



The Latecomers' Applicant Guide for Emergency Medicine Residency

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This guide is intended to be used by medical students who have decided to apply to Emergency Medicine residency “later” than some of their peers.

Since 2020, the process of applying into Emergency Medicine has gone through significant change. Primary research is currently underway to obtain updated demographic and best practice recommendations for applicants, specifically for latecomers to the specialty. This document will be updated with those results when available.

General Overview and Definitions

Some students enter medical school already knowing which specialty they want to pursue. Many other students enter undecided and utilize their time in clinical rotations to help them determine what residency and career is the best fit. The field of emergency medicine (EM) is often defined as an advanced rotation in medical school, meaning that it can not be completed until the fourth year or until other prerequisite rotations such as medicine or surgery are already completed. It is possible that after completing the EM rotation, students who were previously undecided on a specialty may now wish to pursue a career in EM, or students who had previously been on track to apply into another specialty may want to change course and apply to EM. The students who choose to enter EM late in their clinical years, such as late 3rd year or early 4th year, are defined as “latecomers” to the field, and these students may face some unique challenges.

A second population of “latecomers” are those who wish to explore EM as an alternative field of practice, but after the application season. These can be students who initially applied to a non-EM field, but did not match, or physicians who matched into a different specialty but now want to switch into EM. These applicants face similar hurdles to those of other latercomers as well as those faced by the “re-applicant,” and they should review the [Re-Applicant Applying Guide](#) as well.

Challenges that Latecomer Students May Face

Before you read about the specific recommendations for latecomer students, it is helpful to understand the nuances of applying to Emergency Medicine. Please reference [the EMRA and CORD Advising Guide](#) for general application advice.

Obtaining an Away Rotation and SLOEs:

A major hurdle that a latecomer student must overcome is obtaining SLOEs (standardized letters of evaluation). While expectations for the number of SLOEs has changed in recent years, most applicants strive to obtain 2 SLOEs. A lack of 2 SLOEs by the time of application review can result in an application being marked as incomplete, which may limit interview invites. Generally, one SLOE is obtained from an applicant's home institution while the other is obtained from a visiting, or away rotation. For medical schools not affiliated with an EM residency program, an applicant would need to complete two away rotations to obtain 2 SLOEs. Obtaining an away rotation was identified by EM advisors¹ as the single biggest obstacle for latecomer students. A visiting sub-internship at an outside institution with an associated SLOE has become an expectation for an EM-bound applicant. Additionally, the timeline for the rotation to be completed is quite short as the SLOE is ideally uploaded when the Electronic Residency Application Service (ERAS) opens in late September and application review begins. Many of these visiting rotation opportunities will fill with students in the spring or early summer leading to a paucity of available spots for a latecomer student. Inability to hit these deadlines should not discourage an applicant from pursuing EM. Many visiting student positions are left unfilled every year, and a latecomer applicant should be open to the possibility of rotating at any reasonably available program. Rotations that result in SLOEs uploaded after application review begins are still useful and can result in the applicant receiving interview offers if programs are notified of these updates.

Latecomers who chose to switch to EM post-Match will either choose to SOAP into an open EM spot or re-apply in the next match cycle. Obtaining any SLOEs may be difficult for both paths. If the decision to switch into EM is made because the student did not match into a different speciality and the student is anticipating re-applying to the Match the following year, then the student should aim to complete EM rotations in the spring prior to graduation, if possible, in order to obtain at least one SLOE. It is also important that these students review how to best spend the year prior to re-applying (see [Re-Applicant Guide](#)).

If a student is SOAPing into EM, then the question of SLOEs can become more difficult. If possible, the student should aim to obtain any kind of letter of recommendation from EM faculty (ideally someone who knows the student well) and/or have their already obtained letters converted to SLOE format. There are alternative

versions of the SLOE specifically for both these situations (the [Nonresidency SLOE and O-SLOE](#), respectively).

If a student matches into a different specialty and later decides to switch to EM, obtaining SLOEs can be more complicated, or impossible. If this decision is made early enough, EM rotations should be pursued prior to graduation to avoid conflict with clinical responsibilities of the non-EM training program. If the student makes this decision after already starting a non-EM training program, they should reach out to the local EM program director for advice and to enquire about the possibility of an EM rotation or opportunities to work clinically with EM faculty. With rare exception, a letter of support from the applicant's current non-EM program director should be obtained.

What can you do to increase your chances of an away rotation?

- Allow for flexibility in timing, location, and scheduling as students may cancel previously arranged rotations.
- Use the [EMRA Clerkship Match website](#) to see which institutions have availability.
- If there is a certain program(s) of interest, reach out to that program specifically to see if there are any spots available.
- Be flexible with where you complete the away rotation. It doesn't have to be your dream program to fulfill this requirement. Also, doing an away rotation at your dream EM program is not a requirement to match at that program. Rather, it is more important that programs see that you can do well on a rotation outside of your home institution.
- Be mindful of the fact that while many rotations use the VSLO applications, there are still many programs that require an individual application via the registrar's office.

Perceived Lower Commitment to EM:

Students who decide later in medical school, or afterwards, to enter the field may be seen as having a lower commitment to EM. Additionally, when reviewing the application as a whole, residency programs may take note of fewer EM-related activities or research. It is important to have a trusted advisor review your CV and residency application in order to anticipate these critiques and prepare a response.

What can you do to show your commitment to EM?

- Prepare a clear, honest, and meaningful explanation regarding the decision to change specialty choice to EM. Use your personal statement as an opportunity to explain your commitment. Consider addressing the journey that led you to discovery of EM as the specialty for you, then describe the characteristics you bring to the table that make you well-suited for the specialty.
- You may question whether to include involvement in non-EM related activities, such as other specialty interest groups, on your application. In general, we advocate including these activities to demonstrate engagement and involvement in medical school, added to the context you will provide in your personal statement describing your journey toward discovering EM.
- Consider joining national organizations such as EMRA, ACEP, ACOEP, AAEM, or SAEM and attend national meetings, if able. Membership in these organizations is often free for students. These national meetings typically have residency fairs where you can meet residency program faculty face to face. Involvement in these organizations can also help gain a greater understanding of the field of EM.
- Get involved locally with your home institution's EMIG, EMRA, and similar student organizations.

Getting appropriate advising and securing an EM advisor:

Student career advising oftentimes will begin in the pre-clinical years and continue through Match day or graduation. The later that students identify as EM bound the more challenging it can be to obtain EM specific application and career advice. This problem is further compounded by the fact that many students decide later within medical school to pursue EM, limiting the time of available advisors, or when students do not have access to an EM-specific advisor at their home institution.

How can you get appropriate EM focused advising?

- Reach out to EM advisors at your institution or home EM program as soon as you are considering EM, even if you aren't fully committed.
- Use resources on the [CORD](#) and [EMRA](#) websites as a guide.
- If your medical school doesn't have specific EM advising you should reach out to other advisors at schools with an EM residency program. There is a national

advisor network available to help in this situation. Reach out to distanceadvising@cordjobboard.com for more information.

So...What about application plans?

If you were not able to obtain 2 SLOEs, consider pursuing subspecialty rotations in EM. While the letters will be in the form of subspecialty SLOEs, which are not quite as valuable as traditional group SLOEs from a clerkship experience, subspecialty rotations are still a great way to gain exposure to the field and to a residency program. You can also consider obtaining letters from other non-EM rotations that can show off your skill in a similar environment to the Emergency Department (ED) including non-residency-affiliated EDs, ICU rotations, or trauma surgery rotations.

While delaying graduation by a year to facilitate obtaining everything needed to apply into EM is an option, it is expensive and likely unnecessary. The majority of CORD survey respondents¹ advise students to apply to EM during their graduation year from medical school rather than delaying applying for residency. Obviously, this will not be possible for students who decide to switch after not matching into another specialty or after starting a non-EM training program.

Prior to 2021, many advisors would have advocated that the latecomer student have a back-up plan in place in case they do not match in EM. Reviewing trends in the more recent application cycles, the number of available EM training positions remains greater than the number of applicants to those positions. This mismatch puts even those very late to the specialty in a position where a successful Match, or a successful SOAP, into EM is very likely. For those who are very late latecomers (submitting applications to EM more than a couple weeks after the ERAS opening day or those who have no SLOEs), interview offer yield may be lower and a strong SOAP plan can be the key to success. While an EM rotation and SLOE in December or January will be of limited use in the main Match, these letters can position an applicant to be a more competitive applicant to EM programs with openings in the SOAP. We encourage late, latecomers to seek out EM experiences, clerkship or subspecialty rotations, with an eye towards strengthening their candidacy for the SOAP. Becoming familiar with the SOAP process and having a proactive plan should the main Match not yield success can go a long way to understanding the nuanced process of the SOAP and reducing the stress of what can be an extremely hectic Match week. The [No Match Monday Guide](#) is a great place to start. Another option would be to simultaneously apply to a transitional or preliminary year at an institution where there is also an EM program, as this will provide

the applicant access to residency-affiliated EM advisors, allow for potential rotation time in the ED generating additional letters of support, and there may even be an opportunity to transition to EM after the first year of post-graduate training. The back-up plan options available and their relative merits are discussed in detail in the [Re-Applicant Guide](#).

Students should also apply strategically to residency programs and should give consideration to newer programs. The number of EM residencies has experienced rapid growth in the recent past and the competition for interview offers at newer programs is typically less intense. It is also strongly recommended to use the [EMRA Residency Match website](#) to determine which programs would be more likely to interview you based on their requirements for grades, USMLE/COMLEX scores, number of SLOEs, etc. A program should be considered a less-viable “reach” application if an applicant does not meet the requirements they share on [EMRA Match](#).

If an applicant is not receiving interview offers by mid-November, then reaching out individually to help advocate for yourself for an interview offer may be worthwhile. We strongly recommend applicants discuss timing and format of this communication with their advisor before “cold-calling” programs. Residency programs receive a significant amount of communication throughout the application season, and the goal is for your communication to stand out. If your advisor has agreed that it is a good time to reach out, then there are a few general rules to follow. Email is generally the preferred method of communication; it should be addressed to the residency program director but sent to the residency program coordinator. Do NOT use a form email, and do not email every program you applied to. Rather, pick your top 5-10 choices (reasonable choices, not your reach programs) and write a message saying specifically why you are interested in doing your training at their program. What draws you to that program, what details of their training experience appeal to you? Do you have extenuating circumstances surrounding your preference for that program, such as a significant other who is relocating to the same region? Be open, honest, and genuine in expressing your interest. A single reach-out email is generally accepted, but should not be followed up by further communication from the applicant. If you do not receive a response, this is likely the program’s way of communicating they have decided to go with other applicants.

Summary:

While applying to EM as a latecomer is more challenging, it is certainly possible. Keep in mind the following during this journey:

- Obtain a mentor as soon as you start considering EM, even if you aren't 100% committed.
- Work with your mentor and available resources on websites such as [EMRA Clerkship Match website](#) to increase your chances of obtaining rotations and SLOEs.
- Use your personal statement to tell the story of how you became interested in a career in EM.
- Work with your mentor to apply strategically and understand [the SOAP process](#), recognizing you have a very good chance of securing an EM training position in the current application climate.

References:

- 1) Council of Emergency Medicine Residency Directors Advising Students Committee in Emergency Medicine. (2019). [CORD ASC-EM Advising Addenda Study]. Unpublished raw data.