

# Can I Get Into Medical School With a ‘W’ on My Transcript?

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## About Rachel

Rachel Perkins is currently a student at Furman University, where she is pursuing a Bachelor’s degree in Health Sciences with a minor in Medicine, Health & Culture. She hopes to work in Pediatrics and continue public health advocacy. Outside of the classroom, Rachel is a member of Kappa Delta sorority. She enjoys traveling, watching Spanish television on Netflix, and eating at local restaurants in Greenville with her friends.

## When Your Semester Isn’t Going the Way You Planned...

College, especially for pre-meds, is a difficult and delicate juggle of many balls; we have to manage courses, extracurricular activities, and try to maintain a healthy social life, just to name a few. Inevitably, there are semesters when it all becomes too much to handle, and it’s easy to drop a ball amidst the craziness. A class that seemed tough yet manageable at the beginning of the year can become an insurmountable liability to one’s beloved GPA. There is nothing worse than teetering at, or barely above, the dreaded ‘C’ range with no confident idea of how the grade will turn out at the end of the semester. We know that withdrawing from a course, resulting in a ‘W’ on the final transcript, is an option for all students. But, is it advisable for students planning on applying to medical school? What if it only happens once? What about twice? Students in this position are faced with a couple of options to consider:

- 1. Finish out the course. If the end grade is in the ‘A’ or ‘B’ range, the decision paid off.**

This is a seemingly straightforward option. Remember, however, that most college courses have few assignments that are heavily weighted. Thus, if you have failed to perform consistently at the ‘A’ – ‘B’ level throughout the semester, this can be a risky decision. Taking advantage of professors’ office hours, tutors and review sessions are excellent ways to steer toward success.

- 2. Finish out the course. If your grade is in the ‘C’ range, retake the course for a higher grade or choose not to retake the course and keep the ‘C.’**

In general, pre-med students are advised to retake courses in which they have earned a 'C.' In reality, one or two 'C's will not rule out medical school for anyone, especially for otherwise high-achieving students. The key is an ability to reflect upon how the experience challenged you to be better, which can be communicated in a [personal statement](#) and [interviews](#). If you already have a 'C,' or two, don't panic. [Analyze your study habits](#) and prepare yourself to tackle your remaining courses in more effective ways.

If you do choose to retake the course, medical schools will likely see both grades; if you are able to get an 'A' on your second attempt, the grade will average out to a 'B.' Medical schools calculate your AMCAS GPA based off of every single course that you have taken, including incomplete, withdrawn and study abroad courses, college-level courses taken in high school, and even courses expunged from transcripts. The AMCAS GPA is used to evaluate an applicant's ability to complete medical school and is a determining factor in extending interviews to applicants.

### **3. Withdraw from the course and take it again at the same university or another institution.**

The decision to withdraw is difficult; it is mentally, emotionally, and financially frustrating. As pre-med students, it is not in our nature to enjoy failure or giving up when things get difficult; we tend to gravitate towards challenges. It is not easy to give up on something that required such hard work and dedication, even when the graded results fail to reflect these efforts. It is not easy to think about having to relearn material, and pay for the course yet again. It is not easy to think about the other students who *somehow* managed to do well in the course, and how it is going to place *them* at an advantage over *you* when it comes time to apply to medical schools.

Withdrawing from one course is not going to keep you from attending medical school. Withdrawing from two courses is not going to keep you from attending medical school. Withdrawing from three courses... well now this is starting to look like a pattern and *that* is what is going to keep you from attending medical school.

During the application process, medical schools take into consideration the rigor of the courses students have taken in order to best prepare themselves for the challenges of medical school and their futures as doctors. If an applicant consistently withdraws from the tough science or math courses at his or her university and then takes these same courses at the local community college, it might send a message to medical schools that the applicant is unable to handle the workload or rigor of medical school.

## **Take a Deep Breath.**

If you've already withdrawn from a class, or are planning to do so, it is okay – especially if you are a student with otherwise above average grades. Clear your head and prepare

yourself to crush the remaining classes in your course load – it is better to withdraw from one class than to become so consumed with improving the grade that all the other classes suffer. [Medical schools understand that we are all human](#); sometimes we overcommit ourselves one semester or experience hardships that make it difficult to focus on school. What many college students fail to hear often enough is the importance of taking care of physical, emotional and mental health. In this situation, humility is key. There are many understandable, human reasons to withdraw from a course. How can you take those reasons and explain to medical schools the ways in which those reasons made you a stronger applicant, person, and future doctor?

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Although it was mentioned above that grades from withdrawn courses will be made available to medical schools, it does not have any effect on the calculation of the AMCAS GPA. As such, a strong argument for withdrawing is that if you withdraw from a course and get an A on the second attempt, you will then have an A for that course. It can also be argued that a withdraw is better than a ‘D’ or ‘F’ grade. When in doubt, it is always a good idea to speak with a pre-med advisor or academic counselor. If you are at the beginning of your collegiate career, you may be struggling to adjust or manage your schedule efficiently; remember, you can easily change course. If you are nearing the end of your collegiate career, you may simply be tapping out – this is a tempting, although dangerous direction, as it might cause medical schools to question if you can handle four more years of schooling. Regardless, it is important to weigh your options, including your medical school application timeline and financial abilities, to decide if withdrawing is the correct choice for you.