Program Directors Association Guide for Residency Applicants

Orthopaedic Surgery

The *Program Directors Association Guide for Residency Applicants* is a collaborative effort between the Organization of Program Directors Association (OPDA), Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), and American Medical Association (AMA). Its purpose is to provide specialty-specific guidance, application information, and resources. This guide outlines specialty-level guidance and policies for applicants to Orthopaedic Surgery programs.

Specialty responses in this guide were provided through a standardized web form. The corresponding questions from that form are referenced in the footnotes. If a specialty indicated "No specialty recommendation to programs," it means the specialty does not provide guidance on how programs should approach that aspect of the selection process.

Please note that not all aspects of the residency application process are standardized at the specialty level. Applicants should review individual program requirements in Residency Explorer™ tool, FREIDA™, or on program websites.

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Specialty Guidance for the 2025–2026 Cycle

Orthopaedic Surgery has published a statement: https://www.aoassn.org/recommended-guidelines/

Application Process

Application Process Details	Specialty Recommendation
Main Residency Match Season	AAMC Electronic Residency Application Service (ERAS)
Supplemental Offer and Acceptance Program (SOAP)	AAMC Electronic Residency Application Service (ERAS)
Application deadline to be considered for interview[1]	Date applications are released to programs
Application materials accepted after the deadline[2]	None

Additional Deadline Guidance: None noted.

Match Platform

Orthopaedic Surgery participates in the National Resident Matching Program (NRMP).

Additional Guidance: None noted.

Program Signals

Program Signals Details	Specialty Recommendation
Number of signals	30
Signal home institution or away rotation sites?	Yes

Additional Guidance: Orthopaedic surgery applicants can signal their interest in up to 30 programs for interviews. Additional guidance on using program signals is available on the AAMC ERAS website, and orthopaedic surgery applicants are encouraged to signal any programs at which they are most interested in interviewing, including their home institution and any other institutions at which they completed an away rotation. All programs in orthopaedic surgery will be automatically opted in to

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[1] By when should applicants submit applications to programs to be considered for interview?: Date applications are released to programs; Universal interview offer date for the specialty; Other
[2] Is it acceptable for applicants to submit some application materials after the initial application?: Yes; No

receive program signals. Individual programs may choose to opt-out of receiving program signals in the Program Management tab of the PDWS and should do so by their respective cycle's deadline outlined above.

Geographic Preferences

Regarding geographic preference signaling, orthopaedic surgery has turned off this option; therefore, applicants to orthopaedic surgery residency will no longer have the option to signal a geographic preference.

Use of USMLE and/or COMLEX-USA Scores

License Exam Details	Specialty Recommendation
Deadline to submit license exam transcripts to be considered for interview[3]	Initial application deadline
Deadline to submit license exam transcripts to be ranked[4]	Initial application deadline
USMLE transcripts required for DO applicants?[5]	No, USMLE scores are not required for DO applicants

Additional Guidance: None noted.

Letters of Recommendation (LORs)

LOR Details	Specialty Recommendation
Required number of LORs	3 - 4
Required specialty-specific letters[6]	Specialty-specific standardized letter(s) of evaluation (e.g., SLOE, SEL, SLOR)

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[3] By when must an applicant submit a USMLE Step 2 CK or COMLEX-USA Level 2 CE score to be considered for interview?: Initial application deadline; Other
[4] By when must an applicant submit a USMLE Step 2 CK or COMLEX-USA Level 2 CE score to be ranked?: Initial application deadline; Prior to rank order list opening
[5] Does your specialty require that DO applicants submit USMLE scores in addition to COMLEX-USA scores?: Yes, USMLE scores are required for all applicants; No, USMLE scores are not required for DO applicants
[6] Which specialty-specific letters of recommendation should an applicant submit to a program? (Select all that apply): Specialty-specific standardized letter(s) of evaluation (e.g., SLOE, SEL, SLOR); Letter from a Chair; Letter from someone in the specialty (e.g., faculty, attending); Other letters

Additional Guidance for Specialty-Specific Letters: At least two should be from the field of orthopaedic surgery. These can be from your home institution and/or an institution where you completed an away rotation. AOA/CORD recommends that programs should carefully consider eliminating the requirement for a Chair letter as part of the holistic review, recognizing that applicants are from differing types of institutions. Applicants should review the program's profile in the AOA/CORD Orthopaedic Residency Information Network (ORIN)® (https://orin.aoassn.org/#/search) and/or program websites to which they plan to apply. Programs encourage all applicants/recommendation writers to use the AOA/CORD Electronic Standardized Letter of Recommendation (eSLOR) (https://www.aoassn.org/standardized-electronic-letter-of-recommendation-eslor/)

Guidance for Transitional Year/Prelim Programs: None noted.

Guidance for IMG Applicants: None noted.

Supplemental Information

Supplemental Application Materials	Specialty Recommendation
Supplemental application materials recommended	No

Additional Supplemental Application Materials: None noted.

Away Rotations

Away Rotation Details	Specialty Recommendation
Away rotations in the specialty[7]	Strongly recommended
Number of away rotations in the specialty	4

Additional Guidance: Orthopaedic surgery encourages each applicant to arrange a fourth-year rotation schedule that allows them to confirm their interest in orthopaedic surgery and also gain broad-based experience in other areas of medicine that interest them. AOA/CORD acknowledges: The financial burden of doing multiple away rotations and that there is unequal access to away rotations at different medical schools. AOA/CORD recommends a limit of 4 medical student rotations, inclusive of all rotations (home and away). AOA/CORD strongly recommends students consult with advisors to determine number and location for away rotations. AOA/CORD is recommending that all programs participate in a voluntary system of Universal Away Rotation Offer Days. Please see the guidelines on the AOA/CORD website.

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[7] Does the specialty expect or strongly recommend that applicants complete away rotations in the specialty?: No; Strongly recommended; Expected

Interviews

Interview Details	Specialty Recommendation
Universal interview offer date(s)	November 17, 2025, 12:00pm ET
Typical interview offer window	–
Interview scheduling platform	–
Interview format(s)[8]	Virtual, In-person

Additional Guidance: Orthopaedic surgery is encouraging the use of Universal Interview Offer Day. This year, interview offers for all participating programs will be on November 17, 2025, 12:00pm ET. When interview offers are extended, there will be a 24-hour moratorium on accepting interviews. Following this moratorium, applicants will have 48 hours to schedule interviews. If an applicant declines/does not respond by Thursday, November 20, 2025, 12:00pm ET, the program may extend an invitation to another applicant.

AOA/CORD recommends that programs should make their own individual decisions about whether to host virtual or in-person interviews for the 2025-2026 cycle. Programs should not offer hybrid interviewing (i.e. some interviews held virtually and some in-person within the same program's match cycle) for the main applicant pool (non-home students and non-rotators). If a program chooses to conduct in-person interviews, a virtual format should only be considered for interviewing home students or those who have done an in-person rotation. Programs should publish their decision to proceed with virtual or in-person interviews on the program's website and in the program's profile in ORIN®.

Applicant Communications

Pre-Interview Communication Guidance: The specialty does not have a formal position on pre-interview communication. Please check individual Program websites for program-specific application requirements.

Post-Interview Communication Guidance: Orthopaedic Surgery strongly discourages any post-interview communication from the Program Director, Department Chair, or faculty on the Selection Committee.

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[8] Which interview format does the specialty recommend that programs use? (Select all that apply): Virtual; In-person; Hybrid

Open Houses / Second Looks

Open Houses: Open Houses are program specific. Please check individual Program websites or the Orthopaedic Residency Information Network or ORIN (https://orin.aoassn.org/#/search) for more information.

Second Looks: Orthopaedic Surgery strongly discourages any post-interview communication from the Program Director, Department Chair, or faculty on the Selection Committee. Second Looks should only be allowed after the Rank Order List has been submitted and certified by the Program and should not affect Rank Order decisions.

NRMP Voluntary Rank Order List (ROL) Lock Pilot Initiative: No