

## School Submissions: Toronto

In 2015 the University of Toronto created a medical application recap session. To find it, go to <http://www.md.utoronto.ca/>. Then click on “Admissions” at the top of the page and then click on “Applicant Feedback” in the left-hand column.

We will now work through the “school submissions” section for the University of Toronto.

If you answered yes to the first question “Are there any reasons why your transcript does not reflect your true academic ability” you are given 1500 characters to provide information.

Explain why your marks don't reflect your true ability, any gaps in your transcripts, course withdrawals, and or if you didn't take a full course load. You could talk about exchanges, professional experiences, or co-op experiences if this information is not noted on your transcript. Make sure to include the time frame.

Don't just provide an explanation of what happened, and certainly don't make any excuses, regardless of who or what is to blame, but instead include strategies that you used to overcome whatever challenges you faced. If you had success, or positive results in overcoming a situation – share it here.

It is not necessary to talk about low grades in first year as this is very common. However, if you had a failure or withdrew from a course explain that.

This is a screen shot of Toronto's prerequisites form. U of T strongly recommends that applicants have completed their pre-reqs before applying to med school.

If you have a question about the pre-reqs read through Toronto's Frequently Asked Questions page. They provide a link so you can send an email to them with questions and course descriptions.

The University of Toronto has 4 essay questions that need to be answered. The answers need to be 250 words or less, and the questions change each year.

It's the same person scoring all 4 essays, so use different examples from all areas of your life, not just medicine or research.

Read the help screen as each essay is related to the faculty's mission and values. For all the materials required by Toronto: references, essays, and the ABS, the admissions committee is looking for evidence of all 4 clusters.

The clusters are:

**Professional cluster** which they define as maturity, reliability, perseverance & responsibility;

**Communicator/collaborator/manager cluster** which is communication, collaboration, team work, time management & leadership;

**Advocate cluster** is about advocacy, community service & social responsibility;

**And Scholar** is about your academic standing, achievements in leadership, research & social responsibility as demonstrated by (but not limited to) awards, conference presentations, publications & scholarships

We met with a University of Toronto Admissions Committee member and she stated that reviewers are looking for growth and change. If you can display this you will get a higher score.

If a question is about a particular attribute, search on Toronto's medical school website to see if there is more information on how they define it or what they are looking for in context of that attribute.

There are additional essays if you are an indigenous applicant, or if you are applying to the MD/PhD program.

Let's take a look at some of the questions that have been asked over the last couple of years. Note that previous essay questions are often asked or incorporated at the interview stage!

Here are the questions from the 2014 intake.

Each question seems to address a particular cluster each year. For example, "Please describe an experience, an event or an encounter with an individual or group which led to your directly intervening to help others or to taking some action." This indicates that you should demonstrate abilities from the Advocate cluster. "Describe someone who you have interacted with who you feel is a talented teacher. What characteristics does this person embody and how have you tried to adopt these qualities?" This indicates that you should demonstrate abilities and growth in the communicator/collaborator cluster. Of course communication, maturity, reliability, and other cluster traits can play a role in all of your examples.

The 2016 Essay questions, from the 2015 application cycle, followed the same cluster pattern.

This question was asked for the 2016 intake (so from the 2015 application year) and it is about altruism which means the "selfless concern for the well-being of others." The question asks you to define what altruism means to you in the context of medicine. Provide proof with detailed examples about your own altruistic behaviour and make the connection to medicine. Make sure your examples of altruism are genuine and not done for personal benefit or recognition. On Toronto's website about the admission process they state: "The ideal candidate will also provide evidence of outstanding non-academic qualities, including altruism, reliability, responsibility, perseverance, creativity, and leadership, through this process." Use an example of something you have observed/learned in medicine and demonstrate how you also have this character trait. Remember that you want to show you have a balance between self-care in order to take care of others. You could state that you recognize the realities of the profession such as the hours, stress, losing patients, not knowing answers, etc. You could talk about others in the health care profession and or patients and how they are also altruistic. You could also mention how you advocate for others as this shows your values.

Let's discuss some tips to use when answering these essay questions. Remember there is no one right answer. In your answers try to demonstrate reflection about your life experiences and values, and how

they may relate to the question and answer. Provide proof of how you demonstrate the clusters through specific examples by providing enough detail. Show you will be successful and that you are motivated, and remember as a physician you will have a unique ability to help others. You don't need to use every word that Toronto uses to define each cluster, and you want your answer to be well written and interesting. Make sure you answer the question.

Here is a sample response that meets the 250 word maximum, includes multiple perspectives and stakeholders, and includes a personal example (or proof) with an appropriate verifier number.

Toronto also wants you to write 3 brief statements, in 250 words or less, outlining 3 activities/achievements and describe how each item exemplifies one or more of the clusters of professional, communicator/collaborator/manager, advocate, and scholar.

Remember that you need to include a verifier for the activities described in the essays. You can put the number in brackets and make sure they are on your verifier list.

According to Toronto Admissions, although it is not required, it would not go amiss if a student briefly identified the cluster that they were exemplifying in discussing a particular activity. Either the description or number identifying that activity would be fine. They suggest that an applicant have someone read their statement and ask the reader if it was clear what qualities were being discussed in their statement. If a second party felt that it was NOT clear, then a clarifying sentence should be added. Students don't have to worry about similarity or duplication as the essay component is evaluated separately from the ABS component.

Choose the top 3 experiences that have really helped you grow as a person and in your pursuit of a health care profession. Really think about how you developed in the listed skills and areas on this slide.

Health-related volunteering, teaching assistant positions, research experience, and peer advising positions are good places to start to determine which of your experiences will address all 4 clusters.

Provide examples or proof of how you actually used these skills to make your statement more credible. Think about details of the experience that made the situation unique, challenging, or an opportunity for growth, and the specifics of HOW you went about your actions to include enough depth to your experience description.

Many students find completing an OMSAS application is like taking an additional course, so you want to start early. The application opens at the beginning of July, so prepare a realistic timeline keeping in mind that the Sketch and essays always take longer than anticipated. The personal statement & sketch are the only parts of the application that you can now control, so you need to ensure that you have enough time to review, edit, and re-write! It might be helpful to get an application buddy who is also going through the same process to help plan your time, and review your writing.

When editing, read your essay answers out loud as you can often catch awkward sentence structures, grammatical mistakes, and get a sense of the flow better with this method. Make sure to ask someone to evaluate for typos and grammar. When it comes to content changes, remember each person will have

their own opinion. There is often many ways to say the same thing. This is your document – you want to go with your own approach and what you will be happy submitting.

In the Further education – Applying section, you will find information on how to develop content for your personal statements, templates and examples. We also have a Letter of Intent Binder that is kept behind the front desk of the Centre for Career Action. You can review this binder to see application examples from previous Waterloo students who have been accepted to med schools – with their personal information removed.

The Centre for Career Action also has a small library with some books with tips on writing your personal statements.