PDI.

APPLICATION STRATEGY

Building a Competitive Dental School Application

A practical framework for academics, experiences, application materials, timing, and school-specific research.

Prepared by Andrew Gallos, M.S., D.M.D. Candidate, Class of 2028

Fact-checked against current ADEA and ADA guidance | Reviewed September 2026

predentalinstituteofchicago.com

GUIDE OVERVIEW

What this guide covers

A practical framework for academics, experiences, application materials, timing, and school-specific research.

01 How admissions review works
02 Academic readiness without false cutoffs
03 Interpreting the DAT correctly
04 Experiences: depth, reflection, and continuity
05 AADSAS materials and evaluations
06 The 2026-27 cycle and submission strategy
07 Final application audit

Educational guidance only. Admissions requirements, testing policies, and timelines can change. Always verify requirements with ADEA, the ADA, and each dental school before acting. PDI is not affiliated with or endorsed by ADEA or the ADA.

SECTION 01

How admissions review works

There is no single formula used by every dental school. Each program applies its own mission, prerequisites, residency preferences, academic expectations, and review process. A strong application is therefore both well-rounded and school-specific.

- Academic readiness: coursework, overall and science GPAs, grade trends, course load, and DAT results.
- Understanding of dentistry: meaningful observation, employment, service, or other exposure that shows an informed career choice.
- Personal qualities: reliability, service, leadership, resilience, communication, professionalism, and ethical judgment.
- Written and spoken communication: the personal statement, experience descriptions, secondary responses, and interview.
- Program fit: prerequisites, state-residency patterns, mission alignment, and realistic school selection.

> PDI note: Use these as PDI's planning categories, not as an official admissions scoring rubric.

SECTION 02

Academic readiness without false cutoffs

National averages can provide context, but they are not universal admissions thresholds. Compare your record with the published requirements and recent entering-class data for every school you are considering.

- Review the GPA calculated by ADEA AADSAS, not only the GPA shown by your college.
- Look at overall performance, science performance, prerequisite grades, and the direction of your recent work.
- An upward trend can strengthen context, but it does not erase earlier grades or replace required prerequisites.
- If recent science work is needed, choose coursework that demonstrates readiness and confirm that target schools will accept it.
- Do not automatically use the personal statement to explain every low grade. Discuss academic difficulty only when it is central to your path and you can show specific growth.

SECTION 03

Interpreting the DAT correctly

DAT scores are reported from 200 to 600 in 10-point increments. The ADA states that there is no official passing score; each program decides what is acceptable.

- The Academic Average is the rounded mean of Biology, General Chemistry, Organic Chemistry, Reading Comprehension, and Quantitative Reasoning. PAT is separate.
- For first-time examinees tested March-December 2025, the mean Academic Average was 413.9, according to the 2026 ADA DAT User's Manual.
- Official AA concordance examples: old 18 is about 390; 19 is about 410; 20 is about 420; 21 is about 440; and 22 is about 460.
- Section concordances differ, so do not apply the Academic Average conversion to every section.
- Use each target school's current class profile and policies rather than relying on a single internet definition of a competitive score.

SECTION 04

Experiences: depth, reflection, and continuity

Experience quality is not measured by hours alone. Admissions readers need to understand what you did, why it mattered, what you learned, and how it shaped your readiness for dentistry.

- Shadowing: prioritize meaningful exposure to general dentistry and verify each school's expectations. Specialist exposure can broaden your perspective.
- Service: sustained involvement and genuine responsibility are usually more informative than a long list of brief activities.
- Employment: dental assisting, clinical support, research, tutoring, hospitality, and other work can all demonstrate transferable skills when described honestly.
- Leadership: explain the problem you addressed, the people you supported, and the outcome - not just the title.
- Research is valuable when it is meaningful to you, but it is not a universal requirement for dental school.

> PDI note: ADEA notes that shadowing expectations vary by school and that meaningful reflection matters more than simply accumulating hours.

SECTION 05

AADSAS materials and evaluations

Build the application from source documents before the portal opens: transcripts, an experience log, a school-requirement matrix, evaluator information, and multiple drafts of written materials.

- The common personal statement may not exceed 4,500 characters, including spaces, and should not be written for one specific school.
- The Applicant Summary may display up to six most important experiences and up to four most important achievements; you are not required to force six selections if the portal or your record does not support them.
- ADEA AADSAS accepts up to four evaluations. The types of writers requested are determined by individual schools.
- For 2026-27, evaluators answer new relationship and characteristic questions in addition to uploading the narrative letter.
- Check each school's Program Materials profile and official admissions page before inviting writers.

SECTION 06

The 2026-27 cycle and submission strategy

ADEA lists May 12, 2026 as the application opening date and June 2, 2026 as the first submission date. The first acceptance-notification date is December 15, 2026, and the cycle closes February 5, 2027.

- Prepare early enough to submit a complete, accurate application during the summer; do not rush a weak or error-filled application merely to submit on day one.
- Allow time for transcript entry, verification, official DAT reporting, evaluations, and school-specific supplemental requirements.
- Official DAT results are reported in approximately three to four weeks under the current ADA guide.
- Track every school in one document: prerequisites, evaluator requirements, supplemental steps, fees, deadlines, interview format, and communications.
- Dates and policies change each cycle. Re-check ADEA and every program before applying.

SECTION 07

Final application audit

Before submission, review the application as one connected story rather than a collection of isolated sections.

- Your school list matches your prerequisites, residency profile, academic record, goals, and budget.
- Every experience description explains contribution and learning without exaggeration.
- The personal statement answers why dentistry through specific reflection and sounds like you.
- Evaluators meet the requirements of every school on your list and have enough time and context to write well.
- Dates, hours, course entries, and contact information are consistent across your records.
- You have saved copies of every submitted item and created a plan for secondaries and interviews.

REFERENCES

Official sources

These sources were reviewed when this guide was prepared. Re-check them for updates before applying or registering for an exam.

ADEA AADSAS applicant information and 2026-27 dates
https://www.adea.org/godental/Apply/apply-to-adea-aadsas

ADEA AADSAS resources and FAQs
https://www.adea.org/godental/Apply/resources-and-faqs

ADA 2026 DAT Candidate Guide
https://www.ada.org/-/media/project/ada-organization/ada/ada-org/files/education/dat_candidate_guide.pdf

ADA 2026 DAT User's Manual
https://www.ada.org/-/media/project/ada-organization/ada/ada-org/files/education/dat_users_manual.pdf

ADA DAT score concordance
https://www.ada.org/-/media/Project/ADA%20Organization/ADA/ADA-org/Files/Education/DAT_ScoreReportingScale

ADEA shadowing opportunities
https://www.adea.org/GoDental/health-professions-advisors/supporting-students/shadowing-opportunities

Want a review of your actual application?

PDI can help you evaluate your transcript, DAT plan, experiences, school list, and written materials as one complete application.

Explore application mentorship at predentalinstituteofchicago.com

Educational guidance only. Admissions requirements, testing policies, and timelines can change. Always verify requirements with ADEA, the ADA, and each dental school before acting. PDI is not affiliated with or endorsed by ADEA or the ADA.