



## Couples Match Guide

Any two people (friends, partners, family) can participate in the couples match, as long as they are matching through the NRMP during the same application cycle. They can attend the same or a different medical schools. Couples match is not available for military, ophthalmology, or urology matches.

By participating in the couples match, an applicant chooses to create a rank list with another applicant with the goal to match in one of the combinations that they have selected as a couple. If the match is successful, both applicants will match at the highest ranked program combination in which both applicants have been accepted. If applicants do not obtain a match as a couple, the system will not process rank order lists separately.

The [NRMP has several videos](#) that explain how the matching algorithm works for couples match.

## Couples Match Checklist

- Understand [ERAS](#), and [NRMP](#) process and resources for couples matching
- Talk through your individual and couples goals and application strategy with your match partner and an advisor.
- Review your program list with an advisor prior to applying and discuss interview strategies such as strategies for coordinating interview schedules.
- During interviews, take notes on what you liked and disliked. Keep a running rank order list as you visit programs. ([link to Residency Rank Order List page](#))
- Review your rank lists with advisors prior to certifying in NRMP.

## Application Process

In ERAS, you will designate your couples' status under the "Match Information" section of the "Personal Information" portion of the application. (Once you click "yes" to participating in the NRMP match, a drop down will appear that asks you if you are couples matching, what your partner's name is, and what specialties they are applying to).

Match Information

NRMP Match

I plan to participate in the NRMP match \*  Yes  No

NRMP ID:

Participating as a couple in NRMP:  Yes  No

Partner's Name:

Specialties Partner is applying to:

[Information about the NRMP Match](#)

However, this designation does not officially recognize you as participating in the couples match. **In order to officially participate in the couples match, you must register as a couple with the NRMP.**

Each applicant must register individually in the NRMP's R3 system. Once both applicants are registered, they can initiate a "couple request" through the R3 system. The registration process is complete once the "Couple Status" field in the R3 system lists "Accepted" and the "Fee Status" lists "Paid."

## Interviewing

You are not required to tell programs that you are couples matching, however you might find that it is easier to coordinate interview dates and obtain interviews at the same institutions if you inform them.

When interacting with programs, keep in mind that programs deal with couples differently: some will reach out to the partner's specialty to lobby for interviews for them; others will not reach out. Others will not reach out during the interview season but may reach out when making their rank lists to find out where their candidate's partner sits on the rank list. There is no formal way to determine a program's preferences regarding this communication. You may find alumni to be the best resource for this information.

When receiving interviews, it is very common for offers to come in at different times, which can make scheduling challenging. This is especially true for those who are couples matching with people applying in dermatology or orthopaedic surgery, as these specialties don't typically extend interview invitations until later in the season.

Often, if you are the partner applying in the earlier specialty, you will need to accept and complete interviews at programs before your partner has heard. This may mean that you interview with programs and in cities where your partner does not receive an interview invitation, because you don't know whether or not you will "need" that program later should they get an interview. This can lead to extra time and cost, so you may need some extra funding for this portion of the application process. That said, as soon as you receive an interview invitation, you should schedule your interview. Do not wait until your partner hears from their corresponding program before responding - if you do that, you will lose your interview spot because they will fill up.

If one partner gets an interview and the other has not heard for a week or so, it may be helpful to reach out to the program to check on the status of the application and mention that you are couples matching.

In past years, some couples have had success in coordinating their interviews so that they can travel together while others have not. Some share schedules/calendars with one another, and help moderate each other's emails to help the other schedule their interviews.

## Rank Lists

More details will be provided in the weekly Residency Newsletter as the season progresses. Be aware that the ranking process can be challenging and will require you to identify your priorities (both independently and as a couple), to communicate those priorities, and to compromise.

During your interviews, write notes to remember what you liked and disliked about the programs. You may find it helpful to keep a running ROL, fitting programs in as you visit them.

After interviews have concluded, it may be helpful for you to make your own individual rank list, before you talk about the other person's preferred programs. Once you have each figured out where you want to go based on your personal career goals, then you will need to make a couples combined list. Keep an open mind when discussing and negotiating options.

For example, one couple who matched in pediatrics and orthopaedic surgery found that their respective top programs were at the bottom of the other's list. However, both of them ranked the same programs around the 5th and 6th place positions, so those programs ended up being first on their combined couples rank list.

One of the major priorities that you will need to consider when ranking programs is determining whether living together or whether pursuing your individual top choice programs is most important. If you want to live together, you will need to rank programs in such a way that all combinations are within commuting distance of each other. If you are willing to live apart, you can rank your personal top choice programs that are not geographically close to each other first, and then rank the programs that are close together. In this scenario, if you do not match to one of your top choice programs, then you would want to be together.

It is highly recommended that couples review their rank lists with advisors prior to certifying them.

## Resources

In addition to talking with [SOM Career Advising](#) and Departmental Specialty Advisors, use many resources when preparing for a couples match. Good starting places include:

- [AAMC Careers in Medicine: Navigating the Match as a Couple](#) (AAMC login required)
- [NRMP: Couples in the Match](#): match and ranking guides and videos
- Previous SOM Couples Applicants: talk with SOM Career Advisors about accessing the Residents in Medicine (R.I.M.) database. These alums can provide information on process, interviews, ranking, etc.

# FAQ's

## ***When do I need to decide whether or not I am couples matching?***

You do not need to officially decide if you are couples matching until you enter your rank order list (ROL) in early March. That said, it is to your advantage to make the decision to couples match earlier rather than later, as it can impact the number and location of programs you apply to and interview with.

## ***I am couples matching. How many programs should we apply to?***

More than you would if you were applying individually. An exact number will vary based on your specialty choices, your individual competitiveness, and your geographic targets, so it is absolutely necessary to consult with your Departmental Career Advisors and alert them of your couples match status so they can help you target the appropriate number and type of programs to apply to.

While this higher number may seem excessive, bear in mind that you will likely only want to interview at programs or in cities where your partner is also interviewing, so you will need to cast a wider net to maximize the number of chances of overlapping options. Additionally, in order to rank a given program or location, both partners must get an interview with their respective programs and both must like the programs and/or location of the programs. Then, in order to match at the programs, both of the programs must like both of you.

## ***How do we choose programs?***

Students often select programs based on reputation, type (community vs. academic), geography, and their personal competitiveness relative to the program. For couples, geography can often be the dominant factor in determining programs. Larger cities often offer more options than smaller locations, though that will vary by location and specialty. So when you are looking at programs, keep in mind the number of options that a city might offer.

For example, if you are applying in OBGYN and your partner is applying in emergency medicine, trying to stay in northwest for residency is fairly limiting, because Seattle and Portland are the only two locations for both of those residency options, and the rank options that keep you geographically close are fairly limiting:

<b>Partner A - OBGYN</b>	<b>Partner B - EM</b>
1. Program A (Seattle)	1. Program A (Seattle)
2. Program B (Portland)	2. Program B (Portland)
3. Program A (Seattle)	3. Program B (Portland)
4. Program B (Portland)	4. Program A (Seattle)

However, if you apply to programs in NYC or Boston, you will find that you have multiple program options for both specialties, which will give you a larger combination of ranks that keep you and your partner together in the same geographic area:

**Partner A - OBGYN**

1. Program A (NYC)
2. Program B (NYC)
3. Program C (NYC)
4. Program A (NYC)
5. Program A (NYC)
6. Program B (NYC)
7. Program B (NYC)
8. Program C (NYC)
9. Program C (NYC)

**Partner B - EM**

1. Program A (NYC)
2. Program A (NYC)
3. Program A (NYC)
4. Program B (NYC)
5. Program C (NYC)
6. Program C (NYC)
7. Program B (NYC)
8. Program B (NYC)
9. Program C (NYC)

Outside of large city options, if you plan to live together, another strategy is to apply to programs 50 or so miles apart from one another and live in between the two programs. A common example of this is the Boston, Providence and Worcester (U Mass) triangle. Several UW couples have had success with this arrangement. That said, be sure that there is a place to live that is half way between the two programs (there are very few towns between Albuquerque and Santa Fe for example), and consider the conditions that might impact the commuting time (e.g. weather possibilities, traffic, quality of roads, etc.).

***How does the rank process work if we are couples matching and applied to preliminary and advanced residency programs?***

This is a bit more complicated, and will require guidance from your advisors and the NRMP. The short version is that it is very similar to a traditional ROL with the addition of a supplemental prelim program list, however it is possible to link the lists incorrectly and end up matching further down on your rank list or going unmatched, so be sure to review your lists with advisors.

***My partner and I want to match in the same hospital and/or residency program, what do you think?***

This can be done, but it does present challenges that you should consider before submitting your rank list. Some of the benefits of working in the same hospital include working for the same system, seeing each other more readily for meals and meeting each other's friends/colleagues.

On the flip side, if you are applying in the same specialty, you may not want to be at the same hospital, because that means you will be in the same program. Depending on the program, they might not be willing to match a couple, so one of you may go unmatched. If you do match to the same program, it can be challenging to get vacation time scheduled simultaneously (or impossible depending on the size of the program), so you may be separated over holidays. Also, you might need to try to be scheduled for different rotations, so you don't find yourself working together. And while you may prefer to work together, it would mean being on call on rotating nights, which would lead to less time together outside of the hospital.

***My partner and I no longer want to couples match. How do I change my status?***

In order to officially "uncouple," both partners must complete the process with the NRMP. Refer to the [Applicant Coupling support guide](#) under 'Deciding to Uncouple' on the NRMP website for instructions on how to complete this process. This will unlink your rank lists so that your preferences will be reviewed independently from one another.

To that end, you and your former partner may want to discuss whether you would like to officially uncouple or continue through the process as a couple but with disparate rank lists. If you continue in the couples match system, you can ensure that your programs **don't overlap**.

For example, say a former couple only interviewed at three programs (unlikely but just for example's sake), their rank list might look as follows:

<b>Partner A - OBGYN</b>	<b>Partner B - EM</b>
1. Program A (NYC)	1. Program A (Seattle)
2. Program B (Chicago)	2. Program A (Seattle)
3. Program A (NYC)	3. Program B (Portland)
4. Program A (NYC)	4. Program C (UCSF)
5. Program B (Chicago)	5. Program B (Portland)
6. Program C (Seattle)	6. Program B (Portland)
7. Program B (NYC)	7. Program C (UCSF)
8. Program C (Seattle)	8. Program C (UCSF)
9. Program C (Seattle)	9. Program A (Seattle)

As you can see, their first 8 choices are designed to ensure that they are not located in the same geographic vicinity and it's only at the bottom of the list that they are located near each other. Provided they match to one of their top 8 choices, they would then be guaranteed to not be near one another.

There are some things to consider when taking this approach:

1. It requires you and your former partner to collaborate in building your rank lists and be willing to compromise on certain preferences in order to accommodate the larger priority of not being together
2. The couples match can make it more challenging to match/to match high on the rank list since your list is being reviewed in conjunction with another person's list
3. The couples match may give you more control in "guaranteeing" that you will not be near your former partner, if you feel that there is a significant risk of being near another and if avoiding that is your priority

If you are considering going this route, it is recommended that you meet with a Career Advisor to discuss.