

THE PERSONAL STATEMENT



**PUTTING A FACE ON YOUR
APPLICATION**

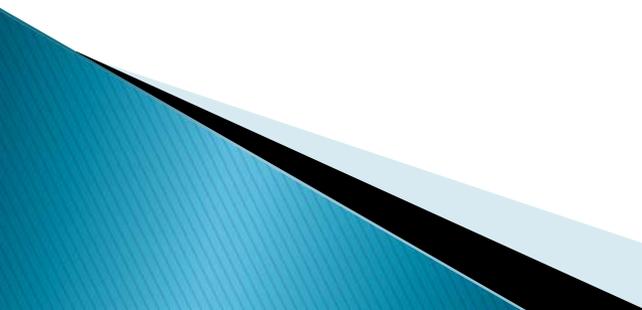
WHY IS THE PERSONAL STATEMENT SO IMPORTANT?

- ▶ The Personal Statement essay included in your online application allows the Admissions Committee to “see the person behind the numbers.” Admissions Officers see hundreds of applications. The Personal Statement offers you the opportunity to stand out from the crowd and convince the committee of your commitment to a health profession and—just as importantly—what you have done in the past to achieve this. It’s your chance to prove to the Admissions Committee that you have earned a seat in their school.
- ▶ The personal statement gets you an interview once you clear the numbers hurdle. You have only one page on which to convey your personality, your experience and motivation, and your uniqueness. It is likely to be the most exacting piece of writing you will ever have to do. Most students need to write several drafts, so start early. Know that the personal statement generally requires many drafts and many hours of rewriting and editing. A great deal of thought and insight must go into this statement for it to be effective. **DO NOT LEAVE IT FOR THE LAST MINUTE OR TAKE IT LIGHTLY!**

Length (including spaces):

AMCAS: 5,300 characters

AADSAS: 4,500 characters



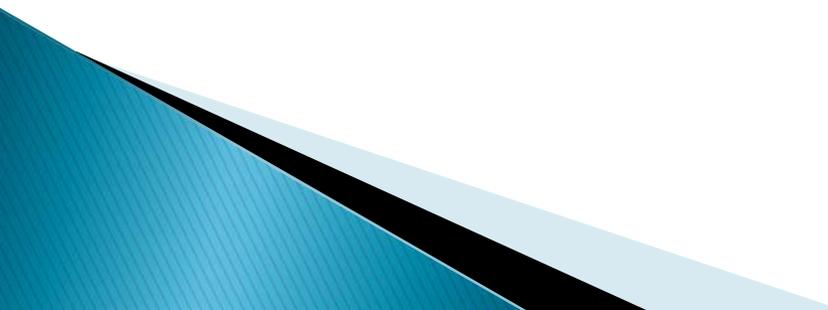
TOP 10 MEDICAL SCHOOL PERSONAL STATEMENT WRITING TIPS

According to Geoffrey Cook, Founder
EssayEdge.com

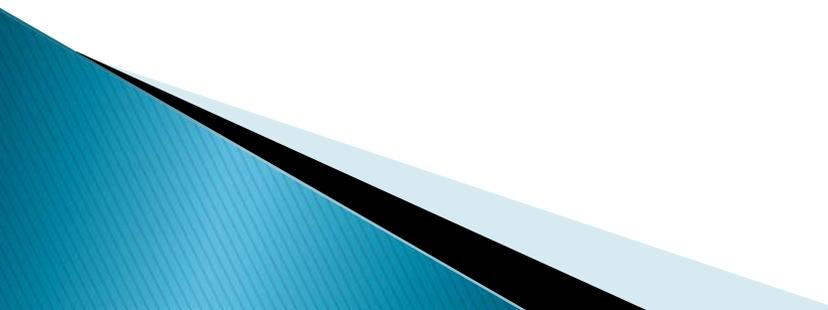
- ▶ Don't Resort to cliches.
- ▶ Don't Bore the Reader. Do Be Interesting.
- ▶ Do Use Personal Detail. Show, Don't Tell!
- ▶ Do Be Concise. Don't Be Wordy.
- ▶ Do Address Your Weaknesses. Don't Dwell on Them.
- ▶ Do Vary Your Sentences and Use Transitions.
- ▶ Do Use Active Voice Verbs
- ▶ Do Seek Multiple Opinions.
- ▶ Don't Wander. Do Stay Focused.
- ▶ Do Revise, Revise, Revise.

Keep in mind that available space for this essay on the AMCAS application 5300 characters.

–According to Geoffrey Cook, Founder
EssayEdge.com



PERSONAL STATEMENT DO'S 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.
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THE ART OF THE AMCAS PERSONAL ESSAY

There are no hard and fast rules for writing an effective personal essay. The process will be different for everyone, especially because the goal of the essay is to give admissions officers some insight into your individual goals and circumstances. Keep this in mind as you write – What aspect of yourself do you want to convey? Is it your compassion? Your diligence? Your prior experience in health care? Most of all, start working on the essay early in the application process. Time will allow you to develop and revise your ideas.

The personal statement should make you stand apart from other candidates so it is best to avoid formulaic essay topics and themes.

Stay away from these types of essays:

- **Manifest Destiny:** Any essay that claims, “I was born to be a doctor,” or “Friends always tell me I should be a doctor,” or “At age ten I knew I wanted to be a doctor.” These are common ploys that tell your reader little more than the fact you really want to get in to med school. They know that already. Spotlight your specific personality, not a destiny that seems larger than you.
- **My Contribution to the World:** It sounds naïve to have your whole life already mapped out, and even more so if it takes on some angelic quality. The “When I grow up, I want to be a... and save the world” tells your reader nothing significant about you.
- **The Interpretive Guide:** This is a fairly common essay, because some people might have blemishes on their academic record that they feel uncomfortable about. Refrain from asking admissions officers to “count this as significant” and from stating that something “shouldn’t count.” It is the readers’ job to make these decisions: they have requested a copy of your transcript, along with lists of your extra-curricular activities, for precisely this reason. Devoting too much of the personal statement to excuses or interpretations of your transcript is repetitive and virtually worthless. State a problem briefly and then move on to statements about what you can do.

THE ART OF THE AMCAS PERSONAL ESSAY

- ▶ **The Traveling Resume**: This essay rehashes your various activities and usually sounds like an itinerary: “And so I did this for three years and it taught me this, and then I did that and it showed me that.” Your readers usually know what your activities mean, and a catalog can become blurry in the readers’ mind. It’s better to focus most of the essay around a single activity or two that offers sincere and deep insight into you.
- ▶ **The Cute Essay**: Videotapes may have been cool for college applications, but medical school is a lot different and a lot more serious. No pictures, art, photos, or interpretive dance are necessary, or appreciated.
- ▶ **Name-Dropping**: If you’ve worked with an important person in your field, ask him or her to write a recommendation for you. Crafting an essay around who you know doesn’t leave enough room to discuss who you are.
- ▶ **“I’m Special” or “But I’m Me”**: Any essay that claims, “You probably don’t get people like me very often...” is almost inevitably wrong. Don’t tell your readers that you’re unique – show them. Instead of a catalog of adjectives, offer them a clear snapshot of yourself and your interests.
- ▶ **“My father, my role model”**: While it’s often useful to discuss the influence upon your life that someone has had, don’t devote your whole statement to a celebration of that person’s achievements in the face of difficulty. Your AMCAS essay should be about YOU.

Adapted from JHU Writing Center, Baltimore, MD

WHAT MAKES A GOOD PERSONAL STATEMENT

The personal statement gives you the opportunity to present a compelling snapshot of who you are and perhaps why you want to be a doctor. Use your personal statement to say what others can't. The personal statement can be a tricky genre to master. On the one hand, you want to give the admissions committee a sense of your personality and who you are. On the other hand, you must sound focused and professional, which sounds like it might impede your ability to capture your personality.

But this does not have to be the case. What you need to do is figure out how to say what drives you to want to become a healthcare professional in as specific a way as possible. The more specific you can be, the more the admissions committee will feel as if they have a sense of who you are.

You don't need gimmicks, jokes, artificial drama, or hyperbole to express who you are or why you would make a good medical student or doctor. All you need are carefully selected details that you can craft into a unique and compelling story that conveys a sense of purpose and motivation.

What Makes a Good Personal Statement?

There is no exact template for an effective personal statement. Often, however, strong personal statements combine a concise description of a personal experience with reflection on how this experience either led the writer to pursue medicine or indicates the writer's character or commitment.

Good personal statements often have a strong sense of narrative. This does not mean that they read like short stories, though they can relate a few scenes or anecdotes from your life. They have a strong sense of narrative, rather, in how they convey the writer's sense of dedication to medicine. Strong personal statements often give readers an idea of how applicants see their experiences as leading to the decision to pursue medicine.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD PERSONAL STATEMENT

A Suggested Writing Process

Everyone writes differently, so these are potential strategies rather than rules.

Make a list of some of your most defining experiences – extracurricular activities, specific classes, volunteer work, research, hobbies, etc. Try not to include overly personal experiences (breakups, trouble with parents, illnesses in the family, and so on). It's difficult to write about such things without being sentimental or cliché. You want experiences in which you did something and had to make a choice.

From this list, try to select an experience that particularly demonstrates your intellectual curiosity, your dedication to service, your composure under pressure, your leadership ability, or any other personal trait that you think is particularly relevant to your case that you would make a good doctor or medical student.

Start writing a draft based on this experience. You want to be specific, but don't get bogged down with an abundance of anecdotes or minutiae. Try to use your draft to craft a succinct story that demonstrates your character and your motivations.

Set the draft aside for some time (a number of days or weeks), and then revisit it with fresh eyes. Be as honest with yourself as you can be: What works in this draft? What doesn't work? What sounds cliché or unspecific? Would a reader who doesn't know me at all get a sense of my personal character and dedication?

Revise, revise, revise: tighten the structure, add new things to make your point clearer, take away sentences or sections that now seem unnecessary, use the active voice as much as possible, and anything else that needs to be done. If what you have just doesn't seem to be coming together, do not be afraid to start over.

Solicit feedback from a couple of trusted readers and revise again based on the suggestions that you find most useful. Don't solicit feedback from too many people though – too many responses can be overwhelming.

Edit your work for grammatical mistakes, typos, clumsy repetitions, and so on. Make your prose impeccable before you submit your statement. Asking help from other readers can be especially helpful with editing, as sometimes it gets difficult to read your work with fresh eyes.

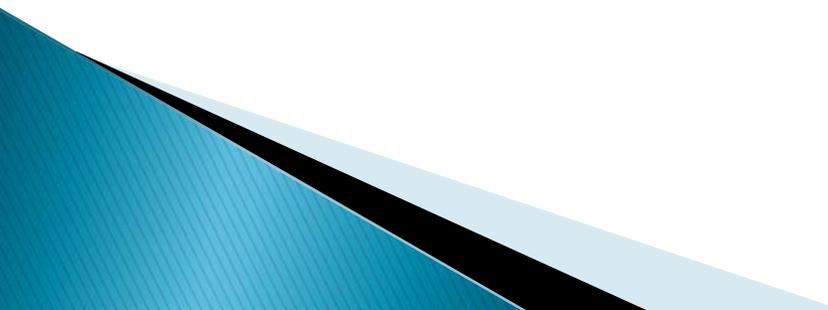
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How to Get Started

The personal statement is an exercise in self-reflection. Questions to consider:

- ▶ Who are you? I am driven to... I have learned to... I believe...
- ▶ What are your most passionate interests or concerns? What problem(s) most occupy your thinking and your efforts?
- ▶ How did you develop those interests? (Not just the story, but what drives you.)
- ▶ What errors or regrets have taught you something important about yourself?
- ▶ When does time disappear for you? What does this tell you about your passions, your values?
- ▶ What ideas, books, courses, events have had a profound impact on you? How so?
- ▶ To what extent do your current commitments reflect your most strongly held values?
- ▶ When have you changed? Consider yourself before and after; what does this change mean?
- ▶ How do your interests and who you are relate to your goals in medical school and as a doctor?
- ▶ Start a “shoebox”; a place to keep random notes for your personal statement; be ready to write at any time. Review these items occasionally; let them tell you more about what you want your personal statement to say. Start writing drafts, experiments; you will know when a paragraph begins to gel.

What to Remember:

- ▶ They are read by non-specialists, so write for an intelligent non-medical audience.
 - ▶ Actions sometimes speaks louder than words so give examples of experiences rather than describing them.
 - ▶ All information must be accurate – don't pad, but don't be falsely modest either.
 - ▶ The personal statement, in part, serves as a test of your communication skills. How well you write it is as important as the content.
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WHAT MAKES A GOOD PERSONAL STATEMENT

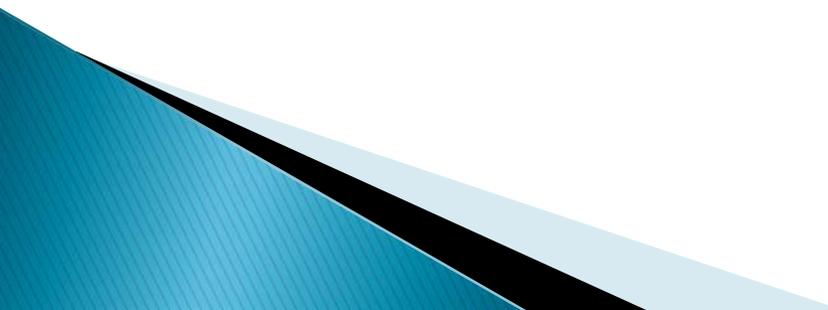
Things to Do

- ▶ Use the experience that you describe to tell a story of personal progress, particularly progress towards your commitment to medicine.
- ▶ Write with active verbs as much as possible.
- ▶ Strive for concision.
- ▶ Sound humble but also confident.

Things Not to Do

- ▶ There are many common pitfalls to the personal statement. Here are some things that you might be tempted to do in your statement but should not:
- ▶ Talk in hyperbolic terms about how passionate you are. Everyone applying to medical school can say they are passionate. Instead, show your readers something you have done that indicates your passion.
- ▶ Adopt an overly confessional or sentimental tone. You need to sound professional.
- ▶ Treat the personal statement like a piece of creative writing.
- ▶ Put your resume in narrative form.
- ▶ Use jargon, abbreviations, slang, etc.
- ▶ Use too many qualifiers: very, quite, rather, really, interesting...
- ▶ Write in overly flowery language that you would normally never use.
- ▶ Include famous quotations. If you must quote, use something that shows significant knowledge.
- ▶ Write about yourself in an overly glorifying or overly self-effacing manner.

From the Yale Pre-Health Website



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

PERSONAL STATEMENT GUIDES

- ▶ <http://blog.owu.edu/writingcenter/files/2012/07/Medical-School-Guidelines-and-Sample-Essays.pdf>
- ▶ <http://www.usnews.com/education/blogs/medical-school-admissions-doctor/2015/07/07/avoid-common-mistakes-on-the-medical-school-personal-statement>
- ▶ http://ocs.fas.harvard.edu/files/ocs/files/graduate_-_medicine_-_personal_statement_workshop.pdf?m=1426790231
- ▶ http://www.healthdiversity.pitt.edu/students-faculty/documents/snmapersonalstatementsvol2_2.pdf