2026–27 Ophthalmology Residency Match FAQs

AUPO ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS OF OPHTHALMOLOGY

sfmatch Residency and Fellowship Matching Services

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What are the important deadlines to participate in the match?

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Important deadlines for the 2026–2027 match cycle include:

July 1: Applicant registration begins at **SF Match.org**.

Sept 1: Beginning on September 1, application forms, along with supplementary material (e.g., recommendation letters, USMLE/COMLEX scores) will be released to programs to which candidates apply. Programs will be notified when applications are complete and ready to review. Additional supplementary material may be uploaded at any time, and programs will be notified of these additions in real-time.

Sept 23: MSPE letters are released.

Oct 13: First interview release date. The second invitation batch release date will occur 1 week later on October 20. Interview batches will be released at 12:00 PM (noon) Pacific Time.

Oct 26: Programs may begin to interview candidates. ***All interviews will be virtual this year.***

Dec 19: Final day of interviews.

Dec 21: Program deadline to submit rank lists by 12:00 PM (noon) Pacific Time.

Dec 28: Optional live Open Houses begin.

Jan 13: Last day for optional live Open House visits.

Jan 14: Applicant deadline to submit rank lists by 12:00 PM (noon) Pacific Time.

Jan 22: Unmatched applicants will be notified of unmatched status by email.

Jan 25: Full match results made available to applicants, residency programs, and medical schools. Log in is required.

A complete timeline can be found on the **Ophthalmology Residency timetable** and **Resources for Medical Students** at **sfmatch.org**, as well as on the AUPO website at **aupo.org/medical-student-resources.**

Q **Is there an advantage to submitting my application before September 1?**

A Programs will not have access to applications prior to September 1, so no review of applications will occur before then. If your file is not complete by September 1 you may upload data at any time and it will be available to programs in real time.

Q **What is new in the application cycle this year?**

A To address the challenges faced by applicants and programs, Ophthalmology established a coordinated interview invitation release during the 2025–26 Match with 4 batch release dates. For the 2026–27 Match, invitations will be issued in 2 batches on October 13 and 20. To allow applicants time to evaluate their invitations, there will be a 24-hour period before invitations can be accepted. Invitations must be accepted within the program's specified response time, which ranges from 48 hours to 120 hours (5 days) from time of receipt.

Programs may release interviews either all at once or across the 2 dates, and they may extend invitations only up to the number of available interview slots. Applicants may cancel interviews at any time.

Ophthalmology will continue its preference signaling program, with the signal limit increasing from 10 to 15. For more information, see the Interview Release FAQ under **Resources for Medical Students** on the **SF Match website**, and the **Medical Student Resources page** on the **AUPO website**.

Unmatched applicants will be notified by email on January 22, three days before full match results are released on January 25. Matched applicants will not receive any communication on January 22

Q **Are USMLE Step 1/COMLEX Level 1 and USMLE Step 2 CK/COMLEX-USA Level 2-CE required?**

A Applicants must upload a USMLE Step 1 score report or a COMLEX Level 1 report to complete the application. In addition to providing these results, applicants will be asked to report the number of times the exam has been taken. However, completion of USMLE Step 2 (CK) or COMLEX-USA Level 2-CE is not required at the time of application submission. The timing of Step 2/Level 2 is up to the applicant, after consultation with medical school advisors. If Step 2/Level 2 has been taken before submission, applicants must enter the exam details in the Personal Information form and upload the Step 2/Level 2 score report.

Osteopathic applicants should note that some training programs require both a USMLE Step 1 score report and a COMLEX Level 1 report. Applicants should review the requirements of each program before applying.

Q **What is the difference between an "integrated" program and a "joint" program?**

A In 2023, the ACGME required all ophthalmology programs in the US to become either integrated or joint programs. All programs fall into one of these groups.

In an "integrated" program, the ophthalmology program supervises the PGY-1 year; therefore, the ophthalmology program director is responsible for training throughout all four years. In a "joint" program, the PGY-1 year is completed at the same (or affiliated) institution as the ophthalmology residency. However, this training year is supervised by a preliminary year program director from another department (often internal medicine or general surgery).

Both joint and integrated programs incorporate 3–4 months of ophthalmology into the PGY-1 training. Residents will be adequately prepared to start ophthalmology residency regardless of which type of intern program they train in.

Q **What is the process to apply to the different types of programs?**

A The ACGME requires all ophthalmology programs to offer a PGY-1 year in either an integrated or joint format.

Integrated programs: Applicants who match into an ophthalmology program with an integrated PGY-1 year are automatically matched into the program's integrated intern year. Applicants do not need to enroll in the **NRMP**, as they are already matched into the affiliated integrated program.

Joint programs: An applicant who matches into an ophthalmology program with a joint PGY-1 year is guaranteed a position in the joint internship but is NOT automatically matched into that position. Applicants should contact each joint ophthalmology residency program for guidance on how to proceed to be matched into the joint PGY-1 year. This may include participating in the NRMP match.

Q **How many letters of recommendation are required? How many need to be from ophthalmologists?**

A SF Match uses a Central Application Service (CAS) to distribute applications to residency programs online. Applicants must complete a CAS application (Personal Information and Required Supplemental forms) and upload all requested documents. Three letters of recommendation are required; when possible, at least one should be from an ophthalmologist. Other sources of letters include professors or preceptors from clinical rotations or medical school, research mentors, community or academic service supervisors, or employers. The strongest letters come from those who can vouch for a candidate's character, knowledge, and skills.

Q **Do all programs I apply to need to receive the same 3 recommendation letters or can some of my programs receive different letters of recommendation?**

A Applicants may request and receive an unlimited number of letters of recommendation but must assign exactly 3 letters to each program they apply to. Applicants have the flexibility to assign a different set of 3 letters to each program.

Q **Is there a limit to the number of programs to which a candidate can apply?**

A Applicants are free to apply to as many as they wish. In making this decision, please refer to the information on the **AUPO** and **SF Match** websites. Candidates should also consult their mentors to determine the best number.

Q **When will interview invitations go out?**

A The first interview invitations are released on **October 13**. A second release date is **October 20**. After the second release, additional invitations may be sent to fill openings created by candidates who decline interview invitations. All residency programs will use SF Match's integrated Interview Scheduler to send invitations. Applicants may schedule more than one interview per day, as long as the schedules do not conflict. Reserving more than one interview in the same time slot is not permitted on the Interview Scheduler. To accept an invitation from a different program at a conflicting time, applicants must first release the overlapping accepted interview.

Q **Will interviews be performed in-person or by video conferencing?**

A The AUPO has directed that all interviews, including those for local students, will again be conducted virtually for this match cycle.

Q **Is there a limit to the number of interviews I can do this year?**

A Each applicant may conduct a maximum of 15 interviews this year. A recent three-year analysis found that the mean number of interviews per applicant was 9.3. In addition, historical data show that interviewing at more than 10 programs is associated with a 90% success rate of matching.

The Interview Scheduler allows a maximum of 15 interviews. To substitute one interview with another, one interview must be released. Interview scheduling outside the SF Match portal is not permitted and may result in penalties for both programs and applicants.

Q **What opportunities are there to learn more about a program?**

A All programs are developing the best approach to showcase what makes them unique. There will likely be a variety of virtual programs and materials developed for this purpose, but the content and length will be determined by each program. Programs may offer virtual meet-and-greet events for applicants prior to interview season to meet some of their faculty and residents and learn more about their program.

Q **Is it possible to visit a program in person after a virtual interview in order to get a better feel for it?**

A Yes. Programs may offer post-interview in-person visitation opportunities as Live Open Houses. Interviews will conclude on December 19, and programs must submit their rank lists by December 21. Between December 28 and January 13, programs may hold in-person open houses **only for applicants who interviewed with them**. An applicant may reserve a slot for an in-person visit after being interviewed using the SF Match scheduling platform, but the name of the applicant reserving the slot will not be released to programs until AFTER the program rank lists have been submitted on December 21.

Importantly, programs will have already submitted their rank lists, but applicant rank lists are not due until January 14 at 12:00 PM (noon) Pacific Time. Consequently, these live visits should be a relaxed, pressure-free opportunity for applicants to further evaluate programs. They are completely optional for both programs and applicants. Open House tours may only be conducted during the designated Open House tour period.

These sessions will be a maximum of 4 hours in length and may include tours of facilities where residents will train, tours of the city or town where the program is located, and social sessions with residents and faculty. Candidates will not be re-interviewed, and coercive activities toward applicants are prohibited.

Q **Can I contact a program to express my interest, either before or after interview invitations have been sent out?**

A Communication preferences vary by program. Some allow direct communication, while others prefer not to receive direct messages.

Q **What if away rotations are not completed before applications are due?**

A Away rotations have never been mandatory to successfully match into an ophthalmology residency and remain completely optional. Given many applicants' desire to complete an away rotation, many will not have completed them until the interview process is underway. Applicants are encouraged to include information about away rotations that have been already completed as well as those scheduled to take place. This information should be entered in the Required Supplemental Form which may not be edited once submitted.

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What if a medical school does not have an associated ophthalmology department?

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Applicants are encouraged to first reach out to the Dean of Student Affairs to express interest in a career in ophthalmology. The Dean will be critical in supporting applicants in this endeavor. Many schools have affiliations with external ophthalmology departments or practicing ophthalmologists in the community. In addition, alumni who have become ophthalmologists are an important resource.

The **AAO medical student webpage**, the **AUPO medical student resources webpage**, and the **SF Match website** all contain valuable resources. The AUPO also favors students from schools without ophthalmology departments who perform visiting clerkships at external institutions. Furthermore, some institutions offer virtual clerkships.

Visiting the websites of the programs will be a good resource. Reaching out directly to the Director of Medical Student Education or the Residency Program Director at institutions of interest is another option.

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What are the enhanced features in the SF Match System?

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The SF Match portal has been designed from beginning to end to enhance the user experience for applicants, with controls and features tailored to their needs. Some of the enhanced system features are outlined below:

- **Customizable Personal Statement**: Applicants can create multiple versions of personal statements and assign a different version to each program.
- **Customizable Selection for Letters of Reference:** Applicants can request and receive an unlimited number of reference letters and assign any set of 3 letters to individual programs.
- **Active Personal Information:** Applicants can update their personal information throughout the match cycle.
- **Document Storage:** All uploaded documents are automatically stored and can be used across other SF Match specialties.
- **Information Management:** Programs have access to updated personal information in real time, and applicants can update materials at any time.

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How does the Interview Scheduler work?

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The Interview Scheduler is a convenient tool for scheduling and managing interviews. Applicants can accept or decline invitations or switch dates if available. Confidentiality is maintained, and applicants and programs can view only their own schedules. Post-interview live Open House visits will also be scheduled through SF Match's platform. Programs will receive applicant names only after rank lists are submitted. Training will be provided via webinars and written materials.

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Are there resources and information available to help applicants decide if ophthalmology is the right fit?

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Many resources are available to help interested individuals decide to pursue a career in ophthalmology. The Residency Program Director, Director of Medical Student Education, faculty members, and residents in the Department of Ophthalmology at medical schools can provide information about the specialty and career guidance. The SF Match website lists key characteristics for all participating residency programs. A rotation in ophthalmology at home institutions or an away rotation can provide valuable exposure.

Medical Student Resources (Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology)

Ophthalmology Resources for Medical Students (American Academy of Ophthalmology)

SF Match – Ophthalmology Residency Match (SF Match)

Vision Mentoring Program (American Academy of Ophthalmology)