



Writing a Personal Statement for Medical School Applications

Tips on Getting Started, What to Include, Common Dos and Don'ts, How to Revise Using a Checklist

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Getting Started



Create a list of memories, personal experiences, moments that stand out in your life.



Review your notes on academic, research, and clinical-patient experiences. If you aren't taking notes you might want to start. Start to connect the experience to the insights you have gained.



Brainstorm: when did you become interested in medicine? Take notes on when and why that moment (or series of moments).




Jot down notes about your personal characteristics & qualities. If you were writing a personal ad describing yourself, what would you say? What might others who know you say about you?



Work on addressing any recurring writing concerns. Bring your writing (Personal Statement or anything else) to the Writing Center. The presentation of your Personal Statement is KEY.



Put some writing on the page - and don't delete or write over previous drafts. In early stages, don't worry as much about structure and organization. Just be sure you are addressing the main points.



What to Include in Your Personal Statement

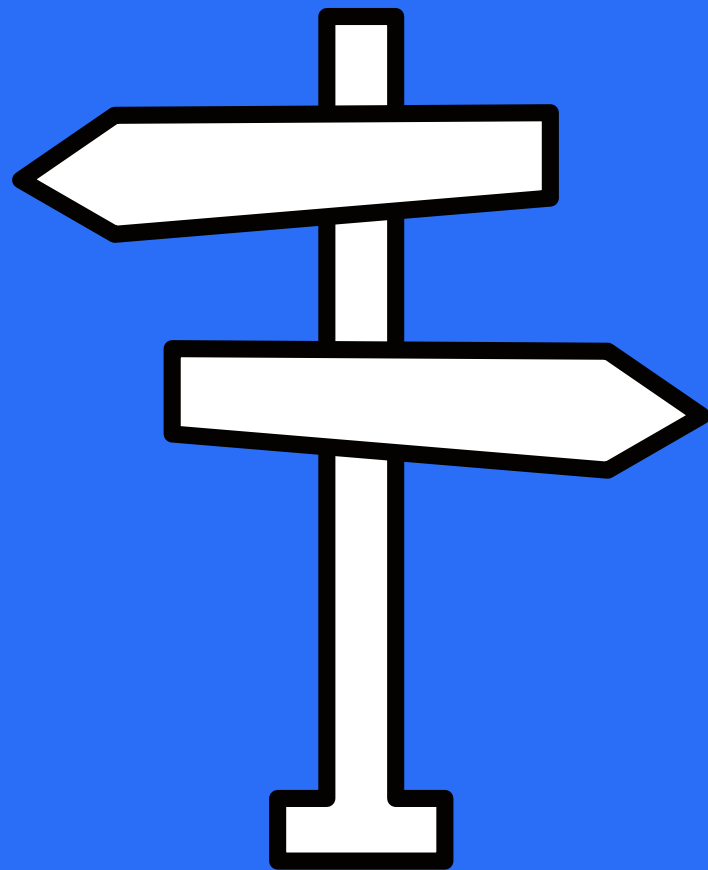
- Personal Narrative - you don't have to cover ALL of this but consider:
 - Your upbringing: what is important about where you were born or grew up?
 - What key life events had an impact on you?
 - Do you have certain interests outside of medicine that have been significant in your life?
- Reflection on patient/clinical experiences:
 - Reflect on what you gained: what did you learn from the experience? How did the experience shape you?
 - How did the experience solidify your desire to pursue medicine?
 - Which specific anecdotes from working with patients stand out?
- Reasons WHY you want to pursue medicine:
 - When did you become interested and what have you learned about medicine/the health profession so far -- and about yourself In the process? Avoid cliches.
- Your strengths:
 - What motivates you? What personal qualities and characteristics do you have that are suited to medicine? Think especially about evidence of humility and empathy
 - AND SHOW DON'T TELL.

The Four Components of the Essay

1. **Motivation**: refers to your ongoing preparation for the health profession (and can include your initial inspiration).
2. **Fit**: determined through a self-assessment of your relevant values and personal qualities/characteristics as these relate to the profession.
3. **Capacity**: demonstrated through holistically aligning with the competencies expected in the profession.
4. **Vision**: relates to the impact you wish to make in the field.



General Advice



Common List of Dos and Don'ts

Craft Your Story: There are key aspects to storytelling including having a beginning, a middle, and an ending. There should be forward momentum to your story: a narrative with a logical progression. Think about including elements of change in your story - remember, in stories we read if nothing changes it is boring.

Be Specific in Examples: In your story, you should talk about what you know. Refer to your specific and significant experiences: work, research, classes, study abroad, fellowships, etc. and explain how these experiences have been important and foundational to your goals. Always: **SHOW!**

Concentrate on Your Opening Paragraph: You need to engage your reader immediately, but don't try to be overly "catchy" or witty in the opener. Don't be phony or artificial. You DO need to establish a focus or "theme" for your statement in the opener, which you will return to at the end.

Writing Matters: You need to write well and correctly. You have to be meticulous. Express yourself clearly AND concisely. Proofread very carefully. We recommend that you work with the Writing Center and PreHealth Advising to make sure your essays are error free and very readable.



**CHECKLIST for
EVALUATING
YOUR
PERSONAL
STATEMENT
DRAFT**

Does your opening paragraph quickly engage the reader? Is there a point of interest that helps give the statement a thematic focus that is sustained throughout?

What is the implicit "thesis" of this statement?

Does the statement offer a "story," with a logical conclusion to this story in the form of the application? What's missing from this story?

Is this really a PERSONAL statement? Is the statement focused on you (or if you are peer reading, the writer/applicant)? Is there too much discussion of someone else, even if that person is significant or played an important role in your/the writer's development?

Are you SHOWING -- using specific examples and concrete descriptions of experiences -- vs. TELLING? Instead of saying, "By shadowing Dr. X, I learned quite a bit about neurology," you might say, "In my experiences working with Dr. X, I assisted with the initial intake information for all new patients, prepared patients for EEG tests, and learned to read diagnostic imaging tests."

Are you following up the SHOWING with a reflection on what insights you gained from the experience, how you changed because of this experience, and how the experience solidified your desire to pursue medicine?

Is the statement well organized? Is there a logical progression from point to point, paragraph to paragraph, with attention to writing features such as transitions? Does each paragraph have a main topic or subject that orients the reader to the point of this section of the statement?

Which details seem unnecessary or unrelated to the main "story"?

Is there a part of this statement that could have been written by any applicant?

YOU CAN
DO IT!



Questions & Discussion

Thank you for your time today! Remember -- along with working directly with PreHealth Advising -- you can work with us in the Writing Center at any stage in your writing process. Some students find it helpful to talk through possible "themes" for their statements or to share early drafts to make sure they are on the right track. You will need to revise your statement many times, so plan to have someone knowledgeable and experienced in writing as a reader throughout your process.