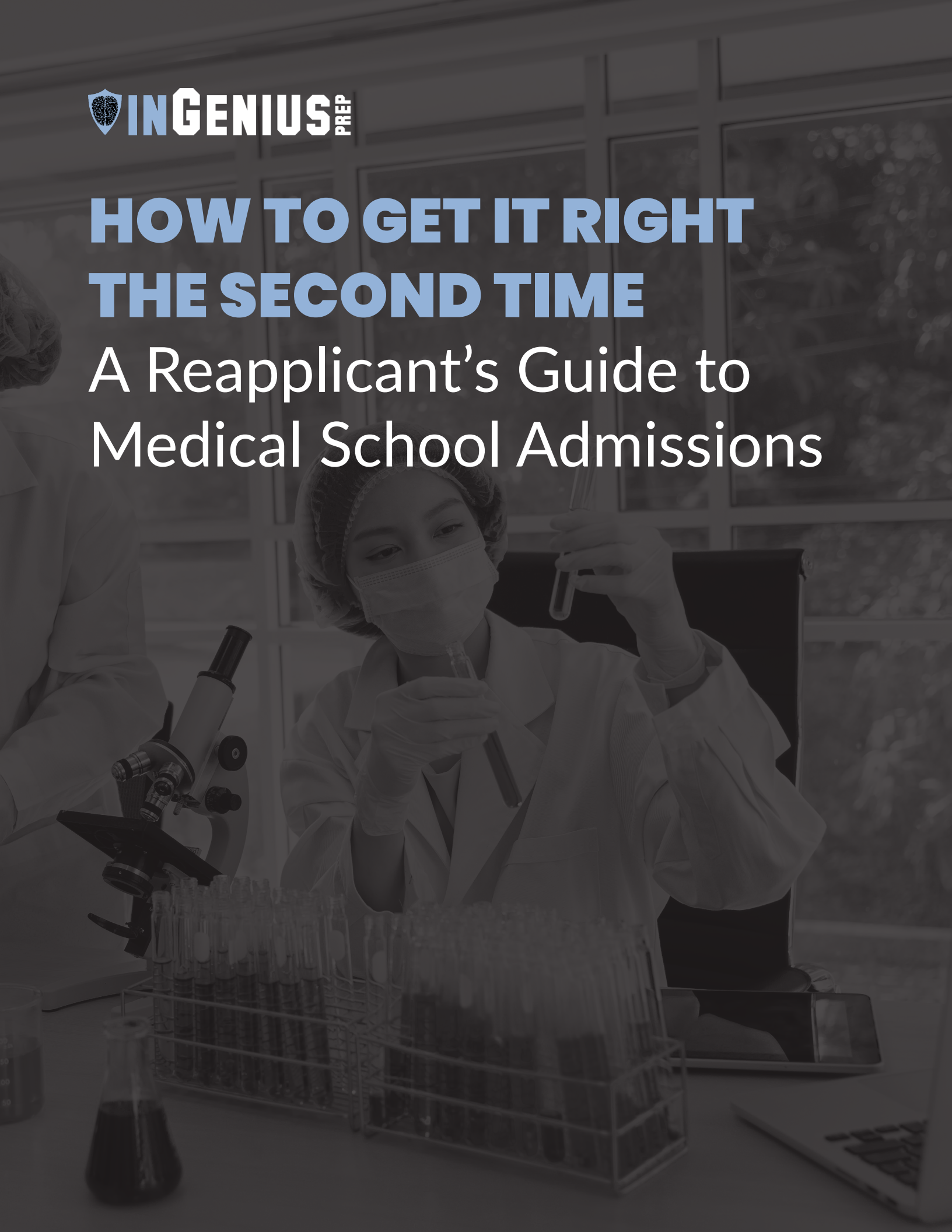




HOW TO GET IT RIGHT THE SECOND TIME

A Reapplicant's Guide to
Medical School Admissions



HOW TO GET IT RIGHT THE SECOND TIME

A REAPPLICANT'S GUIDE TO MEDICAL SCHOOL ADMISSIONS

Donald Gusfa is a second-year DO student at the Michigan State University College of Osteopathic Medicine. Due to insufficient shadowing experience the first time around, Donald had to boost his profile and reapply before he was admitted. In this interview, he discusses how he enhanced his application after being denied, how to stay motivated when reapplying, and advice for students who are currently going through the same process.

How many schools did you apply to the first time versus when you reapplied? Were there any specific schools where you applied both times?

I applied to 17 schools both times. There are a few where I applied both times. Basically, if I had any sort of interest, I would think to reapply. I didn't reapply to the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine in Georgia, which required more letters of recommendation than I had. I applied to my home institution, Michigan State, and to Alabama College of Osteopathic Medicine both times because they both interviewed me the first time around. Then there were a few schools that were reaches and some safety schools, but there aren't any real safeties in this process.

In your experience, what are some of the most common reasons so many applicants are denied admission into medical school?

You don't need to be special at everything, but you need to show that you did the necessary things before you even start applying. That was what made the difference for me. There were a few things that I didn't meet the minimum for that were fixable, like volunteering and shadowing experiences. If you don't hit those minimums, you definitely don't get looked at. Then, you have to be passionate about something. Once they do look at you, then you need to show that you are special in some way. Did you have a publication? Did you have a really cool leadership position? Everyone that got through was special in some specific way and had covered all their bases first.

How did you boost your activities list and extracurriculars once you knew you wanted to reapply?

I shadowed three doctors. I ended up working - that was a hole I had the first time around. And I pushed through a publication that was sitting in purgatory for a little while. Things halfway lined up, and I did have to make a few things happen. I retook the MCAT, went over 500, passed a few more filters. Every step of the way, because some of those things overlap, every time I did something new, I let the schools know that improvement had happened. Because it was not in the original application.

They hate to hear from you unless you have something that they'd love to hear from you. At some levels, schools will deny you because you don't seem to show interest. If I go to your school after I've applied and I go, "to update my application, I did this volunteering initiative these days and I'd like you to know that I did that," now I'm coming to them with something and showing interest in the school. I think that was probably one of the bigger things that I did.

Was your work experience that year medical related?

It wasn't! It doesn't have to be medical related. It doesn't hurt, especially now since those students know a lot of medical terms I still don't. But it doesn't have to be.

Was your personal statement vastly different the second time?

My first personal statement was a story about prevention in life experience. I think it highlighted my old job as a lifeguard versus as work as a swim coach. I helped a lot more people and saved them from drowning. It was pretty good. The second time my essay for sure focused more on failure. I was addressing my own problems and how I learned from failure to get into medical school. How I grew and changed was the subject of the personal statement. I don't think it was a better or worse essay, but it was about me. If you're writing a personal statement, don't make it a resumé. Tell a story. Don't make things up. But, don't be boring. Tell your story, with some fun or weird things that you've done.

Did you make any changes to your letters of recommendation?

Yes. There weren't many. The second time, I had two professors and my research coordinator. I had my boss come in for an additional letter. Cover all bases and get some people that know you. Please make sure you tell them ahead of time. You don't want to be in a spot where you harass people and redo a letter of rec and resubmit something. They're doing a lot of work for you even though it's a favor. A lot of schools will straight up not even look at your application until you have the letters.

Was your application timeline different when you reapplied?

No, but I was also as early as I could be at both times. I submitted immediately. It made a difference in comparison to people I knew who had better stats than me but applied later. Just being punctual, being the first person admissions officers look at, makes a difference.

How did you stay motivated during the reapplication process?

I knew I wanted to go to DO school. So, for a lot of people that aren't motivated for it, I suggested you look deep down and ask, is this what I want to do for sure? I did know for certain that this is what I wanted to do. For people who don't have some life experience, that applied directly after college, you could see the defeat come faster.

Do you have any advice for students who are preparing to reapply?

Look through your files and find what went wrong first. If you had a thousand volunteer hours, don't go volunteering again - it's not going to matter. But if you hadn't shadowed somebody, go shadow somebody. Don't do a lot of one thing and too little of another. And highlight those few things that you're actually passionate about and want to show to the schools. With me, I wanted to talk about my research, and did a lot to get the conversation to my research.