell me about a time you were in a difficult situation and how you responded?
 - How do you feel about animals being used for research purposes?
 - Tell me about a clinical case that had an impact on you?
 - Tell me about yourself?
 - Would you euthanize a healthy animal for convenience purposes?

Just be yourself! The 3 interviews I've went on were very easy-going and they honestly want you to relax. Don't be afraid to be transparent. You got this.