

# THE PERSONAL STATEMENT

What Admissions Committees Need To See

# THE BASICS

## **LENGTH (including spaces):**

- Medical: 5,300 characters
- Dental: 4,500 characters

## **DEADLINE**

**The Personal Statement is a main part of the online application, so it must be PROOFED and LETTER PERFECT by the time the student applies (June 2018) This usually requires SEVERAL drafts.**

# DOs AND DON'Ts

A Personal Statement IS:

- About YOU, not your parents or other mentors
- Proving to the school that you've earned a seat in their upcoming class. (Every applicant has deeply-felt reasons why they WANT to be a doctor or dentist. Show what you've DONE to demonstrate this.)
- Written in a simple, conversational tone. BIG WORDS do not impress Admissions Committees (other than technical references regarding specific research.)

A Personal Statement is NOT:

- A literary exercise
- A reiteration of your resume/experiences
- Full of quotes or obscure references
- An essay on the state of health care and how you'll change it

# Things to Definitely Avoid

- Phrases like “I think...,” “I feel...,” “I hope...,” “I intend...,” “It seems...,”
- Long, complicated sentences
- Contractions
- The passive tense
  - Example: Harry ate six shrimp at dinner. (active)  
At dinner, six shrimp were eaten by Harry. (passive)
- Adjectives like “exciting,” “interesting,” “fascinating,”
- Feelings
- Empty phrases (those that do not convey meaning. Example, “It was a dark, stormy night...”
- Directly insulting the person who is reading your statement. Example: “Today’s physicians are incapable of empathizing with their patients.”

# Key Components

In general, if candidates discuss the following questions, they will compose an appropriate personal statement:

- Who you are?
- What are your career plans?
- Where do you hope to have an impact?
- When did your interest in medicine develop?
- How have you demonstrated your interest and commitment to a career in medicine?
- What makes you a unique candidate?

*Brenda Lee, assistant dean for medical education and student affairs at the University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry*

# All Writing Is Reader-Centered And Purpose-Driven

- Who Are You?

1. *Who are the readers here?*

- An Admissions committee member or administrative screener.

2. *What is their job?*

To make yes/no decisions about whether or not you get an interview to their medical school.

3. *What do they want to know?*

They want to know what distinguishes you from the other thousands of applicants who are also smart, well-educated, and interesting.

4. *What is the purpose of your writing?*

To show this committee that you are more than a collection of admirable statistics—that you are a person worthy of cultivating, of educating, of eventually calling a colleague.

5. *How do you fulfill this purpose?*

By telling the *story* of yourself.



# Show, Don't Tell



## Demonstrate, Don't State.

In other words, give the reader the "hands-on" tour—you think that you're diligent, hard-working, ambitious, compassionate, etc., then **SHOW** the reader this through an experience in your life that demonstrates this quality. Don't just use the words; they've got no reason to believe you!

## Relate, don't Pontificate.

- ✓ Do not rehash your resume. Instead, choose a few experiences that were particularly meaningful and/or can illustrate qualities that you want the Admissions Committee to know.
- ✓ Tell the story (what happened).
- ✓ Tell what you learned (what you got out of it).
- ✓ Tell how what you learned applies to success in medical or dental school (why it matters).

# Avoid Clichés And Sounding Like a Savior!

Phrases like "less fortunate" and "down trodden" are patronizing. Instead, talk about wanting to help people with limited access to health care or setting up neighborhood clinics so that affordable health care is available to more people.



# Keep It Positive

Do not write negatively about yourself, your profession or anyone else! If you need to explain a dip in grades, do so briefly, objectively and without excuses. Do not belabor whatever trauma/situation caused the problem.



# Be Truthful...

## **And don't exaggerate!**

- ✓ "I was first author because I did all of the research by myself."
- ✓ "I assisted doctors with medical procedures."
- ✓ "I speak Spanish/French/whatever fluently."



# Most Important Rule

Say **nothing** in your personal statement that isn't directly relevant to helping an admissions committee make a yes/not decision about your merit as a graduate student. This includes quoting other people (why should they care what Einstein or Luke/Mark/John ever said? What does it have to do with *your* ability to succeed?)

Don't wax eloquently about your parent(s) or spend time talking about someone else's wonderful qualities!

Remember that EVERYTHING in your Personal Statement—and the rest of your application—is subject for discussion at the interview.

