

FREE RESOURCE

What to Do If You Didn't Get In to Dental School

Post-bacc programs, reapplying, and the path forward — honestly explained.

01

02

03

04

05

06

07

08

01



Most applicants who are rejected make one of three types of errors. Understanding which one applies to you determines your next move.

TYPE 1

Numbers Below Threshold

GPA or DAT scores fell below the screening cutoffs at most of your schools. This is a fixable problem — but it requires a real strategy, not just resubmitting the same application.

Warning Signals:

GPA below 3.2 combined with DAT AA below 18. Low science GPA despite strong overall GPA.

TYPE 2

Weak Application Materials

Your numbers were competitive but your personal statement, letters of recommendation, or activities section did not support your candidacy. Committees could not build a picture of you as a future dentist.

Warning Signals:

Generic personal statement. Letters from professors who did not know you well. No meaningful clinical narrative.

TYPE 3

Poor School Selection

Your application was strong but sent to the wrong schools — too reach-heavy, too regionally mismatched, or submitted too late in the cycle.

Warning Signals:

Applied only to top-10 programs. Submitted in October or November. Applied only to in-state schools with low out-of-state acceptance rates.

02



Post-Baccalaureate Program

A structured academic program — typically 1–2 years — designed to improve your science GPA and demonstrate you can handle graduate-level coursework.

Choose post-bacc if:

- Your GPA is below 3.2 and needs a significant boost
- You have a pattern of poor performance in science courses
- You need more time to retake the DAT while also improving coursework
- Your undergraduate institution or major did not include strong science coursework

Formal programs vs. DIY

Formal post-bacc programs (often at universities) provide structure and sometimes linkage agreements with dental schools. DIY means enrolling in courses at a local college independently — cheaper but requires more self-direction.

Reapplying Without a Post-Bacc

This is the right move if your numbers were competitive but other factors were weak.

Reapply if:

- Your GPA and DAT were competitive (3.3+ and 19+ AA)
- Your personal statement was generic or weak and you can significantly improve it
- You applied to the wrong schools or too late in the cycle
- Your clinical experience was thin — you can shadow more in a gap year
- Your letters of recommendation were from weak or inappropriate sources

The critical rule:

Do not reapply with the same application. If nothing materially changed, admissions committees will notice — and reject you again. You must be able to answer: "What is different this time?"

03



ACTION 01

Retake the DAT

If your score was below 19 AA, retake it. Give yourself a full 4–6 months of structured prep. A score increase of 2+ points significantly changes your competitiveness.

ACTION 02

Add Shadowing Hours

If you had fewer than 150 hours, add more — and diversify the settings. Community health clinics, specialist offices, and academic dental clinics all add dimension.

ACTION 03

Rewrite Your Personal Statement from Scratch

Do not edit the old one. Start fresh. Your perspective after a rejection and a year of reflection is genuinely different — let the statement reflect that.

ACTION 04

Get Better Letters of Recommendation

If your letters were from professors who barely knew you, ask a dentist you have worked closely with, a supervisor, or a professor you had a genuine relationship with.

ACTION 05

Address Your GPA Directly

Take 2–3 upper-division science courses at a local university. A or A- in all of them. This is the simplest signal to send that your academic performance was a past issue, not a permanent one.

ACTION 06

Work in a Dental Office

Even as a front desk coordinator or dental assistant, a year working in a clinical environment gives you operational insight and a much stronger clinical narrative.

04



Common Mistakes After Rejection

Reapplying immediately without changing anything

Submitting the same application the following June is not a strategy. It is hope. Committees remember applicants who applied the previous cycle.

Applying to more schools without better materials

Adding 10 more schools to a weak application creates 10 more rejection letters. Volume does not compensate for quality.

Choosing a Caribbean school without careful research

Caribbean dental schools exist and some graduates practice in the US — but the path is longer, more expensive, and less predictable. Do not go this route as a reflex — research outcomes data for specific programs.

Giving up after one cycle

The average dental school matriculant applies 1.7 times. One rejection is not failure — it is information. Use it.

The Mindset Shift

A rejection is not a verdict on your worth or your future. It is a data point. The most useful question to ask is not "why did they reject me?" but "what would need to be true for a committee to say yes?"

Then work backward from there.

What PDI Can Help With

- Honest assessment of what held your application back
- Building a reapplication strategy based on your specific profile
- Reviewing and rebuilding your personal statement
- School list strategy for the next cycle
- Mock interviews to close any performance gaps

PDI works with reapplicants to build honest, strategic second-cycle plans — not just encouragement, but a clear roadmap of what needs to change and how to change it. Apply at:

predentalinstituteofchicago.com

Pre-Dental Institute of Chicago