

UCSF Ophthalmology Advice Guide

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Hello! We are excited that you are interested in ophthalmology! It is truly a special field in medicine. From saving someone's vision after severe eye trauma, to restoring vision with cataract, retina, or cornea surgery, to preserving someone's vision with glaucoma management and surgery, to reconstructing someone's periocular area after trauma, burns, or tumor removal, amazing things can happen in ophthalmology. Ophthalmologists love their job and the majority say they would pick this specialty again if they had the choice. An incredible amount of job satisfaction comes from saving someone's vision!

We are here for you in the UCSF Department of Ophthalmology! We have put together this guide to help you through the process. This guide is meant to be very comprehensive. We want to make sure you are aware of all the opportunities and resources you have so that you can plan accordingly. You do not have to do everything we mention! Please feel free to reach out with questions about the specialty, how to get involved, and how to become a great ophthalmology applicant!

Medical School

A well-rounded application is important for a successful match and any way you can prove to ophthalmology programs that you are dedicated to the field will be helpful to you. As more objective data (such as grades and board scores become less prevalent) other parts of your application will become more important. Various experiences you seek out are not only fun and educational, but will offer exposure to this wonderful field. Search for things that would interest you. Remember, ophthalmology is an early match. You don't have to commit to it early, but if this is a potential career option for you, seek out opportunities that will give you exposure.

Even if you decide on ophthalmology a little later in medical school or you are keeping an open mind, being involved in your school, research and other activities will show well roundedness, interest, hard-work, and passion for medicine on your application.

PRECLINICAL YEARS: FOUNDATIONS 1 (MS1, MS2)

What should you do or get involved in during preclinical years?

- 1.) Extracurricular activities- these are just ideas and options, but are not limited to the list below! (Significant involvement in a few is more important than superficial involvement in several. Any leadership position will hold value.)
 - a. Vision and Ophthalmology Interest Group: This is a great way to connect with our department, find mentors, find out about any informational sessions, medical student microsurgery labs, volunteer events, research activities, or other ophthalmology specific events.
 - i. Website: <https://sites.google.com/site/ucsfpreophthalmology>
 - b. Surgery Interest Group
 - i. Website: <https://surgeryinterestgroup.ucsf.edu/>
 - c. Other Student Organizations that interest you
 - d. [https://meded.ucsf.edu/md-program/current-students/student-services/student-organizations - Full-List-of-Specialty-Interest-Groups](https://meded.ucsf.edu/md-program/current-students/student-services/student-organizations-Full-List-of-Specialty-Interest-Groups)
 - e. Any service projects or other volunteer opportunities
 - f. Tutoring
- 2.) Explore the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO website) medical student section
 - a. This website has educational resources for students including interactive clinical

figures and cases

b. It also includes links to ophthalmology medical education webinars

c. This is the website link: <https://www.aao.org/medical-students>

3.) Shadow/Observation

a. Shadow both in the clinic and the operating room to get exposure.

If there is a specific attending you would like to shadow, you can reach out to them directly, or you can reach out to Shelle Libberton (contact available below), Education Programs Administrator for the UCSF Department of Ophthalmology, and she can help set you up with opportunities. (Shelle is an excellent resource for medical students!)

b. When you shadow, it can be helpful to know some basics about ophthalmology. Knowing some basic anatomy is great. If you are going to the OR, you can look up the procedure you are observing so you know a little about the anatomy or surgery steps. You will look impressive! (Some helpful educational websites are listed at the end of this guide.)

4.) Introduction to ophthalmology fall lunch-time lecture series (Ophthalmology 160.01) in the course catalog

a. Faculty from the Department of Ophthalmology are invited to give lectures

b. Gain knowledge of common and uncommon eye problems that may be seen in internal medicine, family practice, the emergency room, the ophthalmologist's office and in an ophthalmology operating room.

c. Appreciate the clinical and surgical duties of an ophthalmologist and learn about the various subspecialties and career paths in ophthalmology.

d. Held once a week from September – late November/December

e. Lunch is provided!

e. Can be taken for 1 unit of credit, but does not have to be for credit. Anyone can join!

5.) Consider finding a Career Mentor

a. We can help you find a mentor either through VOIG (through a mentoring program) or you can contact Neeti Parikh (contact available below), who can help introduce you to other members of the department.

b. Mentors are excellent. They can give you advice about what to do in medical school, help you find research opportunities or give you research projects, provide application and interview advice and much more. Mentors are key throughout the entire medical training process so find some good ones!

- 6.) Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO)
- a. offers a Global Mentorship Program for junior researchers. This program is focused on career guidance and would give you the opportunity to be mentored by someone from a different institution.
 - i. <https://www.arvo.org/education/arvo-global-mentorship-program/>
Note: You do have to be an ARVO member for a year in order to apply for this program.
- 7.) For Underrepresented in Medicine Students:
- a. Minority Ophthalmology Mentoring Program
 - i. This program is through the American Academy of Ophthalmology
 - ii. Its purpose is to increase diversity in the field of ophthalmology by helping underrepresented in medicine students become competitive ophthalmology residency applicants.
 - iii. Website: <https://www.aao.org/minority-mentoring-students>
 - b. Annual Rabb-Venable Excellence in Ophthalmology Research Program
 - i. Through the National Medical Association
 - ii. Geared towards increasing the number of under-represented minority physicians in ophthalmology and academic medicine.
 - iii. Website: <http://www.rabbvenable.org>
- 8.) Research – **This is important throughout medical school.** Please see the separate section below on research. A great time to consider a research project is the summer between 1st and 2nd year. You have a good block of time here and a project could turn into a poster, abstract, or a paper.

CLINICAL YEARS: FOUNDATIONS 2 (MS3) and Career Launch (MS4)

- 1.) Foundations 2 clinical rotations
- a. Traditional 3rd year Clerkship Program
 - i. Ophthalmology CIEx: If you are even just thinking of a career in Ophthalmology, we strongly urge you to do a CIEx in ophthalmology. This will allow you to explore the field in your 3rd year and is a great opportunity to get some clinical experience prior to your sub-internship if you decide to pursue ophthalmology. You will work with a resident and faculty member and get a chance to meet people in the department and make contacts for research in ophthalmology if you haven't done so already.

1. 130.01A CIEx - Ophthalmology CIEx at the VA

2. 130.01B CIEEx - Ophthalmology CIEEx at Mission Bay
3. If your schedule allows, try to do this earlier in your 3rd year, so you meet people in the department earlier.

b. Longitudinal Clerkship Programs

- i. PISCES- Sign up for a longitudinal CIEEx in Ophthalmology (where you will be paired up with a preceptor and spend 4 half days in the OR and 4 half days in clinic over the course of the year).
 - ii. Others: KLIC, Model SFGH, VALOR- check with your individual directors about scheduling CIEExes and/or speak to us about ways you can gain clinical exposure and experience in ophthalmology.
- c. Note: Our department holds a 3M (morbidity, mortality and microsurgery) conference every Thursday morning. It is a great opportunity to learn about the various surgical aspects of our field. Previous students considering ophthalmology have enjoyed the conference. We recommend attending during your CIEEx and your resident preceptor can give you the room location or zoom information.

2.) Career launch clinical rotations/electives

a. Ophthalmology for Primary Care, Ophthalmology 140.05

- i. Two-week elective providing practice in the eye examination, ophthalmology skills, and working with a resident preceptor and various faculty in the outpatient setting (clinic and OR).
- ii. If you have already done a CIEEx in ophthalmology, you do not need to take this elective and can go right to your sub-internship (see below). If you have not taken a CIEEx and are still planning to pursue ophthalmology, we suggest taking this elective early in your 4th year (it is usually offered in April) so you can gain some experience before your sub-internship which you would do soon after.
- iii. If you are not pursuing ophthalmology as a career, but would like to gain some skills and experience in the field to help you with your chosen field- this is a great 4th year elective and is offered at various times throughout the year!

b. Ophthalmology Sub-Internship

- i. UCSF offers ophthalmology sub-internships at Parnassus/Mission Bay or the VA.

1. 140.01A Advanced Ophthalmology Clerkship, Mission Bay

2. 140.06 Advanced Ophthalmology Clerkship, Veterans Affairs Medical Center

- ii. You must do a sub-internship in ophthalmology if you are applying to ophthalmology and should plan to do this in May, June, or July of your 4th

year.

- iii. You will be assigned both a resident and a faculty point of contact.
 - iv. During your sub-internship, introduce yourself to an attending(s) (your resident can help with this). Get to know an attending(s) so you can ask for a letter.
 - v. SOME clinical experience (i.e. a 3rd year CIEEx) is very useful for your sub internship.
 - vi. An expectation for your sub-internship is that you, the student, present directly to the attending (after a week or so of “learning the ropes” from the resident). This is good - you want face time with clinical faculty so you can impress them!
 - vii. Other things you may expect from your sub-internship rotation are: a) clinic or teaching rounds at the end of a clinic day, b) you may be asked to present a case or topic in an informal setting, or a topic/case presentation towards the end of the rotation to all the faculty/residents.
- c. Research in Ophthalmology Elective: Ophthalmology 150.02 i. A research project under the direction of a member of the faculty carried out in the Department of Ophthalmology
- d. SPAN: Specialty Practice Ambulatory Sub-internship
- i. SPAN is required during your fourth year
 - ii. You will work one-on-one with a preceptor in a chosen specialty or subspecialty
 - iii. If you are applying to ophthalmology, you could consider asking an ophthalmology faculty member to be your SPAN preceptor. This is not a requirement or a necessity! However, it is something to consider, especially if you are still looking for faculty to write letters.
- e. Other sub-internships
- i. If your schedule allows, we recommend doing either a medicine or surgery sub-internship early in your 4th year so that grade can be submitted with your application.
- f. Away rotations
- i. Away rotations are not a requirement for your application.
 - ii. There is a split amongst both advisors and residency selection committees on whether or not an away rotation is beneficial. An away rotation can help or hurt you. It could potentially hurt you if you rotate at a place and for some reason you don't mesh well with the faculty or program. If your application could use some improvement, then an away rotation could give you the credibility and connections you need in order to at least get an interview. It is also a good consideration in certain circumstances such as geographical limitations to where you hope to

match.

- iii. When looking for away rotations, if you decide to do one, consider what kind of experience you are looking for. Some programs may have you rotate through all the different sub-specialties and with many or several physicians in 3-4 weeks (which may give you a nice overview of the program to see if it is a good fit for you, but may limit how well you get to know the faculty). Others may have you rotating on only one sub specialty, which may allow you to get to know the ophthalmologists, fellows, and residents on the service better, which could serve as an opportunity to make contacts for recommendation letters or someone to speak up for you to get an interview. You can search program websites individually to find out what they offer and their application requirements. For most away rotations, you will have to submit an application and/or a letter of recommendation from an ophthalmologist. Application deadlines will vary so start looking soon after you take Step 1 in March.
- iv. If you choose to do an away, consider it a month-long interview, but do NOT expect a residency interview just because you do an away rotation. You may consider getting a letter from the place you did your away, but we suggest completing your home sub-internship first and would first consider letter writers from here first.
- v. If you want to create a rotation, you have to do some research on ophthalmologists that you would be interested in working with and whether they would take medical students for 3-4 weeks. Then you can email them or contact them directly and tell them potential dates and what you are interested in. Word of mouth obviously helps in finding mentors that teach a lot and are fun to work with and will advocate for you after your rotation. (You may or may not be able to use this for credit.) Something like this would be more common for a research elective.
- vi. During your away rotation, plan to work hard and prove yourself to be a good candidate for their program. Get to know people and be prepared. Don't complain, including to residents even if they are doing so because you don't know what they will think about you. Read a lot and know as much as you can. Ask questions. Show that you are interested and want to learn. Meet the residency program director while you are at the program. If you don't work with them, ask to set up a meeting. Also, if you can find out who is on the residency selection committee, try and meet them too, but this is not always stable and/or easy to determine. (NOTE: THIS ALL APPLIES TO YOUR HOME SUB-INTERNSHIP AS WELL!!)

3.) Step 1 and 2

a. Step 1:

- i. Step 1 is required for your application.
- ii. Given that it is P/F, if you have to take it more than once to get a passing score, this will make matching more difficult. Be prepared to explain why in the interviews. You can explain a specific situation if there is one, or say “I studied, I tried, this is the score I got, but it does nothing to reflect on the doctor that I will be” and then explain your strengths that will make you a good ophthalmologist/doctor. Program committees want and will respect honesty and sincerity.
- iii. Bottom line: If there is an issue, please come to us, your mentors, confidential or non-confidential career advisors to review your application and help you formulate a plan.

b. Step 2

- i. As of now, this is not an application requirement, but we suggest taking before applications if your schedule allows and you think you can do relatively well. While it is still scored, it is not weighed nearly as heavily as Step 1 was when it was scored.
- ii. Not everyone takes it prior to application deadlines (but make sure you take it according to SOM guidelines!) Some applicants try and take it as late as they can so these scores do not end up on their application, or they will take it soon after applications are submitted (early September), so they can later update their application with the score if they choose (though some programs may require you to send it as soon as you have the score).

4.) Grades and Honors

- a. Honors during your 4th year sub-internships are very important (Surgery, Medicine, and of course Ophthalmology). As many schools move towards a Pass/Fail system (UCSF included), any objective grading will be looked at, which for UCSF students, means the sub-internships you complete in the early part of Career Launch (MS4). Your third year core clerkships are also still extremely important as the comments you receive will be used for your MSPE letter.

RESEARCH

- 1) Research is important. One thing to note: All research you do in medical school is great. If you decide later in your medical school career that you like ophthalmology, but have completed projects in other fields- this work is still very valuable. It is, however, ideal to have been involved in some ophthalmology research during medical school. In addition to having ophthalmology research on your application, it also is an excellent opportunity to get to know a mentor well who might be able to write a strong letter of recommendation and vouch for you when necessary.
- 2) There are a lot of research opportunities in ophthalmology.
 - a. We advise you to find a research mentor who will really make sure you get something done. It is good to be able to say that you have done research, but it is much better to have something to show for it. In finding a research mentor you should a.) be interested in what they are doing research on b.) like and get along with your mentor c.) make sure they know what your time and commitment can be and make sure that they have a project that can fit into the time that you have available.
 - b. There are many people here at UCSF you can work with. Some research opportunities are listed on the VOIG website. You can go on the department website and look up all the faculty members and see what specialties they are in and what research they are involved in. If you find something that interests you, email the faculty member and let them know you are interested in research in ophthalmology and if they have any projects that you could become involved with or take on. You can also speak to your mentor in ophthalmology or come to one of the ophthalmology advisors. If you tell us your interests, we can give you some recommendations on who you can reach out to. Our residents are also a great resource. They may have projects you can get involved with or know of people you can work with.
- 3) Publications are important and hold the most weight on an application. First author publications will hold the most weight.
- 4) Presentations at meetings or posters are also excellent opportunities.
 - a. Presenting at local and national conferences is a great experience and also good for your application.
 - i. UCSF School of Medicine holds various research symposia that you can present at such as the Health Disparities Research Symposium and UCSF Education Showcase. Keep an eye out for opportunities like this. They are an excellent way to show your work and not as difficult to get a project accepted at as a larger national conference may be!

- ii. ARVO (The Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology) and AAO (American Academy of Ophthalmology) are two of the largest ophthalmology conferences. There are many other specialty specific conferences and then other research conferences in general around the country that you can also present at (and yes- a virtual presentation counts!)
- iii. If you want to submit an abstract for a conference, the deadline to submit is often several to many months before the actual conferences. You will only have to submit the abstract and then the poster and presentation can be done later, however, as medical school is actually not a long period of time in the scheme of research, it is often a crunch to get enough data to get an abstract submitted in time.
- iv. It is best to do some research about conferences that you would be interested in attending or presenting at ahead of time and know the dates of abstract submission. Also, your mentor or PI is a great resource for information about upcoming conferences and if you show interest in presenting, they can help you.

- 5) Be proactive about your research. Find your mentor. If your mentor has clinical responsibilities as well, we highly recommend asking to shadow or spend some time with them in the clinic and/or OR for more face time with them (as this will become important if you ask them for a letter. Define a project and deadlines. Keep in touch with your mentor and schedule meetings, etc. Be aggressive enough to make every attempt to finish projects you start. Your mentors, letter writers, and interviewers want to see dedication and commitment and completing a project shows this. Your mentors are busy too, so staying on top of your project can be super helpful!
- 6) Try to aim for at least 3 research projects, knowing that all may not get to publication or presentation by the time you submit your applications. (Not all have to be in Ophthalmology.)
- 7) Don't forget about Quality Improvement Projects and Case Reports. These may not hold as much weight as a journal article, but they are still important. Everything counts!
- 8) The best time to start is the summer between first and second year and then continue small projects throughout second and third year. It is difficult to start something your 4th year and expect it to be complete for your application (however, this also has been done!). For a project for the summer between 1st and 2nd year, you should start reaching out to potential mentors in January or February. This may be a time for you to go elsewhere (abroad or another institution) for research. You may come across something, or if there are opportunities we become aware of, we will post them on the VOIG website and/or the VOIG Facebook page.
- 9) Deep Explore Project- All UCSF medical students are required to complete a faculty mentored Deep Explore Project. You may consider an Ophthalmology related project for

this.

GAP YEAR

- 1) Some people take a gap year between 3rd and 4th year (or 2nd and 3rd year, but between 3rd and 4th is more common here). This is not necessary in order to match. However, it could help boost your application if it is weak in other areas and it could show dedication to research.
- 2) You have some options for your gap year, but remember, the key is to make it productive and have excellent mentorship. You can do research, or research and a masters, or spend time abroad working or doing research. Make sure that the year is beneficial to you.
- 3) Do research on your PI and make sure they publish regularly.
- 4) Plan to work hard during this year. You don't want a year of research on your application with nothing to show for it. Also remember that if you do research at UCSF with one of the ophthalmologists here, you will be creating an impression that will continue with you through the application process. If you impress them, they will want to keep you or support you. However, the opposite can also hold true.
- 5) Choose wisely and again, if you do take a gap year, be productive!
- 6) Lastly, if you do decide to take a year off, there are funding opportunities you can apply for, both extramural and intramural.
 - a. One option is the Yearlong Inquiry Program (<https://meded.ucsf.edu/fund-opportunity/yearlong-inquiry-program-yip>)
 - b. You can look for other information on the SOM inquiry funding office site
 - c. <https://meded.ucsf.edu/inquiry-funding-office>
 - d. Deadlines for these applications are often early (towards the end of MS3: December/January)

OTHER THINGS THAT MAY HELP YOU:

- 1) PhD/Master's Degree
 - a. There are a good number of applicants who have PhDs. There are also several options for masters degrees, such as a Masters in Public Health or Masters of Business Admin, etc. These are not necessary, but if you have them, they will only add to and boost your application. However, we do not recommend doing this unless it is something you are very interested in.
- 2) UCSF offers a MD with Distinction (MDwD), which recognizes students who engage in high-caliber mentored research.
 - a. <https://meded.ucsf.edu/md-program/current-students/education-programs/md-distinction>

b. Again, not necessary, but if it is something you are interested in, it is something to consider.

3) Networking

a. Networking is not just important for business school. It will also help your career in ophthalmology. Ophthalmology is a very small community of doctors and most ophthalmologists, especially those in academics know each other or know of each other.

b. It will benefit you to know the ophthalmology faculty here at UCSF. Try to get to know 2-3 well, which is why research helps. This way you will have people to reach out to for recommendation letters that are descriptive, detailed and sincere. Yes, you can almost always get a positive letter, but you want a GLOWING letter that sets you apart from others.

c. Conferences can also be a great place to meet other ophthalmologists. It's best to present or have a poster at a conference, but if you don't and are still able to attend, then you should! They are great for networking. You may like someone's presentation and can strike up a conversation with them after. You may meet residents from other programs (that you may end up interviewing at later!) Major ophthalmology conferences as mentioned are AAO and ARVO. However, there are many smaller conferences, local conferences, and sub-specialty specific conferences as well. You can research what is available or ask your mentors or the residents.

4) Working abroad

a. This is a great opportunity if you are interested and have the time in your schedule. This is an option for the summer between 1st and 2nd year or if you take a gap year. (Again, whatever you do must be useful and productive).

b. Some options include reaching out to our faculty at the Francis. I. Proctor Foundation, the Himalayan Cataract Project, and Unite for Sight. You can also look up programs on the internet and search out experiences. There are also research projects that take place abroad that you could get involved with as well (Proctor would be a good starting point for this).

5) Awards

a. Awards will of course add to your application. These could include many different types of research awards, grants, fellowships, UCSF-specific awards such as the Dean's Prize or Deep Explore Project Prize, poster awards at a conference, etc. Keep an eye out for potential opportunities to be recognized. You can also ask your mentor or research PI if he or she knows of any opportunities.

Application Process

Applications/Match

1.) Overview

a. The first thing to know about the Ophthalmology Match and application process is it is early! It doesn't follow the same timeline as the other specialties in medicine.

You will submit your ophthalmology application earlier, start interviewing earlier and submit your rank list earlier. But you also match earlier! This is the good part!

2.) The Ophthalmology Match

a. The San Francisco (SF) Match oversees the ophthalmology residency match process.

i. <http://www.sfmatch.org>

ii. Know this website well. It has a lot of important information including the timeline, match statistics, fee schedule, individual residency program information, etc

b. The Central Application Service (CAS) distributes applications to residency programs online. Applicants are required to fill out a CAS application form, provide a set of required documents, and select programs for distribution. A separate fee is required for CAS distributions.

i. A complete CAS application package which includes the following documents:

-CAS Application Form

-College Transcript(s)

-Medical School Transcript(s)

-USMLE Score Report or Transcript(s)

-ECFMG Certificate (applicable to International Medical Graduates)

-Three letters of reference

-MSPE (medical student performance evaluation) letter (uploaded by the medical school, at the same time it is for all other residency applications: usually around October 1)

ii. VERY IMPORTANT: Some programs may require additional support documents. Documents that are not listed in the CAS instructions manual must be sent directly to the program. This could include a picture, a CV, an extra essay or paragraph. You need to carefully review the individual program requirements on the SF match website and go to the websites of each of the programs you are applying to.

c. Costs: The application process does unfortunately get costly as you have registration fees and have to pay application fees by the number of programs you apply to. Look at the SF Match website for fee information. With in-person interviews, you also have to factor in travel expenses, however for the time being, interviews are still being held virtually!

d. SF Match Timeline- general overview

i. Early July: Registration begins for the ophthalmology match

ii. First week of September: Deadline for submitting your completed application * Once you are ready to submit your application, read and double check you have everything in. Then, after you submit, check online that your application was received and is complete.

iii. End of January: rank list submitted

iv. Early February: ophthalmology match results

v. Interview invites will start coming in mid October

vi. Interviews will happen usually from late October through December

3) The Intern Year match

a. Ophthalmology residency is 3 years plus one year of Internship

b. The ACGME (Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education) has now mandated a mandatory PGY-1 (i.e. internship) year to be implemented by ophthalmology programs (that must include three months rotation in ophthalmology, which is great for you!).

c. This means the intern year is combined with the 3 years of ophthalmology residency and are not a separate application.

d. Ophthalmology residencies will be in one of 2 categories

- 1: Joint training program: the PGY-1 year is offered by the

Department of Medicine or Surgery, the match is through NRMP (still

need to register with NRMP so you can rank that joint internship, but you don't need to apply to separate internships through ERAS).

- 2: Integrated training program: The PGY1-4 years are offered by the Department of Ophthalmology, match process is conducted solely through SF Match and you do not need to register with NRMP.

e. Since you do not know which type of program you will match into, you should plan on registering for NRMP

i. NRMP: National Resident Matching program, which oversees the main residency match including internship match

-<https://www.nrmp.org>

-You must register for the NRMP (registration opens in September)

ii. ERAS (Electronic Residency Application Service)

-This is where you fill out your application for your internship programs. You do not need to do this now, unless you are dual applying.

Ophthalmology Residency Applications and Programs

1. How many ophthalmology programs to apply to?
 - a. This is really up to you. The average number of programs applied to is high due to the competitiveness of the specialty and this can get expensive. It will be helpful to really think about the programs that are within your reach based on your application and where it really makes sense for you to go. Programs can often pick on whether you are just applying to apply to another program or if you really do want to be at their program. The average number that people applied to in 2021 was 80 programs. However, between 40-50 programs is probably enough if you have a strong application. If you are questioning how many to apply to, speak to an advisor about this.
 - b. If you get 10-15 interviews, then you should be safe for the match if you go to all of them and rank them all. The average number of interviews for those who matched in 2021 was 12. You could be safe even at 10, but that really depends on how you interview. 10-15 interviews are a lot and it is very exhausting. At the same time, it is a great time to meet other applicants and future colleagues. You might end up interviewing with similar people again for fellowship or job interviews in the future, so it is also a networking opportunity.
2. Types of programs to apply to and how to pick:
 - a. Different ophthalmology programs offer different opportunities. There are programs that are more research based and may expect you to do some research even if it's not required.
 - b. The top ten programs are fairly research-oriented, but will also give great clinical training. Some require research. The requirement might be one project or paper though. Other programs just encourage research and will definitely be happy with more research or papers published. If you are interested in research or don't want to do research, it might be helpful to find out the requirements.
 - c. Think a bit about what you want to do with your career in the future and then try and target the right program for you. Believe it or not, you also have a choice.
 - d. Think about how you learn. There are some programs that throw you in and let you figure things out and there are programs that walk you through things slower. Look at what sorts of clinical settings the residents rotate through and this may give you a clue. Do the residents spend time at a county or VA hospital? Then there is likely a good deal of autonomy/trial-by-fire. Are they mostly working in attending clinics? Then there may be considerably more supervision and direct instruction.

e. Think about if there is something special you are looking for, such as freedom to do a rotation abroad, research time, elective rotation, etc. Some programs might offer opportunities like these and others may not.

f. If you are already interested in a particular specialty in ophthalmology (you are way ahead of the game), but then you should also know which programs are strong in this specialty and if the program gives you great training in this particular specialty. All programs have strengths and weaknesses. You want to make sure that you will have the mentors and training that you need to get the fellowship that you want.

g. We are not going to talk about programs specifically because there are always changes depending on the residents and attendings that are at the facilities and the quality of the facilities offered by the programs. However, if you want to know which programs have good reputations, which programs are more clinical, which are more research-oriented, which are easy, which are stronger in certain specialties etc...ask around. Faculty at UCSF would be happy to talk to you about different programs. It might even be helpful to reach out to current residents since they went through the interview process not long ago.

h. Do your research. Look up the programs on their website. Talk to faculty and make sure you get the reputation of the program, learn about what they focus on, learn about which sub-specialties are strong at each program, etc. You can ask during interviews about stability of the ophthalmologists and whether anyone plans to leave, retire, or if they are hiring new persons, etc. If the program director is switching or the chair is leaving, etc. These are not necessarily bad things, but helpful to know and try and understand. For example, losing the cataract surgeon that most of the resident cataract surgeries come from, or losing a VA facility where most of the cataracts come from, could negatively affect your training.

i. Location: While it is certainly true that clinical training and program fit should be first on your mind when selecting programs, remember that you will have to live in the surrounding city for ~4 years, and this will also be a source of many of your connections. Really think about what you're looking for in a city OUTSIDE of residency. i.e. Do you have family on the east coast that you'd like to be near? Do you absolutely need to be located by mountains? Or is location perhaps not very important to you at all? There is no wrong answer!

3. Personal Statement/narrative

a. The personal statement/narrative is capped at 500 words.

b. Ok to be creative and have a story or something that will make you stand out, but don't make it weird.

c. Some people write about why they became interested in ophthalmology and the journey that brought them to that decision. Try not to be too poetic about the

field or your accomplishments (i.e. “the eyes are truly the windows to the soul...”). Just describe your thoughts about ophthalmology in a straightforward and convincing way!

- d. Talking about why you specifically would be a good resident and a great addition to any residency program is an option.
 - e. You can highlight some of your noteworthy accomplishments or some of the challenges that you faced during your life or journey.
 - f. You can highlight interesting things you have done or something unique about your background or life.
 - g. You can highlight an ophthalmology case that made you interested in the field. Be careful how you present the case depending on what it is though. For example, a surgery to remove an eye, or an enucleation, may be very interesting to some people, but if you present the case in that it was exciting or very cool, this could be concerning to some people because having to remove someone’s eye is sad even if it is an interesting surgery to see what an eye looks like. Basically, just be careful how you present the case depending on what it is.
 - h. Reach out to friends or prior UCSF graduates for examples. You can also search for examples online.
 - i. There are also 2 short answer questions you will have to answer. (There is a choice of 2 out of 4)
 - j. After you have written your narrative and short answer questions, share it with family or friends or colleagues to see what they think about it. If you have ophthalmology mentors, you can ask if they will read it. Make sure you find people who are going to give you an honest opinion and advice for improvement.
 - k. Spell check your writing! Seems intuitive, but evidence shows otherwise. (Spell ophthalmology correctly!)
5. Residency letters of recommendation (LOR)
- a. LOR are very important in ophthalmology because the community is very tight knit. Everyone seems to know everyone, especially in the academic world. So a LOR is basically a letter to a close friend or colleague at times. Don’t be surprised during an interview when someone strikes up a conversation about the ophthalmologist that wrote your LOR.
 - b. Required number – 3 , Ideally 2 from Ophthalmology, 1 from another field.
 - c. Who to have write your letter –
 - i. The more personal, the better. We recommend 2 ophthalmologists and then one other faculty member from your 3rd or 4th year rotations, preferably from medicine and surgery and/or a rotation you honored in or did well in. You could ask 3 ophthalmologists if you feel you can get 3 strong letters, though many programs will appreciate a letter from

another department to show your well roundedness. You want the letter writer to really know you as a person. You can even ask the person if they feel comfortable writing a “very strong LOR” for you. If they cannot, then you can say that it would be best for you to have someone else write it who can. You want the letter to be personal with specific facts about you and your accomplishments. It is usually clear when a letter is not strong. Since many medical schools do not have grades or honors, many don’t have AOA, and USMLE will be out in the future, your extracurriculars, research and your letters of recommendation are going to be very important in helping you stand out as an applicant.

ii. When to ask? June or July, or earlier. You want to give the doctors plenty of time to write the letter and submit it. SEND FREQUENT REMINDERS.

iii. How to ask? Schedule a meeting, talk to the doctor in person, have a CV and your personal statement available. Talk to the person about yourself and help them understand how best to write your letter unless you feel strongly that they know.

6. Extra letters of recommendation

- a. You can submit an extra letter of recommendation directly to programs that you are interviewing at and/or programs that you really want to get an interview at and haven’t heard from. Though we do NOT recommend this. Think carefully about submitting extra letters. They are extra reading and extra work. Targeted extra letters may be most useful. For example, these could be letters from the away rotations that you do. Often people who do away rotations will have a mentor, from that program, write a letter to the residency director at that particular program. These letters could either be personally handed to the program at the interview or sent directly to the program by the author. Takes a bit of coordination for it to be sent directly to the program, but at least then the letter is confidential to you. We do not recommend sending extra letters without a really good reason.
- b. Make sure it’s a great letter. It is not worth it for you to send an extra letter that is just mediocre.
- c. SF match will now allow you to choose different letters to send to programs. You will only be able to send 3 to each program, but you could submit more letters and choose which 3 letters you want to send to each program. This is another opportunity for you to send targeted letters that might highlight your interest in a particular region or a specific program, which is a better option than sending an extra letter.

7. Who can I talk to about the application process and programs for advice?

- a. Deans at UCSF can offer advice, but would be more general to the application

process.

- b. Specialty career advising
 - i. Website: <https://meded.ucsf.edu/student-services/specialty-information-and-advising>
- c. Ophthalmologists at UCSF are great for advice about the process. The residency program director and /or director of medical student education are people you can and should reach out to. Any ophthalmologist can give you advice about what they know about different programs.
- d. Fellows and residents – they are closer to the application process and can tell you about their experiences. Email or talk to them on your rotation. Residents and fellows are full of useful information and are always willing to talk to you about it.
- e. Previous UCSF students/alumni who are now in ophthalmology residency or heading there.

Advice for Interview Process:

- 1.) Waiting for interview invites
 - a. Waiting for invites is not fun. That is for sure. But just like applying to medical school, there is some waiting involved.
 - b. SF match determines the earliest day invites can go out, which is usually the 1st or 2nd week of October.
 - c. Don't be too worried if you don't get an interview right away, there still is hope. Sometimes programs have spots that open up later because people canceled interviews or couldn't come.
 - d. You can use the student doc forum or others to find out which programs gave out interviews throughout the interview season. Usually they do it in batches. Sometimes it is known/the program tells the applicants when they should hear back by. Hearing through colleagues also happens.
 - e. If you don't hear back by that time, then feel free to contact them via email or phone to find out the status of your application and to express your sincere interest in the program (only if you really do have a sincere interest). However, do not be a pest because usually the coordinator who sends out the emails is also very close with the residency program director. Always be polite. You may just get an automated message back saying there are no more interview slots, but it may be worth a try if a spot opens up.
 - f. You will get interview invitations through an email or through the SF match portal and will be given a selection of either one or a few dates to interview.
 - g. If there are a couple programs that you have your heart set on, you can have your

ophthalmology mentor call the residency program director directly to recommend you. However, they will not call every program that you applied to, so pick a couple only. Also, there are applicants who when they don't get an interview somewhere, they have their mentor call. This can be helpful if your mentor is a well-known ophthalmologist or she/he knows people at the program well, but it is uncertain how much it will help. Ophthalmologists trust their friends and colleagues and will take their advice and recommendation about applicants, especially if they would take time out of their precious schedule to call.

- i. Programs are not going to give out more interviews than they have interview spots for. But, they could reach out to you later if a spot opens or they can offer more interviews.

2.) Responding to interview invites

- a. Become a serial email/SF match portal checker during the fall. You need to get the email with the interview invite fast and respond to the invite asap if you want to get the interview date of your choice. Some people set up a separate email account specifically for this purpose, and set it to send them instant notifications. Note that the Mail app in iPhones does not push notifications automatically, but rather periodically checks to see if there are any emails. Because of this, it's better to get a separate app (i.e. Gmail) that it constantly checking for new emails and immediately sends a notification. Responding with in minutes is best. If you wait 24 hours or so, it is likely days will be filled up and they may not move people around even if you can't come that day.
- b. Check your email regularly. This is not easy given that many students are on rotations, but do your best. Most attendings and residents will understand, just try to be respectful.

3.) Scheduling interviews

- a. This can be hard. Programs may have interviews on the same day and you will have to choose between two programs. You may not be able to go to two programs on the same day. Though, with virtual interviews this year, this is sometime possible if programs only have half day interviews This is also why it's important to respond to invites quickly because there may only be one day listed that you do not have an interview and you need that date.
- b. Some people make a spreadsheet or something before receiving interview invites to know the interview dates of the programs they are most excited about and will make sure to keep an eye on those dates and leave them available if possible.
- c. You WILL have to choose between programs along the way and you may have to say no to some programs that you would love to go to, which can be disappointing, but that is how it is set up.

- d. If you don't get the date you want, then you can ask to be put on a waitlist for the other day.
- e. If you have to cancel an interview because you accepted another that you like better on the same day, then you should email the program you are not going to interview at sooner than later. This is out of respect of the other program so they can fill their interview day. Think about it like you are giving someone else an interview spot and it may make or break them matching, so it's a good thing. You could also ask the other program for another interview date and if you could switch, but it often does not work.
- f. Some people put together calendars and schedules with interviews scheduled and then interviews from programs they haven't heard from so they can kind of map out which dates would be best for which program, etc.
- g. SF match has now limited the number of interview invites an applicant can accept. You can change them (i.e. drop one and add another), but the total number cannot exceed the max. This is new and tends to change, so check the SF match website the year you are applying for the interview cap. .

4.) Preparing for interviews

- a. Read up on the program – the rotation schedule, the ophthalmologists and maybe their research (especially those on the interviewing committee if it is known), hospitals you would work at, about the area the hospitals are located, etc.
- b. Read up on those that are interviewing you (when this information is known). You can ask the coordinator if you are allowed to have the names of the doctors that will be interviewing you. Some programs give it without asking, some will give the info if you ask, and some have the policy of not telling you. If they don't tell you, at least just find out their specialty before you go into the interview.
- c. Know your research – especially know your research if the person interviewing you is in the same specialty as your research. They will know a lot more than you and may make sure you know your research.
- d. Know your application – be able to explain and discuss every detail on your CAS application, even if it's a hobby or whatever. People will often find the most minor of details on your application and will ask you about it. If you say you are fluent in French, be ready to do an interview in French. If you say you can do card tricks, be ready to do one. If you say you are an expert in Greek history, be ready to answer history trivia.
- e. Ask mentors or residents about the program to give you any extra insight.
- f. Check the interview date with the program to make sure you are showing up on the right day. Often programs will send a confirmation email, but if they do not, it's best to confirm.
- g. Know the interview schedule if it's available. At least know when the interview

day starts and exactly where to be. If you are unsure, call the program and ask for details.

- h. Review your research and application the night before so its fresh in your mind.
- i. For virtual interviews, make sure you have your schedule and log in information handy and that you have the necessary programs downloaded for the virtual interview. Make sure your devices are charged and plugged in so you don't run out of battery.
- j. Make a list of common questions asked at interviews and practice saying them out loud. Examples are – tell me about yourself, tell me about your research, tell me about a patient from medical school, etc. It can be helpful to practice some questions so you have some good responses prepared or at least you thought about them a bit. You don't want to sound rehearsed, but since interviewing can be stressful, it's helpful to have had some practice.
- k. The department of ophthalmology also offers practice/mock interviews. When it is closer to interview time, the department will send you an email about getting these practice interviews scheduled.

5.) Planning interviews

- a. If you are traveling for your interview, plan your trip ahead – have flight info, accommodations, and transportation all set up so the process runs smoothly. Plan for extra time so you aren't rushing. - this does not apply for the time being as interviews are virtual!
- b. Be organized – You can keep a spreadsheet of the programs, interview dates and times, other information.

6.) The interview

- a. Social event - Many programs have an event the night before- even virtually! It will consist of a social between the residents and the applicants. This is a great time to get to know the residents and ask them lots of questions about the program, both good and bad. You can also ask about places to live, what it's like to live in the specific area you are interviewing, nightlife, outdoor activities, etc. If you have a family, you can ask residents with family what the life and location is like, etc. You can ask details about the schedule, including call schedule. You can ask about life as a resident and if they are happy with their program. Just use it to your advantage of getting to know the residents and the program as best as you can. This is very helpful because it can put you at ease on interview day. You can use the information you learned from the night before during your interviews on interview day. For example, you can use information to answer questions like why the location or the program is best for me, or what you like most about the program, or why you would fit in best with the program.
 - i. This night is a part of the interview and remember that. But still have fun because often these events are fun.

- ii. Often the residents say that they have no say in the interview process, but don't believe that. The residents are very close with the ophthalmologists and if they don't like you because you are rude to them or something, they will probably tell the residency director. This also includes staff at the facility. Be nice to everyone because you never know how it will affect you. Be super polite.
 - iii. Good to get to know the residents because you will see them on interview day and be talking to them more.
 - iv. Remember their names!
 - v. Work the room! Get to know as many residents as you can. Again, they have a voice and can recommend you as well.
 - vi. Dress nice unless they tell you otherwise
 - vii. Get to know the first-year residents and see if you like them...they will be your senior residents your first year and will be teaching you and helping you a lot.
- b. Interview day
- i. Don't be late!
 - ii. The day often starts early and will often be split into a morning and afternoon session. If you interview in the morning then you will have time to meet with the residents after lunch, or vice versa. Sometimes you will attend grand rounds.
 - iii. The day is long so be prepared.
 - iv. Don't complain and always try to be positive and have a smile.
 - v. Be nice to everyone on interview day. Remember it's a tight knit community. The program wants to see how you get along with people and how you interact.
 - vi. Know your interview schedule and make sure you get to where you need to be on time. Show up early for the interview day and make sure you know where you are going (ie there may be various zoom links)
 - vii. Make sure you get all of your questions answered and be prepared to ask questions. Almost everyone asks you if you have questions, several times. After a while, it is ok to say that you don't have any more questions. But come prepared with questions that you have thought about. This will help spark conversation and also will show the programs that you have been thinking critically about your interview and the program.
- c. Virtual interview tips
- i. Be prepared.
 - ii. Have your login data and your schedule readily available with a clock/watch easily visible to make sure you are on time.

- iii. Make sure you have the program on your computer – Zoom or other.
- iv. Make sure you have a stable internet connection.
- v. Make sure you have good lighting and can be seen well on video. A bright back-lit window will make it hard to see you. Test your video out before.
- vi. Make sure your computer is plugged in and charged so you don't lose connection because you run out of batteries.
- vii. Dress like you are going to an in-person interview. You are basically interviewing for a job. Wear a suit.
- viii. Try your best to talk/interact like you were at an interview. Sit up straight. Smile. Have a conversation with the person interviewing you.
- ix. Show enthusiasm!
- x. Make sure there are no distractions around you.
- xi. Make sure your area is clean and nice in the background.
- xii. Think about background and what it looks like and how it might be perceived by the person interviewing you.
- xiii. Make sure you get all of your questions answered and be prepared to ask questions. Almost everyone asks you if you have questions, several times. After a while, it is ok to say that you don't have any more. Ideally have a few questions to ask to show your interest in the program.
- xiv. Some programs may also have other virtual events scheduled, like grand rounds or morning report. Make sure you go to these because they may be monitoring attendance. The programs are as excited to have you there as you are to interview!

7.) Post-interview

- a. Take notes. Jot something down immediately after your interview or within a day. After several interviews, things blend together and it is good to be able to refer to your notes when you are ranking. Write down names of residents and doctors that you talked with. Often your interview schedule will have the names of the interviewers and you can keep that for reference.
- b. Thank you notes/Emails
 - i. Send thank yous. This has been a tradition, so you should consider doing it, however it is up to you. (It is very difficult to know who expects a thank you and who does not, so when in doubt, likely better to just send it!)
 - ii. In the past, applicants sent cards, but most are sending email thank yous now and this is also ok.
 - iii. It is not necessary to send a note to everyone you met or interviewed with. You can just send a thank you to the residency director and residency coordinator. If you have time and you want to, you can send

thank yous to all the people who interviewed you. Some programs tell you NOT to send thank you notes or emails and if they are specific about it, then you should not send one!

- iv. Sending a thank you is also an opportunity for you to express more interest in the program and say how excited you are after meeting the doctors and seeing the facility.
- v. Getting an interview is also an honor. There are many applicants out there that did not get the interview, so be appreciative of that opportunity.
- vi. Try to not just write a generic thank you. Make it a bit special if you can. This is where writing down notes after the interview can help as well.
- vii. If you do send thank you emails or notes, don't expect a response. (not getting a response is normal!) The programs can't give you updates or information about how you did or your ranking.
- viii. Ideally be prompt with these if you are going to send them.

Advice for Ranking Process:

1.) Communicating with the program

- a. You should tell your number one program that they are your number one and you want to go there. They also are ranking and are playing the game too and want to have a good group of residents. It helps them rank if they know how much that you are interested in them. Only send such a message if you are sure that you will be ranking them #1. Do NOT send this email to more than one program, and avoid sending a letter of intent to a program only to change your rank order later. Word travels in the ophthalmology community.
- b. You can email the residency director or the coordinator or the residents to ask further questions. Often you will be given this information in the interview and can use it for any final questions that might help you decide on programs.
- c. Don't pester the programs. They cannot legally tell you how you are ranked. Just make sure the program you want to go to knows that and hope for the best.
- d. You can have your mentor call the program you are ranking number one and do a final recommendation. Many people will often do this, at least for the top programs.

2.) How to pick your number 1

- a. It's not easy to do this sometimes. Go with your gut. Think about the training and the people and the location and what works best for you. Sometimes one of these things are more important than the others for certain applicants. Truth is

though, training should be your number one. Three years is not that long and you want to be well-trained and prepared for practice or fellowship.

- b. Talk to mentors, family, significant others and rank.
- c. Location may be important to you, so take that into consideration.
- d. Which program do you mesh with the people most, feel most comfortable at?
- e. Remember your interview day and how you felt on the day. Did the environment work for you, etc? You want to be as happy as you can be during the residency process.

3.) How to rank

- a. Similar info to above.
- b. Make several different lists.
- c. Make a list, sleep on it and see how it makes you feel.
- d. The top choices are not the only important choices. You have to be serious about the whole rank list because people do move down their list not expecting it and you need to think about even number 14 and 15 and make sure they are in the order you would like to go to them.
- e. Talk to people about the rank list. You can present it to your mentors, etc, and see if they have any further input. You can talk to faculty at UCSF. You can also talk to other applicants and hear about their views of the program and even how they are ranking if they are willing to tell you that information. All information is helpful.
- f. Rank as many programs as you can. Obviously do not rank a program if you hated it so much that you really wouldn't go. But ask yourself if you would rather be an ophthalmologist and go to that program or not be one/or at least take a risk in not being one. If you would rather be an ophthalmologist, rank that program! You might be bummed at first if you drop down your rank list, but you may end up loving the program you matched at. Remember you come from a great medical school and have the support of one of the best ophthalmology programs!
- g. Then just submit your rank list on SF Match and don't look back! Make sure you submit it on time!
- h. Celebrate and keep your mind off your rank list until match day!

MATCH DAY!

- 1.) You should hear that you matched somewhere earlier in the week via email.
- 2.) You likely will get a call on the morning of match day from the program director of the program you matched at! Look at the area code...it might be a good hint as to where you are going!

- 3.) UCSF may also do something else to inform you or celebrate your match day!
- 4.) You can also check SF match in the morning.
- 5.) If you matched at a joint program and need to rank that intern year on NRMP: don't forget to do so!

CELEBRATE!!!!

You matched into an amazing specialty!

Best wishes in the match process and we hope to see you in the field of ophthalmology in the future!

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*We are open to feedback if you have other information you would like to see in this booklet!

LIST OF HELPFUL RESOURCES : Links provided or easily searchable

For Career/Residency Information:

- UCSF Specialty Career Advising Website!
- Department Website
<http://ophthalmology.ucsf.edu/>
- Vision and ophthalmology Interest Group website
<https://sites.google.com/site/ucsfpreophthalmology>
- VOIG Facebook Page
<https://www.facebook.com/preophthalmology/>
- Harvard guide to the match
- Iowa guide to the Ophthalmology Match
- Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology
<https://aupo.org/programs-services/medical-students>
- American Academy of Ophthalmology
<https://www.aao.org/medical-students>
- LGBTQ+ Community Survival Guide for Applying to Ophthalmology Residency
<https://www.aao.org/lgbtq-community/survival-guide-residency>
- UCSF Proctor Foundation:
<http://proctor.ucsf.edu/>
- The Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology
<http://www.arvo.org/>
- SF match
<https://www.sfmatch.org/>
- Student Doctor Network
- Google Spreadsheet: Ophthalmology match
- Ranked to Match Guide:
<https://www.rankedtomatch.com/> (\$\$)

Ophthalmology educational resources (exam tutorials, case modules etc.)

- American Academy of Ophthalmology
<https://www.aao.org/medical-students>

- University of Iowa Short video tutorials on eye examination

<https://webeye.ophth.uiowa.edu/eyeforum/video/ClinOphth/INDEX.htm>

- UCSF Clinical Ophthalmology CLE (Clinical learning environment) page.

<https://courses.ucsf.edu/course/view.php?id=1511>