How to Become a Dentist?

Job Description
A Dentist is a doctor who works with patient’s teeth and gums. Dentists diagnose and treat tooth and gum problems to prevent tooth decay and gum deterioration. Ninety percent (90%) are general practitioners who deal with a wide variety of dental problems, such as the prevention of disease, tooth fillings and extractions, and oral surgery.

There are two types of Dentists: Doctor of Medical Dentistry (DMA) and Doctor of Dental Surgery (DDS). Within these two general areas, there are specializations: endodontist, oral pathologist, oral surgeon, orthodontist, periodontist, to name a few.

To become a dentist, a student needs to graduate from dental school (approximately a four year program), then pass licensing exams. Most students first get a bachelor’s degree since dental programs prefer applicants who have completed an undergraduate degree.

Dental schools do not prefer one major over another although many applicants choose to major in biological sciences because in most cases, this major will fulfill the prerequisites for a dental program and prepare you for Dental school entrance exams.

Like many other graduate and professional programs, dental schools like to admit applicants who are well-rounded. In general, a well-rounded applicant will have a solid GPA and DAT score and have participated in and made significant contributions in their extracurricular activities such as a student organization, volunteering in a dental office, or academic research.

Work Environment
Dentists can work just about anywhere. They can start a private practice, work for another Dentist, work in a hospital (civilian or military), or work for a governmental agency doing research. Many Dentists may also return to their Dental school as professors.

Typically, a Dentist works in an office or lab for 40-50 hours per week; some work evening hours to accommodate patients. About 72% of Dentists in the U.S. are self-employed and own a private practice. Many Dentists work part-time beyond the usual retirement age.

Career Outlook
Each year, a large number of students graduate from dental school and thus create competition for jobs, especially in large metropolitan areas. The majority of Dentists are concentrated in highly populated areas, and in some areas, the market is over saturated with Dentists.

For new graduates, the most job openings are in rural and inner city areas.

Income
The average salary of a Dentist depends on whether s/he owns a private practice or works on a salary basis, geographic area, or specialty. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, national monthly pay ranges include: Entry Level ($5,989), Average ($12,856), and Top Level ($13,867 and up).
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Education Requirements

To become a licensed Dentist:
1) Bachelor’s Degree
2) Dental Admission Test
3) Dental School
4) State License

1) Bachelor’s Degree from a 4-year college/university (4 years)
Students first get a bachelor’s degree since dental programs prefer applicants who have completed an undergraduate degree. Dental schools do not prefer one major over another although many applicants choose to major in biological sciences because in most cases, this major will fulfill the prerequisites for a dental program and prepare you for dental school entrance exams. Dental colleges require completion of pre-dental courses that include science and humanity classes, such as chemistry, anatomy, psychology, math, biology, physics, etc.

2) Dental Admission Test (DAT)
All US dental schools require applicants to take the Dental Admission Test (DAT). This test is designed to measure general academic ability, comprehension of scientific information and perceptual ability. A student should take the DAT well in advance of applying to dental school but definitely at least one year prior to the intended start date. For more information, review the DAT Program Guide (PDF) on the ADA website.

3) Dental School (4 years)
A student needs to graduate from a dental school approved by the American Dental Association. Acceptance into a dental school is based on: college grades, amount of college education, admission testing (DAT), and recommendations.

Like many other graduate and professional programs, dental schools like to admit applicants who are well-rounded. In general, a well-rounded applicant will have a solid GPA and DAT score and have participated in and made significant contributions in their extracurricular activities such as a student organization, volunteering in a dental office, or academic research.

4) State License
Dentists are licensed by a state where they want to practice dentistry. A state license must be renewed every two years.

For California:
Department of Consumer Affairs
Dental Board of California
1432 Howe Ave, Suite 85
Sacramento, CA 95825
http://www.dbc.ca.gov/
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Sources of Additional Information

American Association of Orthodontists (AAO)
www.aaortho.org
(314) 993-1700

American Dental Association (ADA)
www.ada.org
(312) 440-2500

California Dental Association (CDA)
www.cda.org
(916) 443-0505

Occupational Outlook Handbook
2010 – 2011
Available in the Career Center Library

Eureka: The California Career Information System
www.eureka.org
Site Code: For current Foothill students only, please contact the Career Center

Career Center Resource Library
Room 8329
(650) 949-7229

AADSAS (American Dental Schools Application Service)
http://www.adea.org/dental_education_pathways/aadsas/Pages/default.aspx
This is the centralized application service that is sponsored and administered by the American Dental Education Association (ADEA). The AADSAS application is available online typically between May 15th and February 1st of every year. The application will require you to submit information including:

- Colleges and/or universities attended
- Biographical information
- Coursework completed and planned prior to enrollment in dental school
- DAT scores (if available)
- Personal Statement – one page essay about you and why you want to become a dentist
- Background Information – including experiences related to the dental profession, extra curricular, volunteer and community service experiences; honors, awards and scholarships; work and research experiences
- Dental School Designations – where you indicate the dental programs to which you plan to apply
- Official transcript from every college/university that you have attended

AADSAS also accepts and distributes letters of evaluation (letters of recommendation) with your AADSAS application. Typically, students apply to about 4 – 10 dental programs.