



Striving to Check All of the Boxes

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I truly used to think that there was a recipe for the perfect medical school applicant. You may be thinking the same. If you had good grades, research experience, volunteered at a local hospital and community organizations, and did well on the MCAT, it'd be smooth sailing from that point onwards. From my personal journey to medical school however, I learned to take a step back from that common perception of "medical school application musts" and "check boxes" that we can often get caught up in on the road to medical school.

I wanted to write this article because of something that I learned from my application to medical school is that by striving to be the "perfect medical school applicant", you can often lose the most important pieces of yourself along the way. I do not mean to undermine the importance of some of those aspects listed above - strive for strong academics, volunteer at places you enjoy, try out a cool research opportunity, and study hard for that MCAT! However, do not lose sight of those things that have always made your days brighter. Those pieces of yourself, I would argue, are equally as important as those commonly perceived "musts" of medical school applications.

Let me give you a personal example to clarify. In high school, I really loved to sing - it was my outlet and comfort. My voice teacher said I should consider doing a bachelor's degree in music. I immediately thought, "well someone told me that a science degree is a must for medical school, so I can't pursue singing right now", when in my heart I knew I probably would have enjoyed that degree the most.* There were so many examples of this where I turned down things I really enjoyed because I was trying so hard to dedicate time to checking off what I thought were the classic boxes.

** Disclaimer: Any degree that you enjoy would be good for medical school and I think that a degree in music is an incredible route. Just double check with schools if they have any pre-requisite course requirements. When I was younger, I was misled by some people to believe a science degree was the only route to medicine, which is not the case.*



Flash forward a few years, after all of that time spent dedicating to application musts, and I didn't get accepted in my first round of applications to medical school. I was devastated! Why had I given up those things if it didn't end up working? In the following year, I caught up for the lost time and spent the year doing things I really loved that were not classic check boxes. I travelled, raised a golden retriever puppy (a true feat), and spent more time with my friends and family. I was accepted the next application cycle.

You are a great applicant, with all of your fun hobbies, quirks, and unique interests included. Do you love learning about astronomy? Amazing. Do you like trying to learn new languages in your spare time? That's awesome. Is your definition of a perfect day spending time with your dog? Same with me. My point here is that medical school applications are difficult and require a lot of time to achieve some of those "checkboxes", but at the end of the day, *the admissions committee wants to see who you are, not who you think they want you to be.*

In summary, as cliché as it may sound, **truly be yourself.** Don't get too caught up on application musts. Do some reading about what the schools you are applying for may require for applicants. Dedicate time to volunteering and study hard for your courses. **But, at the end of the day, reflect on what makes you YOU.** In my books, that's the perfect applicant.

