

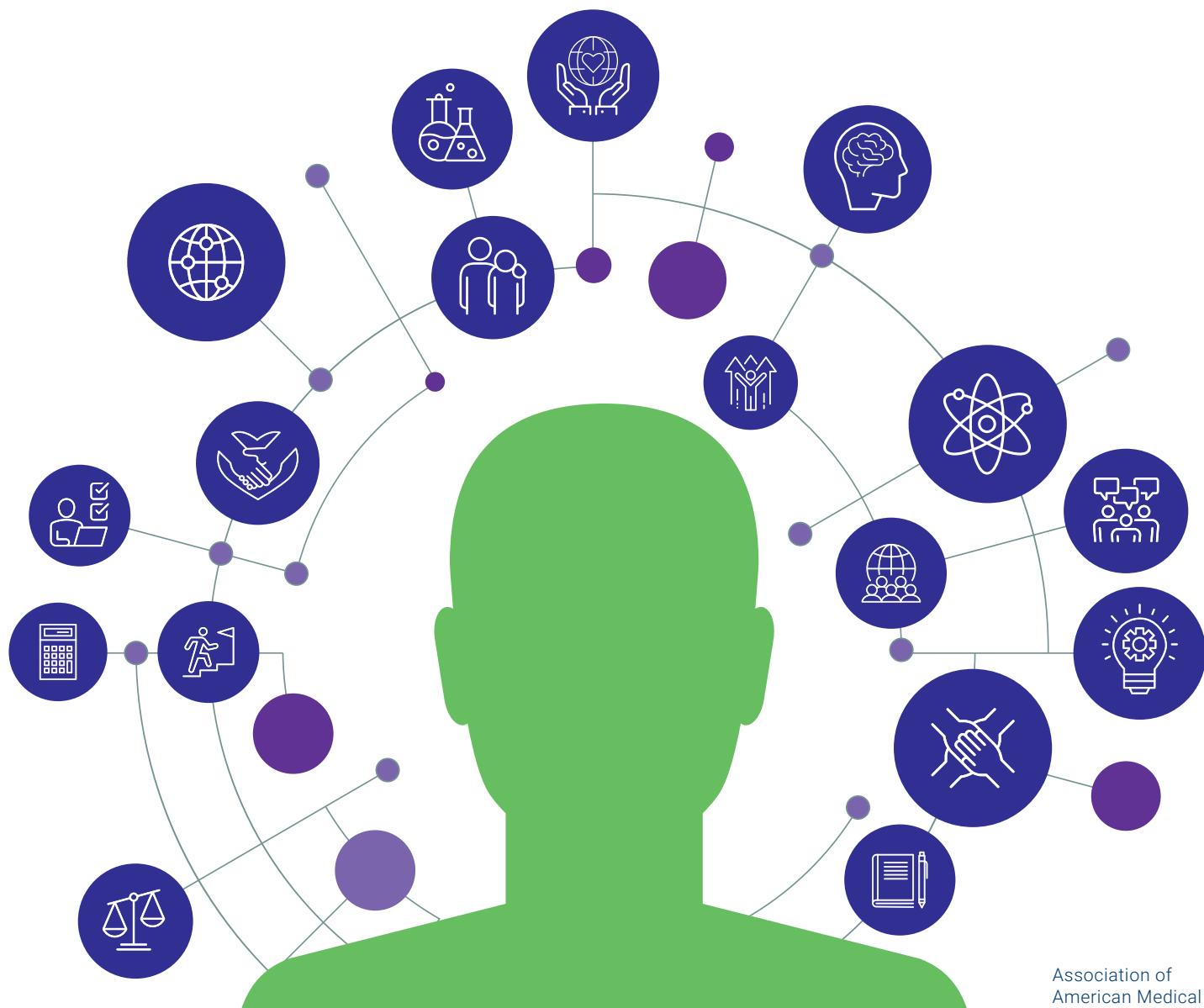


AAMC

Tomorrow's Doctors, Tomorrow's Cures®

# Anatomy of an Applicant

Premedical Competency Resources and Self-Assessment Guide  
for Medical School Applicants





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## Introduction

This guide supplements the [Anatomy of an Applicant](#) student profiles featured on the AAMC website that are based on the [17 Premed Competencies for Entering Medical Students](#). Many medical schools have identified the premed competencies as important for entering medical students. The guide was created in direct response to inquiries from applicants, prehealth advisors, and admissions officers who asked the AAMC for help in better understanding how to demonstrate aptitude in the premed competencies. It provides guidance on how the premed competencies could be developed and demonstrated through an applicant's experiences in preparation for medical school. The guide contains sections that:

- Describe the individual components of a medical school application.
- Define the individual premed competencies.
- Demonstrate how an applicant's responses inform admissions officers about their proficiency level in different competencies.
- Help generate ideas about how to show experience and develop proficiency in the various competencies.

## Use this guide to:

- **Get organized.** This guide will help you organize and think strategically about your coursework and experiences before you begin completing and submitting medical school applications. If you have a prehealth advisor, we suggest that you consult with your advisor either before using the guide or after you have completed the self-assessment at the end.
- **Become a more competitive applicant.** The premed competencies included in this guide reflect the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors valued by medical schools. This guide will help you better understand areas where you're strong and where you want to develop greater understanding and competency as you prepare to apply to medical schools. (For school-specific requirements, be sure to review the [Medical School Admission Requirements™ \(MSAR®\)](#), visit medical schools' websites, and consult with your prehealth advisor.)
- **Help you get started.** Use the worksheets in this guide to begin identifying where and how your current coursework and experiences offered opportunities to develop or demonstrate the premed competencies and how this can inform your future plans. Share your completed worksheets with your prehealth advisor or mentor, and update the worksheets regularly as you gain experience or develop understanding or strength in a competency. (These worksheets will be a helpful reference if you're planning to apply to the [Summer Health Professions Education Program \(SHPEP\)](#), medical school, or postbaccalaureate programs. They will also be helpful as you're preparing for interviews.) Remember, no applicant will be proficient in every area — that's not realistic or expected by medical schools.

**Just a friendly reminder:** When you submit your medical school applications, you will need to affirm that the information you have submitted is your own work. All written passages, such as the personal statement, essays required from MD-PhD applicants, and descriptions of work and activities, should be your own; they should not have been written, in part or in whole, by another author and should not be the product of artificial intelligence. Although you may be inspired by the students featured in the [Anatomy of an Applicant profiles](#), you need to be sure that you are telling *your* story in *your* words. Anatomy of an Applicant was created at the request of and with the guidance of the medical school admissions community.

Admissions officers are already familiar with the stories that appear in Anatomy of an Applicant — your application is a chance to tell *yours!*



## What the Parts of Your Application Tell Medical School Admissions Officers

You may have learned about the American Medical College Application Service® (AMCAS®) and the Medical College Admission Test® (MCAT®), and you probably know that there are many components that go into a *complete* application. This section will help demystify all the components of a standard medical school application. You will learn why medical schools ask to see all this documentation and what it tells them about your qualifications as an applicant.

### Primary Application

**What it is:** The primary application, AMCAS or the Texas Medical and Dental School Application Service (TMDSAS), is a verified record of most of the elements listed below compiled into a centralized application. This application is distributed to each medical school that you designate.

**What it communicates:** Why you've chosen medicine as a career, how you prepared for medical school, your experiences, and how people perceive you as a student and future physician.

- ▶ [Learn more about applying with the AMCAS application.](#)

## Secondary Application

**What it is:** An additional school-specific application that supplements your primary application. It helps explain why you're interested in a particular institution; how your goals, experiences, and plans align with the school's mission and goals; and how and what you would contribute as a learner at *that* institution. In other words, it's an opportunity to answer the question, "Why this school?"

**What it communicates:** From the school's perspective, the secondary application provides an opportunity to probe for more institution-specific information by, for example, evaluating your fit with their mission, assessing your reasons for applying to that particular school, and posing other school-specific questions.

► [Learn more about secondary application policies with MSAR Reports.](#)

## Official Transcripts and Coursework

**What they are:** The official record or records from each college or university you attended, the courses you took, and the grades or credit you received.

**What they communicate:** These components tell part of the story about how you academically prepared for medical school. For example:

- Did you take upper-level science courses?
- What were your grade trends and coursework patterns?
- Do you have experience with writing-intensive courses?
- Did you challenge yourself with higher-level coursework in and outside your major?
- Did you formally study another language or take coursework in another language?
- Do you have a broad liberal arts background?
- Did you take community college courses or complete coursework at other institutions?
- Did you take postbaccalaureate or graduate courses?
- Did you have to overcome academic challenges?



## MCAT® Score(s)

**What it is:** The Medical College Admission Test is a standardized multiple-choice test designed to assess your problem solving, critical thinking, and knowledge of natural, behavioral, and social science concepts and principles.

**What it communicates:** The MCAT exam tests the skills and knowledge that medical educators, physicians, medical students, and residents have identified as key prerequisites for success in medical school and beyond.

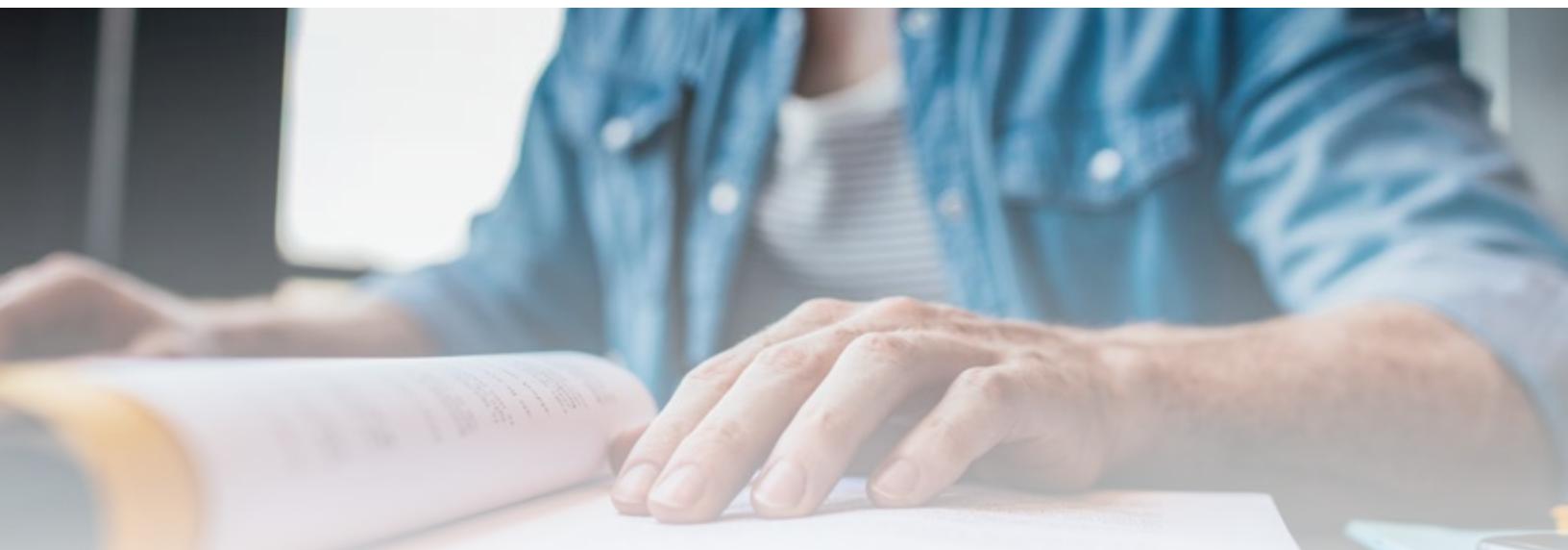
The MCAT exam is one tool that medical school admissions officers use in combination with application materials (e.g., transcripts and personal statements) and interviews to select future medical students.

► [Learn more about the MCAT exam.](#)

## PREview® Professional Readiness Exam Score

**What it is:** The AAMC [PREview®](#) professional readiness exam is a standardized exam that presents a series of hypothetical scenarios students may encounter in medical school and asks examinees to evaluate the effectiveness of a series of behavioral responses to each scenario.

**What it communicates:** The PREview exam is designed to assess examinees' understanding of effective and ineffective behavior across professional competencies identified as important for success for entering medical students. The PREview exam is one tool that medical school admissions officers may use in combination with other application materials (e.g., experiences, letters of recommendation) and interviews to enhance holistic review of applicants.



## Personal Statements From Primary Application and Essay Questions on Secondary Applications

**What they are:** The personal statement on the AMCAS application is your opportunity to communicate your motivation for a career in medicine and distinguish yourself from other applicants. The essay questions on your secondary applications will provide context for the other components of your application and further inform an admissions committee about how you may be a good fit for their institution.

**What they communicate:** This is your best opportunity to tell the medical school admissions officers something about yourself that they wouldn't necessarily learn by looking at the other parts of your application. You may focus on, for example, meaningful experiences, your development in particular competencies, how your interests align with a school's mission, your desire to serve in a particular community or to work with a particular patient population, or any challenges or obstacles you've faced, including distance traveled. *Distance traveled* is how admissions officers and prehealth advisors refer to those life challenges you've faced and conquered.

## Experiences, Publications, or Poster Presentations

**What they are:** An opportunity to highlight your extracurricular activities, including medically related experiences and exposure, employment, volunteer work, internships, and research.

**What they communicate:** The impact you made while engaging in the activity and the personal growth and transformation you experienced as a result of your participation, particularly around the premed competencies.



### Letters of Evaluation or Recommendation, Committee Letter

**What they are:** Confidential letters sent directly to the application service (or medical school) by individuals (or your undergraduate institution's committee) on your behalf. You can send [the AAMC's Letters of Evaluation guide](#) to your letter writers to help them create your letter.

**What they communicate:** Your personal qualities, characteristics, competencies, and capabilities as a future physician from the perspective of someone who knows you.

### Biographical Information

**What it is:** Your family structure, parent or guardian education and career information, citizenship, language proficiency, legal residence, and criminal convictions.

**What it communicates:** Your biographical information gives admissions committees more context about your background, access to resources and services, and family structure. For example, you may include the education level of your parents or whether you are the first in your family to attend college.

### Possible Review of Social Media and Internet Search

**What it is:** This is the public commentary, discourse, and images you post on social media sites, message boards, and blogs.

**What it communicates:** Increasingly, admissions officers may view these sites to learn more about your opinions, biases, social behaviors, and judgments. This can be both positive and negative. Note: Be sure you know what's available about yourself (or about someone else with your name or a similar name).

- ▶ [Read more about how social media can affect your application.](#)



## Interview

**What it is:** A virtual, in-person, or hybrid meeting between you and one or more individuals representing a medical school. Some schools use multiple mini-interviews (MMIs) or more structured interviews to focus on particular competencies.

**What it communicates:** If you are invited to interview, it means that the school is interested in learning more about you and whether you would be a good fit there. It is an opportunity for the school to learn more about your personal qualities, competencies, experiences and interests, how you communicate, and how you engage with other current and future members of the school's community. It is also your opportunity to assess how you feel about the medical school and its environment and to ask additional questions.

► [Read more about the AAMC's interview resources.](#)

## Financial Information

**What it is:** This is a snapshot of your ability to finance or pay for your education.

Note: Your ability to afford medical school will not factor into the admissions decision.

**What it communicates:** Medical schools use financial information differently. Some may use it either to help distribute need-based aid and scholarship funds or to develop a financial package to help you finance your education.

## Criminal History Search

**What it is:** A search and report of your criminal history. The report is used to ascertain the ability of conditionally accepted applicants to become licensed physicians, to enhance the safety and well-being of patients, and to ensure the public's continuing trust in the medical profession. The AAMC recommends that all U.S. medical schools obtain a national background check on applicants upon their conditional acceptance to medical school.

► [Read more about the criminal background check service.](#)

**What it communicates:** This confirms your integrity and whether you have been forthcoming and truthful about your criminal history on your application and during your interviews. It also communicates to medical schools your potential ability to become a licensed physician. Some medical schools may require an additional form asking you to disclose other information.



## The Premed Competencies and What They Mean

The 17 Premed Competencies for Entering Medical Students help communicate the standards expected of all applicants accepted to medical school. These competencies were identified as essential for success in medical school and in the field of medicine. They were developed with extensive input from representatives in admissions, student and diversity affairs, faculty, students, and prehealth advisors.

### Professional Competencies



**Commitment to Learning and Growth:** Practices continuous personal and professional growth for improvement, including setting and communicating goals for learning and development; reflects on successes, challenges, and mistakes; pursues opportunities to improve knowledge and understanding; and asks for and incorporates feedback to learn and grow.



**Cultural Awareness:** Appreciates how historical, sociocultural, political, and economic factors affect others' interactions, behaviors, and well-being; values diversity; and demonstrates a desire to learn about different cultures, beliefs, and values.



**Cultural Humility:** Seeks out and engages diverse and divergent perspectives with a desire to understand and willingness to adjust one's mindset; understands a situation or idea from alternative viewpoints; reflects on one's values, beliefs, and identities and how they may affect others; reflects on and addresses bias in oneself and others; and fosters a supportive environment that values inclusivity.



**Empathy and Compassion:** Recognizes, understands, and acknowledges others' experiences, feelings, perspectives, and reactions to situations; is sensitive to others' needs and feelings; and demonstrates a desire to help others and alleviate others' distress.



**Ethical Responsibility to Self and Others:** Behaves with honesty and integrity; considers multiple and/or conflicting principles and values to inform decisions; adheres to ethical principles when carrying out professional obligations; resists pressure to engage in unethical behavior; and encourages others to behave honestly and ethically.



**Interpersonal Skills:** Demonstrates an awareness of how social and behavioral cues affect people's interactions and behaviors; adjusts behaviors appropriately in response to these cues; recognizes and manages one's emotions and understands how emotions impact others or a situation; and treats others with dignity, courtesy, and respect.



**Oral Communication:** Effectively conveys information to others using spoken words and sentences; actively listens to understand the meaning and intent behind what others say; and recognizes potential communication barriers and adjusts approach or clarifies information as needed.



**Reliability and Dependability:** Demonstrates accountability for performance and responsibilities to self and others; prioritizes and fulfills obligations in a timely and satisfactory manner; and understands consequences of not fulfilling one's responsibilities to self and others.



**Resilience and Adaptability:** Perseveres in challenging, stressful, or ambiguous environments or situations by adjusting behavior or approach in response to new information, changing conditions, or unexpected obstacles, and recognizes and seeks help and support when needed; recovers from and reflects on setbacks; and balances personal well-being with responsibilities.



**Service Orientation:** Shows a commitment to something larger than oneself; demonstrates dedication to service and a commitment to making meaningful contributions that meet the needs of communities.



**Teamwork and Collaboration:** Collaborates with others to achieve shared goals and prioritizes shared goals; adjusts role between team member and leader based on one's own and others' expertise and experience; shares information with team members and encourages this behavior in others; and gives and accepts feedback to improve team performance.

## Thinking and Reasoning Competencies



**Critical Thinking.** Uses logic and reasoning to identify the strengths and weaknesses of alternative solutions, conclusions, or approaches to problems.

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**Quantitative Reasoning.** Applies quantitative reasoning and appropriate mathematics to describe or explain phenomena in the natural world.

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**Scientific Inquiry.** Applies knowledge of the scientific process to integrate and synthesize information, solve problems, and formulate research questions and hypotheses; is facile in the language of the sciences and uses it to participate in the discourse of science and explain how scientific knowledge is discovered and validated.

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**Written Communication.** Effectively conveys information to others by using written words and sentences.

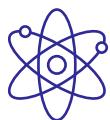
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## Science Competencies



**Human Behavior.** Applies knowledge of the self, others, and social systems to solve problems related to the psychological, sociocultural, and biological factors that influence health and well-being.

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**Living Systems.** Applies knowledge and skill in the natural sciences to solve problems related to molecular and macro systems, including biomolecules, molecules, cells, and organs.

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## Developmental Planning and Experience Worksheets

The developmental planning worksheets are designed to help you gauge your development and understanding in each of the premed competency areas. Remember, medical schools do not expect that you will have fully mastered each competency or mastered each one to the same extent. The worksheets will help you gauge where you are now, identify opportunities for growth, and help you articulate how you have developed and demonstrated the competency areas. Be sure to save and revisit these worksheets, reflecting on your growth and experiences. These sheets may become resources for you when preparing to write your personal statement, answer questions on secondary applications, and ready you for interviews.

## Premed Competency Experience Worksheets

In the AMCAS application, you're able to list up to [15 significant experiences](#) (three of which should be listed as your most meaningful), including extracurricular activities, awards, honors, and publications that you would like to highlight for medical schools. This worksheet provides a structured way to keep track of your experiences by reflecting on how the experience was transformative for you, your impact while engaging in the activity, and the personal growth you experienced because of your participation.

Use the sheet below to think about which [competencies](#) you gained experience in and how you developed or demonstrated these competencies through the experience. Keep in mind that medical schools will not expect any one experience to relate to *all* competencies. You will likely demonstrate numerous competencies through several experiences. You should complete this worksheet either at the end of an experience or periodically update it over the course of a long-term experience.

**Name of experience:**

Type of experience (check all that apply):	Volunteer	Laboratory	Paid
Start date:	End date:	Hours/time spent in experience:	

**Supervisor or contact information:**

**Meaningful or important parts of this experience:** Reflect on your experience and for each relevant competency, describe:

- What you learned about the competency by observing others.
- How you developed or improved in the competency.
- How you demonstrated the competency.

*Note: Remember to write about only relevant competencies, not all competencies. No one experience is likely to reflect all competencies.*

## Professional Competencies

Describe what you learned about this competency and how you developed or demonstrated this competency during this experience. (Complete for all that apply.)



**Commitment to Learning and Growth.** Practices continuous personal and professional growth for improvement, including setting and communicating goals for learning and development; reflects on successes, challenges, and mistakes; pursues opportunities to improve knowledge and understanding; and asks for and incorporates feedback to learn and grow.



**Cultural Awareness.** Appreciates how historical, sociocultural, political, and economic factors affect others' interactions, behaviors, and well-being; values diversity; and demonstrates a desire to learn about different cultures, beliefs, and values.



**Cultural Humility.** Seeks out and engages diverse and divergent perspectives with a desire to understand and willingness to adjust one's mindset; understands a situation or idea from alternative viewpoints; reflects on one's values, beliefs, and identities and how they may affect others; reflects on and addresses bias in oneself and others; and fosters a supportive environment that values inclusivity.



**Empathy and Compassion.** Recognizes, understands, and acknowledges others' experiences, feelings, perspectives, and reactions to situations; is sensitive to others' needs and feelings; and demonstrates a desire to help others and alleviate others' distress.



**Ethical Responsibility to Self and Others.** Behaves with honesty and integrity; considers multiple and/or conflicting principles and values to inform decisions; adheres to ethical principles when carrying out professional obligations; resists pressure to engage in unethical behavior; and encourages others to behave honestly and ethically.



**Interpersonal Skills.** Demonstrates an awareness of how social and behavioral cues affect people's interactions and behaviors; adjusts behaviors appropriately in response to these cues; recognizes and manages one's emotions and understands how emotions impact others or a situation; and treats others with dignity, courtesy, and respect.



**Oral Communication.** Effectively conveys information to others using spoken words and sentences; actively listens to understand the meaning and intent behind what others say; and recognizes potential communication barriers and adjusts approach or clarifies information as needed.



**Reliability and Dependability.** Demonstrates accountability for performance and responsibilities to self and others; prioritizes and fulfills obligations in a timely and satisfactory manner; and understands consequences of not fulfilling one's responsibilities to self and others.



**Resilience and Adaptability.** Perseveres in challenging, stressful, or ambiguous environments or situations by adjusting behavior or approach in response to new information, changing conditions, or unexpected obstacles, and recognizes and seeks help and support when needed; recovers from and reflects on setbacks; and balances personal well-being with responsibilities.



**Service Orientation.** Shows a commitment to something larger than oneself; demonstrates dedication to service and a commitment to making meaningful contributions that meet the needs of communities.



**Teamwork and Collaboration.** Collaborates with others to achieve shared goals and prioritizes shared goals; adjusts role between team member and leader based on one's own and others' expertise and experience; shares information with team members and encourages this behavior in others; and gives and accepts feedback to improve team performance.

## Thinking and Reasoning Competencies

*Describe what you learned about this competency and how you developed or demonstrated this competency during this experience. (Complete for all that apply.)*



**Critical Thinking.** Uses logic and reasoning to identify the strengths and weaknesses of alternative solutions, conclusions, or approaches to problems.



**Quantitative Reasoning.** Applies quantitative reasoning and appropriate mathematics to describe or explain phenomena in the natural world.



**Scientific Inquiry.** Applies knowledge of the scientific process to integrate and synthesize information, solve problems and formulate research questions and hypotheses; is facile in the language of the sciences and uses it to participate in the discourse of science and explain how scientific knowledge is discovered and validated.



**Written Communication.** Effectively conveys information to others using written words and sentences.



## Science Competencies

*Describe what you learned about this competency and how you developed or demonstrated this competency during this experience.*

**Human Behavior.** Applies knowledge of the self, others, and social systems to solve problems related to the psychological, sociocultural, and biological factors that influence health and well-being.



**Living Systems.** Applies knowledge and skill in the natural sciences to solve problems related to molecular and macro systems including biomolecules, molecules, cells, and organs.

## Premed Competencies: Self-Assessment

When evaluating your readiness for medical school, schools assess your development, understanding, and proficiency in the premed competencies through your experiences as described in the AMCAS application, personal statement, interview, letters of recommendation, and performance on other assessments (e.g., MCAT exam, PREview exam).

You should periodically assess or reassess your learning and development in these competencies to determine where you may need additional experiences to better prepare for medical school.

Using the sheet below, reflect on each competency area and what experiences have given you an opportunity to learn and develop in the competency. (You can view all competencies and their definitions at the end of this document.)

### Date of Self-Assessment:

### Competency:

#### Professional

- |   |                               |
|---|-------------------------------|
| Commitment to Learning and Growth         | Interpersonal Skills          |
| Cultural Awareness                        | Oral Communication            |
| Cultural Humility                         | Reliability and Dependability |
| Empathy and Compassion                    | Resilience and Adaptability   |
| Ethical Responsibility to Self and Others | Service Orientation           |
|   | Teamwork and Collaboration    |

#### Thinking and Reasoning

- |                        |
|------------------------|
| Critical Thinking      |
| Quantitative Reasoning |
| Scientific Inquiry     |
| Written Communication  |

#### Science

- |                |
|----------------|
| Human Behavior |
| Living Systems |

### Level of Competency Development:    Planning

### Progressing

### Demonstrating

### How I demonstrated this competency across experiences:

### How developing this competency helps prepare me to be a successful medical student or future physician:

**What I learned or how I grew in this competency:**

**How I hope to further learn and grow in this competency:**

### My Plan to Develop This Competency

**Next steps:**

**Timeline:**

**Notes:**

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## Content Experts and Thanks

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### Questions, Comments, or Suggestions?

Send your questions, comments, or suggestions for future applicant and premed resources to [AspiringDocs@aamc.org](mailto:AspiringDocs@aamc.org).



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