



**4 COMMON RESIDENCY
APPLICATION *mistakes*
THAT PREVENT IMGs FROM
MATCHING**

By Shawna-Kaye Lester

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Every minute you've spent hitting the books in med school has come down to this moment—submitting your residency match application.

You're hoping when programs review your application, they'll be excited to invite you to interview.

You already know the 5 aspects of your application that will be scrutinized most closely (Figure 1).

Your:

- USMLE Step 1 score
- Letters of recommendation in your chosen specialty
- Medical School Program Evaluation (MSPE)
- USMLE Step 2 CK score and
- Personal statement

While all of these elements are essential, none has the power to speak for you like your personal statement. Underestimating the importance of the personal statement is one of the top 4 mistakes I've seen prevent International Medical Graduates (IMGs) from matching.

FIGURE 1:

Percentage of Programs Citing Each Factor and Mean Importance Rating¹ for Each Factor in Selecting Applicants to Interview (N=1,233)

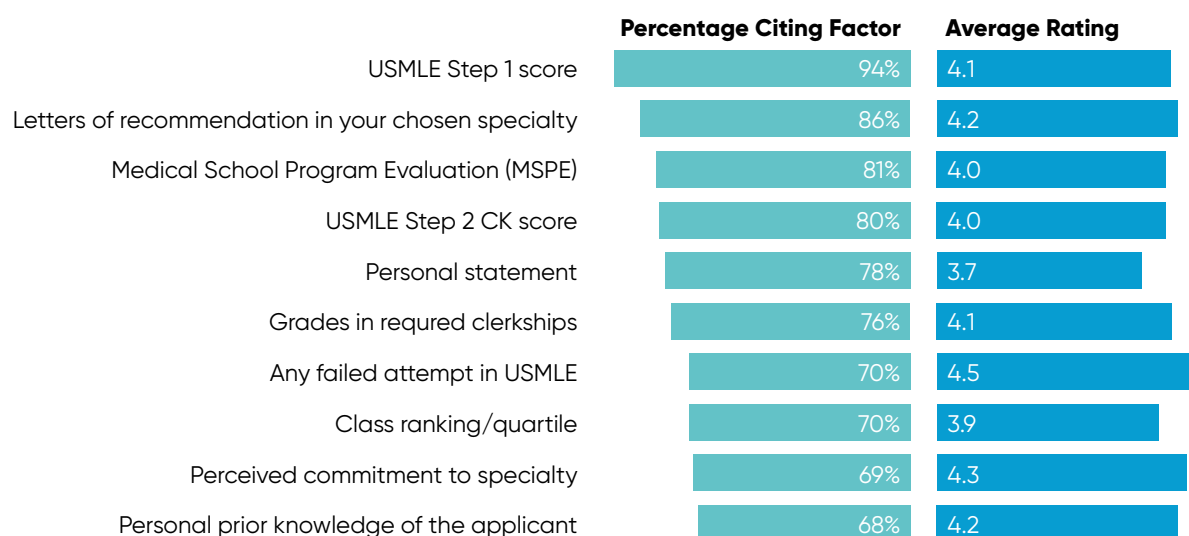


FIGURE 1: National Resident Matching Program, Data Release and Research Committee: Results of the 2018 NRMP Program Director Survey. National Residency Matching Program, Washington, DC. 2018.

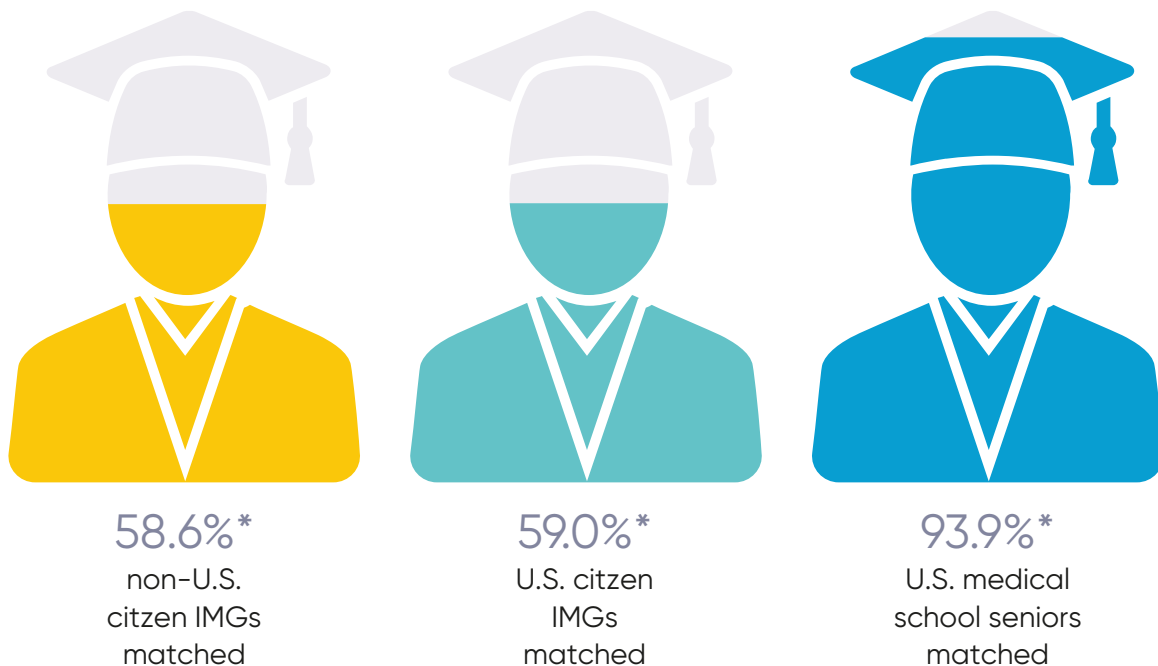
¹ Ratings on a scale from 1 (not at all important) to 5 (very important).

Just 58.6% of non-U.S. citizen IMGs and 59% U.S. citizen IMGs were successful in the 2019 match, **compared to 93.9% of U.S. medical school seniors.**

It is integral that you know how to beat the odds, starting with knowing which mistakes to avoid (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2:

2019 Main Residency Match® Rates For Non-U.S. Citizen IMGs, U.S.-Citizen IMGs, and U.S. Allopathic Medical School Seniors



* National Resident Matching Program, Results and Data: 2019 Main Residency Match®. National Residency Matching Program, Washington, DC. 2019.

Let's take a closer look at each mistake and what it will cost you. After that, we'll talk about how you can avoid them.

MISTAKE

#1

UNDERESTIMATING THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT

There are 2 ways you can fail to make the most of your personal statement.

A. **You tell yourself that all you have to do is write a personal statement that doesn't harm your chances, because you definitely can't write something that increases your chances of matching.**

If you don't aim to stand out, you won't. You'll blend into the crowd and be forgotten.

IMGs who are easy to forget don't end up at the top of Rank Order Lists.

B. **You leave yourself with less than a month to write your personal statement and end up rushing it.**

It's hard to produce a convincing residency personal statement—one that shows self-reflection, clarity of purpose, readiness, and fit—when you're rushing. But programs will view the quality of your personal statement as an indication of the effort you put into in your work.

IMGs who don't communicate in every aspect of their application that they're deeply invested in their own success will not inspire any program to offer them an interview.

MISTAKE

#2

WRITING A PERSONAL STATEMENT THAT DOES NOT CLEARLY COMMUNICATE WHY YOU SHOULD BE CHOSEN

A personal statement is a brief piece of writing (I recommend no more than 800 words). Its purpose is to open the door to an interview and, eventually, a match. To do this, your personal statement must make your target programs understand that you bring unique value to the table.

You need to match, and programs need you to join their team. When you communicate what specific value a program would get from you that they can't get from another candidate, you've made their choice easy.

However, here are two ways in which you can waste the opportunity to let a program understand why they should select you.

A. You don't tell your story in your personal statement.

The number one way to communicate your unique value is to tell your story. A good story takes the main character on a specific journey and makes us feel a connection to them.

In your story, you're the main character.

If your personal statement doesn't make your reader understand the journey that has brought you to your current position, explain your motivation for wanting to make residency training the next step in your journey, and make your readers feel invested in your success, you haven't communicated why they should choose you.

IMGs who don't tell their personal story in a way that shows why they should match will be overlooked for applicants who have.

B. You cram too many points into your personal statement.

Your personal statement must have one main message: Choose me.

You need to have a few points that drive home that message. However, IMGs often try to include so many points that their personal statement ends up sounding like a list. It then becomes impossible to present any single point with clarity, authenticity, emotion, or specificity ([4 of the 8 writing tools that make personal statements memorable](#)). So, reading their personal statement feels like reading a long curriculum vitae (CV).

IMGs whose personal statements explore more than 5 points, especially points that rehash information on their CV, compromise their odds of matching.

MISTAKE #3

SUBMITTING A CV THAT UNDERSOLLS YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS

Your CV informs your target programs about all the relevant skills and experiences you have acquired in your medical education journey to date.

It's essential for any member of the selection committee who looks at your CV for even a few seconds to want to dig deeper, and for those who skim it for a few minutes to be convinced that you are ready for the rigors of residency training. However, residency match applicants squander this opportunity in two main ways.

A. **You submit a CV with sparse, poorly articulated content.**

Your CV will include sections dedicated to your educational background, medical school awards, membership in professional organizations, work experiences, volunteer experiences, research experiences, publications, and hobbies.

While you may not have content to fill in every section—for example, you may not have done research or volunteer work—each section for which you do have relevant content must be filled with great care.

Mistakes IMGs often make include describing their work experiences in terms like, “Did the usual duties of a pediatric intern.” They provide such throwaway descriptions of their work experiences because, they explain, an attending physician already understands what an intern does.

Even worse, several IMG applicants provide no descriptions at all (NONE) for the entries/experiences on their CV; they simply list the experiences!

Don't confuse providing concise, high-impact content on your CV with providing sparse, weak content.

IMGs who don't prepare a CV that properly positions their accomplishments will be overlooked for less accomplished applicants who submit a robust, well-positioned CV.

B. **Your CV has basic, unforgivable errors.**

There are certain rules of general CV writing that are especially relevant when applying for medical residency. It's unforgivable to have on your residency CV:

- Misspellings
- Exaggerations about your roles and accomplishments
- Inconsistent formatting
- Disorganized information
- Unexplained time gaps

The most common errors are disorganized information and unexplained time gaps.

An IMG whose CV is riddled with basic errors has disqualified themselves from being invited to interview.

**MISTAKE
#4**

**CHOOSING NOT TO GET PROFESSIONAL
INTERVIEW COACHING ALTHOUGH YOU
HAVE POOR INTERVIEW SKILLS**

Once you have been invited to interview, the interactions you have with the faculty during your visit become the most important factor in determining how highly a program ranks you (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3:

Percentage of Programs Citing Each Factor and Mean Importance Rating¹ for Each Factor in Ranking Applicants (N=1,208)



FIGURE 3: National Resident Matching Program, Data Release and Research Committee: Results of the 2018 NRMP Program Director Survey. National Residency Matching Program, Washington, DC. 2018.

¹ Ratings on a scale from 1 (not at all important) to 5 (very important).

It's essential that you shine in every interview you have.

One of the biggest mistakes applicants, and even reapplicants, make is that they secure an interview but don't get professional interview coaching.

MISTAKE
#4

CHOOSING NOT TO GET PROFESSIONAL INTERVIEW COACHING ALTHOUGH YOU HAVE POOR INTERVIEW SKILLS

Here's how not getting professional interview coaching can sabotage your match outcome:

A. You are not exposed to the range of questions you can be asked during your interview.

There are several kinds of interview questions that can be asked on your interview day, including behavioral, case, and clarification questions. These types can vary depending on whether the interview is structured or unstructured, or if you are in a one-on-one setting, talking within a small group of peers, in front of a panel, or moving from station to station.

IMGs are often not aware of all the kinds of questions they can be asked and, because of that, they prepare poor answers, and overestimate how well they answer questions.

As an IMG, it's your job to be prepared to answer every kind of residency interview question in any setting and make a good impression.

B. You give incomplete responses to behavioral questions and ask inappropriate questions.

If you're an IMG who has gotten multiple interviews but hasn't matched, you can bet your interview skills are the reason. Here's how your interview performance can raise red flags:

→ The messaging of your interview responses differs from what was presented on your application, suggesting inauthenticity.

→ You provide incomplete responses to behavioral questions, so they aren't convincing.

→ Most importantly, when it's time to ask questions, you focus on what you can get out of the program as a resident versus on what you can contribute.

For an IMG, getting an interview is a prized opportunity, but giving incomplete responses and asking offensive questions will make it slip through your fingers.

4 COMMON RESIDENCY APPLICATION *mistakes* THAT PREVENT IMGs FROM MATCHING

MISTAKE #1

UNDERESTIMATING THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT

A. You tell yourself that all you have to do is write a personal statement that doesn't harm your chances, because you definitely can't write something that increases your chances of matching.

B. You leave yourself with less than a month to write your personal statement and end up rushing it.

DO THIS:

- Acknowledge the importance of your personal statement to your match result and give yourself at least 8 weeks to write one that stands out.

MISTAKE #2

WRITING A PERSONAL STATEMENT THAT DOESN'T CLEARLY COMMUNICATE WHY YOU SHOULD BE CHOSEN

A. You don't tell your story in your personal statement.

B. You cram too many points into your personal statement.

DO THIS:

- Figure out your main message and tell your story in no more than 5 related points in your personal statement.

MISTAKE #3

SUBMITTING A CV THAT UNDERSOLLS YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS

A. You submit a CV with sparse, poorly articulated content.

B. Your CV has basic, unforgivable errors.

DO THIS:

- Prepare a CV that properly articulates your accomplishments and is free of errors.

MISTAKE #4

CHOOSING NOT TO GET PROFESSIONAL INTERVIEW COACHING

A. You are not exposed to the range of questions you can be asked during your interview.

B. You give incomplete responses to behavioral questions and ask inappropriate questions.

DO THIS:

- Get professional interview preparation to improve your responses and your questions, especially if you are a reapplicant.

CLICK HERE, AND I WILL HELP YOU CREATE AN APPLICATION THAT GIVES YOU THE BEST SHOT AT LANDING INTERVIEWS AND MATCHING.

ABOUT SHAWNA-KAYE LESTER, M.S., M.P.H.

Hi there!

I'm Shawna-Kaye Lester, Founder of Memorable Essay®.

I help ambitious physicians like you match into residency.

I believe that you should have the medical career of your dreams, not one you settled for.



→ My clients have matched into a variety of residency programs, including at **Englewood Health, Jackson Memorial Hospital, the University of Miami, SUNY Downstate, Howard University, and the University of Central Florida.**

→ I understand your big-picture goals: **You need to match so you can take your first step toward becoming a hospitalist, completing a fellowship, or creating the practice you've always wanted to.** I have hundreds of happy clients who I've helped to take the first step.

→ **Memorable Essay® is a trusted brand. Our satisfied clients include The Jack Kent Cooke Foundation,** which gives the largest scholarships in the United States to students with financial need and exceptional academic promise.

→ **I'm a trained journalist published on CNN's Anthony Bourdain Parts Unknown,** and I'm a former health care communications professional.

→ **I don't view this as a just a job:** When I was 17, a science teacher at my high school stood at the front of our classroom, and asked me and my classmates why we all wanted to become doctors. She said matter-of-factly, "You can't all become doctors." She was wrong. Every single person who wanted to become a doctor became one.

One evening some years later, I was talking with one of my friends from that class. She was applying to residency match as an IMG and kept saying, "I don't have anything to write about." I knew that wasn't true, because I could see all she had to offer. I also knew how many

hours in the library and how much money had gone into her journey. I couldn't imagine her not matching.

I supported her using the expertise I had from college and graduate admissions consulting.

When she interviewed for match, a selection committee member let her know how much they loved her application. She matched that year, and I have been supporting residency applicants ever since.

LET'S WORK ON YOUR APPLICATION TOGETHER

You're pouring yourself into every aspect of your application, because you're definitely not ending up in SOAP or applying all over again next year. You cannot wait to leave your current job because you want world-class medical training. Your personal statement, CV, Letters of Recommendation, and interview need to make an unforgettable impression so you get multiple interviews and match.

YOU'RE LOOKING FOR:

- ✓ Comprehensive admissions, branding, and writing support from an expert so you create a personal statement that gets you shortlisted.
- ✓ Professional CV assistance to show off your skills and accomplishments so they know at a glance you're the top contender.
- ✓ Insider secrets to get recommendation letters that seduce the directors at your top-choice programs.
- ✓ Private coaching sessions, email, and WhatsApp support throughout your application process so you never feel frustrated or overwhelmed by doing everything on your own.
- ✓ Interview coaching for your ultra-competitive selection process so you ace your interviews and match into your top choice.

OUR SIGNATURE SERVICE—APPLICATION ACCELERATOR—IS YOUR NEW BEST FRIEND.

Please note: We also offer a la carte services for personal statement, CV, letters of recommendation, and interview preparation.

TO ACCELERATE YOUR JOURNEY TO THE MATCH, APPLY HERE

CLIENT SUCCESS *stories*



“The talking points we came up with during interview prep were used countless times throughout the interview season. I highly recommend Memorable Essay.”

“I secured 9 interviews and really thank Shawna for all her help. The essay we worked on served as an icebreaker at most of my interviews and the points we made were often referred to by the interviewers. The talking points we came up with during interview prep were used countless times throughout the interview season.”

“I highly recommend Memorable Essay to anyone applying to the match. It’s easy to contact Shawna and her suggestions are clear. You’re in good hands because she knows what she is doing.”

Jason, Internal Medicine



“When I went to interview, a program director singled me out.”

“When I was recommended to Memorable Essay, I was not sure if I needed help. I thought I could just get my friends to read over my match application. I’m glad I chose to work with Shawna: Working with her boosted my confidence in what I was bringing to the table. It also helped me make my personal statement appealing and improve my CV so it sold me well. When I went to interview, a program director singled me out—he said he wanted to talk with me because of what I had written about in my personal statement.”

“Our interview prep was especially helpful, and I wish I had done it earlier. I had read books on interviewing, but my interview prep allowed me to prepare answers that were unique to me. It also prepared me to ask strong questions during my interviews, which I believe made a difference in my match outcome.”

Nicola, Internal Medicine



“I matched to my Number 1 ranked program.”

“Before working with Shawna-Kaye, I was hesitant about whether this would be a worthwhile investment. Now that I have successfully completed the process, without a doubt I would say my decision to improve the quality of my application with guidance from Shawna- Kaye has proven to be one of my best investments in my career to date. Shawna- Kaye took her commitments seriously, appeared to understand and value how important this process was for me, and was invested in me successfully securing a residency position.”

“I felt satisfied with my personal statement and CV, and my interview prep made me feel less nervous in approaching my interviews. I obtained greater than my expected number of interviews, inclusive of my top 3 choices of university programs, and matched to my Number 1 ranked program.”

“I think people generally underestimate the importance of their application— it is actually just as important as your Board scores. Programs look at your personal statement especially to get an idea of how much effort you place into assigned tasks. For most of my interviews, the program directors commented on my personal statement and that was a nice way to break the ice.”

“My advice is to start early with the process, be diligent with your work and timelines, and really commit to having an immaculate application. Without a doubt, doing this process with Shawna-Kaye’s guidance is an investment into your future that is worth having.”

Shanique, Pediatrics

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