

Sketch, Tips, Formal Education

Let's review the sketch section where we will provide tips and also talk briefly about the Formal Education section.

The "sketch" section is a very important part of your application. The sketch component for many of the schools is reviewed to determine whether you will be invited for an interview. You only complete the sketch once. Different layers of the sketch are submitted to some med schools and we will discuss this when we talk about the individual schools.

These are the 7 categories that you can choose from for the sketch: formal education, employment, volunteer activities, extracurricular activities, awards & accomplishments, research, and other. The letters in brackets are the abbreviations that OMSAS uses.

We will go through each section of the sketch shortly.

A verifier is required for the majority of the activities you record in the sketch and for some of your essays that you will write in the school submissions section. A verifier is someone that can verify that you completed an activity. It is not a reference. Try to use an "unbiased" verifier. You can use the same verifier for multiple activities.

If a verifier is not provided, the activity will not be considered.

Any activity that can be substantiated by an academic transcript does not require a verifier. In that case, put in "0" for the verifier number. If you do not record a number you will not be able to save that particular activity.

We recommend that you put your verification number in brackets beside the activity. You will do this for both the sketch and essays. There is an example screen shot of the top layer of the sketch in the next couple of slides.

It is a good idea to let your verifiers know that they may be contacted anytime between November to April, although it is not clear how often verifiers are contacted.

This is a screenshot of the verifier page. The system will allow you to save this page without adding in a phone number. The risk of not including a phone number will be that your verifier cannot be contacted and therefore the activity may not be considered. If the person is out of the country, include that information in the comments box and provide details on how they can be contacted. Also, mention the time frame that they are away.

Use your verifier's professional or business address even if you know them from a personal experience (such as travelling, or maybe a student you knew from school).

In the Sketch, you will need to use point form as you will have only 150 characters to describe each activity. We will provide more details and examples on how best to demonstrate your activities.

There are a total of 48 entries or activities that you can submit. If you do not have 48 activities, please do not worry. It is the quality of your activity not the quantity of activities that is most important. Choose your activities wisely so you demonstrate substantially who you are.

You can list activities you have been involved in since the age of 16. Just a reminder you need verifiers for each activity to be considered by the med schools.

McMaster University Admissions Committee reviews the sketch after the interview stage. It is not part of the application review. Hence, verifiers are not necessary if you are only applying to McMaster. They only receive the top layer of the ABS (the list) and it is not scored or marked in any way. It is used during the final file review for applicants that are interviewed. This is where reference letters are reviewed as well and they are also not scored. So, if you are only applying to McMaster University you only need to complete the top layer of the sketch and not the next layer where you would provide more details about each activity.

Northern Ontario School of Medicine independently assesses the sketch according to their scoring guidelines. The score from the ABS is averaged with your score from independently assessed essay questions that counts towards a third of the weighting of your pre-interview calculation. According to a NOSM webinar it is up to the candidate to decide what to include in the sketch. There are no bonus points given for volunteering at a hospital. The sketch is how the admissions committee gets to know who you are. Review NOSM's website and follow them on social media sites to understand how they contribute to their community, and if you are doing things that are on the same pathway chose those type of activities to record. They are looking for well-rounded individuals. They are looking for intelligent applicants, but also candidates who can identify with their own patients, so they want to see what other things you have done in your life such as playing sports, volunteering, what you do in your spare time, and are you involved in your community. Generally they don't want candidates that are all about academics. It doesn't matter how many activities you completed; it is more important for them to see if you were able to commit to something and do it for a longer length of time. If you had increased responsibility and/or grew within the organization, show that. They will understand if you only have work experiences if you have to support yourself financially. When describing one of your work experiences you could state that you paid for your education or supported yourself through school.

At the interview stage, Ottawa Admissions has a copy of the top layer (the brief details) and you will be asked questions related to these details in the interview. For the 2nd layer where you can provide details in 150 characters, Ottawa only reviews your choice of the top 3 activities for all categories except Formal Education & the Other section. Ottawa does not assess the category 'other' when scoring the sketches; however, the items listed in that category are used for discussion during the interview process. Please note you can only choose activities for your top 3 completed during your undergraduate years. Unfortunately there is no leeway for graduate students who may have, or other applicants who have just graduated and have, completed activities the summer after undergraduate graduation, or shortly after their degree. Ottawa's policy is to only evaluate those activities that are done during the undergraduate years, as they feel they get a much better sense of how the student is able to cope and succeed with these activities while also maintaining a high academic average and full course load.

Queen's University emphasizes in the OMSAS booklet "that candidates should emphasize in the autobiographical sketch those areas of experience that include particular interest in advisory work, athletics, community work, fine arts, health care, employment, literature, organization, teaching and travel. Leadership skills are valued."

Western Ontario does not require the sketch.

The University of Toronto evaluates the ABS (meaning the sketch) and 3 additional ABS essay answers as a whole. There are also 4 other essays for Toronto that are marked independently.

Action verbs are the first step to concisely describing your responsibilities in the sketch. You don't have much space to write and admissions committee's will not assume what you have done, or what you have to offer. It is important to provide clear concise points. You will be evaluated on all parts of your submission so use present tense if you are still completing an activity and past tense if it is done.

Similar to writing a concise bullet point on your resume, you can use the same formula to write a few short bullet points. Each point can be separated by semi-colons for this section of your application.

Use a strong verb that demonstrates the skill you were using (for example: Prepared, Observed, or Created). Verbs like "helped" "assisted" or saying "responsible for" don't say very much and certainly don't prove that you were using any type of skill. You can find more examples of strong action verbs in CareerHub.

After you have selected a strong action verb – include the details of what you did, and HOW you did it!

In many of the sections you are limited to 150 characters to write your details, so use your space wisely.

We want to credit BeMo Academic Consulting for this information. They recommend in order to choose the top 3 activities for the sketch categories of employment, volunteer activities, extracurricular activities, awards & accomplishments, and research for the University of Ottawa, consider the following: the level of uniqueness of the activity, the level of commitment you gave to the activity, the progression of your role in the activity and the skills you developed and also the relevancy to medicine.

Often it is helpful to move an activity from the "volunteer" category to the "extra-curricular" category or vice versa in order to be able to highlight your top activities that you want Ottawa to review in detail.

CanMEDS is the framework of essential physician competencies. The CanMEDS framework is organized around seven Roles: Medical Expert (and that is the central Role), Professional, Communicator, Scholar, Collaborator, Leader, and Health Advocate. These competencies are taught to you in med school and they have milestones throughout your MD degree. Medical schools are now looking for these competencies at the application stage.

These align with University of Toronto's clusters which you can find in the OMSAS Instruction Booklet or on the University of Toronto's website.

Other qualities or skills that align with the role of a physician to consider are:

Compassion

Problem-solving abilities

Trust

Tenacity

Altruism

BeMo Academic Consulting has created a chart to show how to keep track of your activities prior to completing your application. You may find it helpful to create something similar to this.

When you are considering what activities to include, also consider the points listed on this slide.

This screenshot is to show the top layer of the sketch.

You will choose the category by using the drop-down menu.

Put in dates also by using the drop-down menu.

The description box is 48 characters. Remember you need to add a verifier at this level. So you will put the number of your verifier in brackets at the end of your description.

This screenshot shows a partial example of the top layer of the sketch.

You need to add in verifiers on the top layer of the sketch under the "description column." Med schools receive 2 pages of information: the first page includes the categories with the 48 character description & verifier numbers which is the top layer, and the second page is the detailed descriptions which is the 2nd layer. Not all schools review both pages.

Just a reminder that you should put in the verifier number bracket zero bracket when your information is substantiated (or proven) on your transcript.

Click on "add/change details" to get to the 2nd layer.

You can't edit the category you choose on the top layer. Once you have selected a category for an activity, you have to delete and re-enter your information if you want to change the type of category. If you messed up by using extracurricular when you meant to use volunteer, then you have to delete and enter your information again.

Here are some tips to consider.

Don't do activities for the sake of resume padding; you should be able to show **consistent** interest in activities and the community where you are helping people; if you have completed the same role over different time periods (e.g., playing outdoor soccer) then you could put those all in the same activity submission.

Make sure you show balance between repetition, commitment, and diversity of activities. We know that all your activities are important, but often you need to strategize in order to provide the admissions committee with a well-rounded perspective of who you are.

Use Canadian spelling.

When you copy text from Word and put it into the OMSAS text boxes, you will lose symbols, so read your application carefully. Save and return to the submission to review it before you submit. Accuracy counts.

Remember, it is not necessary to enter all of your activities for one category at one time, as the system will arrange your activities so that all volunteer activities, for example, are together.

If you will still be participating in an activity after the OMSAS application deadline, and you aren't sure of what the end date will be, use the dashes that are in the drop-down box.

If you started an activity prior to high school, or prior to when you were 16 years old, and it continued through high school or you are still doing it, include it. We suggest you use the start date you began the activity, even though it may be before you were 16.

Under the formal education category you list any educational experiences you had back to when you were 16-years of age, so typically this will include high school and university. However, if you completed a summer college course or a language course this information also needs to be included.

A verifier is required for your high school entry (because you are not sending high school transcripts).

No further information is required for this section.