Writing the Personal Statement for Health Professional Schools
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The personal statement...
...is a “revelation of your personality”
...includes your strengths, beliefs and values
...uses concrete, vivid details to demonstrate the qualities and characteristics you possess and will also aid you as a health care provider
...is your first (and perhaps only) opportunity to sell yourself

All health professional schools require applicants to submit a “Personal Statement” during the initial application phase. This statement is a critical element in the application process and can significantly help or harm a student’s chance for success. This form is a tool to help you begin your personal statement. In addition to using this form, it is imperative that you consult with your Preprofessional advisor for further assistance. Following is a checklist of things to consider when writing this statement.

1. This statement must be personal. It is your initial opportunity to address the admissions committee. This statement can lead to an interview IF you express your commitments, motivations, and values. The personal statement should be a reflection of the unique individual that you are.

2. Be sure to discuss WHY you are interested in the chosen profession. Schools want to assess your motivation for this career before they ask for an interview. Are there events, people and/or experiences that reinforced your interest? Share personal vignettes that support your stated interest and motivation. Avoid clichés and undocumented generalizations about wanting to help people. Remember that numerous other professions cite “helping people” in their mission statement.

Before starting this statement ask yourself...“what have I done to personally convince myself that I want to be a...?” Being a health care provider often means a lifetime of giving back to society—what sustained commitment have you made to humanitarian activities?

3. You may wish to discuss individuals or incidents that have shaped your life. However, avoid extensive references to childhood or high school experiences. Granted early exposure to medicine may have sparked an interest, but should not be the reason behind your pursuit of this goal. You must convey that you’ve made an adult decision to pursue this career.

4. ELABORATE upon extracurricular activities and/or volunteer/work experiences that you have listed elsewhere in the application. Do not make the mistake of merely re-listing these activities. Use this opportunity to give new information about your involvement which is not listed elsewhere. Since many students are involved in a number of activities, focus on noteworthy ones. Describe the depth of your involvement in a fashion that implies you have certain characteristics necessary to be a good health care provider. Discuss your contribution, what you have learned from the experience, and the personal satisfaction you have gained. Discuss the personal impact of these activities.

Consider personal qualities that have been developed and/or enhanced through such involvement. Do not write “I am a warm, compassionate person” – let the reader draw his/her own conclusions after reading your statement. Describe your experiences so that the reader concludes you are mature,
independent, etc.—refrain from directly telling them so. Consider responses to the following questions: What did you learn? How has this reinforced your interest in the chosen profession?

5. The personal statement provides the opportunity to answer any perceived questions. Most applicants will not need to use this space to explain academic irregularities. However, if you have a significant number of “W’s” on your transcript, you may wish to consider addressing the reasons in the statement. Do not use the entire space to discuss your transcript and leave other questions about motivation and activities unanswered. If necessary briefly explain the nature of the situation and accept responsibility for your academic record. Consult with your pre-professional advisor if you need further guidance.

6. Many students wish to write about their personal philosophy — caution, this is a tricky thing to discuss in the statement because you may come across as being narrow-minded or intolerant to different opinions. While your personal philosophy is important, it is a difficult task to produce a relevant and sincere statement while discussing these items. Weigh the pros and cons before deciding to include this item. Perhaps our philosophy is better discussed at the interview.

7. Non-traditional background? If yes, use it to your advantage. If returning to school after a significant gap in time, describe why your career change is a well thought out decision. Focus on the positives of your current career while describing how medicine will fill the gaps of what is missing.

8. This statement must be well written with an introduction, body and conclusion. Do not expect your first draft to be the final product. Once the statement is complete, it is beneficial to have it reviewed by several individuals with different perspectives. An individual who has good editing skills for both spelling and grammar usage is of particular importance.

9. When writing the statement take advantage of the maximum number of characters allowed. You are given a certain amount of space for a reason, and using one-half page does not convey a strong interest in the application. If you are submitting an application through a service (i.e. AMCAS), do not express an interest in a specific health professional school. Your application may not be very successful if MSU-College of Human Medicine reads about your strong interest in U of M. (or if UAB medical school reads about your strong interest in USA medical school) (Personal statements sent directly to schools not participating with an application service should include a brief discussion of your interest in the school and its program.)

Students planning to utilize centralized application services, please note the following maximum characters for the various services. The following is a list of professional schools, the centralized application service they utilize and the maximum # of characters allowed for the personal statement:

- **Allopathic (MD)** – AMCAS – 5,300 characters
- **Dental (DDS & DMD)** – AADSAS – 4,500 characters
- **Pharmacy (PharmD)** – PharmCAS – 4,500 characters
- **Physical Therapy (DPT)** – PTCAS – 4,500 characters
- **Physician Assistant (PA)** – CASPA – 5,000 characters
- **Podiatry (DPM)** – AACPMAS – 4,500 characters
- **Optometry (OD)** – OptomCAS – 4,500 characters
- **Osteopathic (DO)** – AACOMAS – 4,500 characters
WRITING A PERSONAL STATEMENT

Test for writing a successful personal statement for application to professional school

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As you begin to write:

- Gather information about how and what to write
- Think about what to say and how to say it
- If you feel compelled to write your "life story" - do so and then put it aside
- As you write, you may feel the urge to write about a specific event. Follow that urge.
- If some strong emotions get stirred up, don’t retreat from them.

Ask yourself:

- Who were the most influential people in your life? Why did they do for you?
- What were the pivotal moments in your life? Looking back, what can you recall having changed you? How were you affected?
- Do you feel a passion for medicine? What is the source of that passion?

It’s hard to begin!

- As you begin to know what will be in your essay it may be hard to write the beginning.
- Set the beginning aside and just write what you feel is the essence of your essay.
- Put it away for a few days.
- Re-read and think about what logically follows then write it.

Most important

- What is the impression of yourself that you are creating?
- An effective essay creates the idea that you would be an interesting applicant to interview.
- Have you highlighted your assets by "evidence and example" without sounding arrogant?
- Are you resilient?
- Are you inspired by accepting disappointment and moving on.

More important stuff!

- An admissions committee will have questions about whether an applicant is committed enough to the profession that she can withstand the rigors of a professional school curriculum.
- Do you provide evidence that you’ve matured, responsibility, accountable, cooperative, persistent, resilient, have a capacity for work, support, focused, efficient, organized and purposeful?

What to include?

- Your motivation for becoming a physician
- Have you captured the compassion as well as the passion for the study of medicine?
- Did you talk about individuals or incidents which have shaped your life and values?
- Distress health-related, people-oriented activities and the lessons learned as a result.

What else to include

- Extracurricular activities and work/volunteer experience (not a repeat of the application)
- Did you include what you learned, how you contributed and what you have matured?
- Irregularities in your academic record
- Did you refer to the guidelines of the institution (bead®)? If you must cover this did you give a reason and not an excuse?

More stuff to include

- Below-average grades
- Did you offer an explanation not an excuse?
- Non-traditional background (by virtue of race, sex, age, academic background or life experiences, etc.)
- Did you make the most of it and turn lemons into lemonade?
- Participation in a Postbaccalaureate Program
- Did you write about what you learned or how you matured?
You're almost finished!

- Future Plans/Long-term goals (only include if it's sincere)
- Did you say something definitive, sincere and substantial? (If not then hit delete)
- Personal Philosophy (If in doubt, leave it out)
- Did you think it through carefully before including? If it's important to you, could it be better to save it for the interview?

Reapplicants
Should you change your personal statement?

YES!!
- You are not the same person you were when you applied previously
- Speak as the person you are today
- What have you done since your last application?
- Why are you now a much better applicant than you were before?

Hallelujah! It's Done... well almost!

- Have someone who is a good writer read your statement
- The Miller Writing Center
  http://www.asu.edu/writing/writing-center/
- Read your essay aloud
- Check and double check for spelling/grammatical errors

What you need to know before submitting

Each of these centralized application services provide specific directions you need to refer to before submitting.
- AAMCAS – Allopathic Medical School
- ACOMAS – Osteopathic Medical School
- OptiCAS – Ophthalmology
- AADSAS – Dental School
- PharmCAS – Pharmacy
- CASPA – Physician Assistant
- PTACAS – Physical Therapy
- OTCAS – Occupational Therapy
- AACOMAS – Podiatry

One final thought!

"Be yourself, but in proper English!" I

Resources

- A copy of this book is available for you to use in SCC 239
- Access from Mrs. Christensen's office