

Writing Personal Statements for Health Professions

What are the steps for writing a personal statement for the medical professions?

Follow this process:

1. Researching graduate programs or employers
2. Understanding program or job expectations
3. Brainstorming
4. Drafting
5. Editing and revising
6. Peer reviewing

What should I put in my personal statement?

Consider these ideas:

- **A definite answer to the prompt:** specific answers to the questions asked of you by the prompt. This is what the reader is looking for. Make sure to provide responses that do the job of answering the question.
- **Use your unique tone: write who you are in your own voice.** Don't use hefty language for the sake of using big words if that's not how you sound in real life. You can communicate your intelligence through your excellent ideas, not just your vocabulary.
- **Show maturity in thinking and in writing:** your ideas demonstrate that this is something that is important to you, invigorating not just your passions, but your dedicated care to the subject, which compels you to approach it with maturity
- **Include academic experiences and interests in the medical field:** what relevant medical experiences in school make you a good candidate? What interests connect you personally to the field?
- **Acknowledge relevant work and research experiences (paid or unpaid):** what work experiences contribute to or demonstrate your professional interest in the medical field? What researches have ignited your curiosities or compelled you to keep digging for more information?
- **Explain long-term academic and professional goals:** How does what you want for your future connect to pursuing your degree? What academic and professional obstacles do you need to overcome to achieve your goals?

How can I show my individuality? How can I be creative?

Try answering some of these questions:

- Be honest about how you became interested in studying medicine/dentistry. If becoming a doctor/dentist wasn't a childhood dream, that's fine, but explain how you discovered medicine/dentistry as a career possibility and what you have done to research the career.
- Have you observed or worked in doctors/dental offices? Explain what you've done to demonstrate your interest in medicine/dentistry. Talk to practicing doctors/dentists to increase your understanding of general practices. How do these specific experiences connect or speak to you personally?
- Do you have any special talents or leadership skills that could be transferable to the practice of medicine/dentistry?
- What do you want the school to know about you that hasn't been disclosed in other sections of the application? What specific additional information makes you an excellent candidate?
- Express your commitment to helping others and mention any efforts made to enforce that commitment.
- Did you have to work to pay for your education? How has that made you a stronger applicant?
- To get where you are today, have you had to overcome hardships or obstacles? If so, how has this

influenced your motivation for advanced education?

How can I make sure that I sound like a professional?

Reflect on these tips:

- Don't fake it. You want to showcase who you really are.
- Avoid "gimmickiness." You want to rely on your unique talents, and accomplishments--not your fun and quirky font choice or neon printer paper, which anyone can imitate with the click of a mouse.
- Don't get too casual! You want to present yourself as a professional looking to expand your knowledge and experience through education, not a friend with similar interests at a party.
- Your audience is a group of professionals, so acknowledge them with your respectful, academic tone.

How is writing a personal statement different for the medical profession?

There are some additional things to consider, including:

- **Concision is key!** You don't have a lot of space in which to answer the prompt:
 - AMCAS Personal Comments Essay: The maximum number of characters is 5300. This is *characters*, not *words*! Concision is essential here since this translates to approximately one page. You will receive an error message if you exceed the space available
 - ADEA AADSAS application Personal Essay, the maximum number of characters is 4500, including spaces. Again, this is *characters*, not words. You don't have a lot of space
- **Proofreading is essential!**
 - No changes can be made after your application has been submitted.
 - Note: You cannot run spell check in the submission box, so you may want to compose your essay in Microsoft Word (or some other text-only word processing software), then copy and paste it into the application. (This may result in formatting issues, so take time to review the final document before submitting your application.)

What is the one thing I should remember about writing personal statements?

Start early and plan to revise! Revision is part of the process.

What resources are available on campus?

There are several free resources that you should take advantage of, including:

- **The Writing Center**, a place you can come with your ideas, your brainstorm, your first drafts, your final drafts, and everything in between. Tutors meet with you individually to discuss your work, provide feedback, and talk about ideas or concerns. Make an appointment online at writingcenter.gmu.edu.
- **Career Services**, a dedicated source for career and graduate school preparation. Their website includes a timetable for the application process and resources for the application process as a whole. Check out their medical careers website at: <http://careers.gmu.edu/students/jobsearch/industries/Healthcare.cfm>

"As you revise personal essays, concentrate on exuding an affirmative, positive tone. Be upbeat but not overbearing. Explain but don't equivocate. Be realistic but not pessimistic. Speak confidently but don't brag. Be idealistic but not naïve. Tell the truth about yourself and your background but don't apologize for either."

-- from Joe Schall's Writing Personal Statements and Scholarship Application Essays

Medical School Personal Statements

Use your statement to demonstrate these qualities:

- **Integrity and ethics** – How have you demonstrated honesty?
- **Reliability and dependability** – Provide evidence for how you fulfill your obligations. Are you punctual? Do you take responsibility for your actions?
- **A service orientation** – In what ways have you helped others?
- **Social, interpersonal, and team skills** – In what ways are you sensitive to the needs of others? How have you collaborated effectively?
- **A desire to learn** – How do you strive for self-improvement? What have you learned from assessing your own strengths and weaknesses?
- **Resilience and adaptability** – How do you show adaptability in stressful or changeful environments? How have you recovered from setbacks?
- **Cultural competence** – How have you interacted with communities different from your own? How do you understand and negotiate cultural difference?
- **Oral communication** – How can you demonstrate that you can successfully communicate and interact with others? How do you present effectively?

Use your statement to distinguish yourself from other applicants. Topics to address:

- Why have you selected the field of medicine?
- What motivates you to learn more about medicine?
- What do you want medical schools to know about you that hasn't been disclosed in other sections of the application?

You may also use the personal statement to

- Explain special hardships, challenges, or obstacles that may have influenced your educational pursuits.
- Explain significant fluctuations in your academic record that are not explained elsewhere in your application.

Entering the Personal Statement into AMCAS

- Type it directly into the AMCAS application to avoid formatting problems that arise from copying and pasting from other software OR compose your statement on Notepad
- Proofread carefully. You cannot run spellcheck in AMCAS. Once you submit the application, you cannot edit it.
- The space for the essay is 5300 characters, about one page.

Excerpted from the AMCAS Instruction Manual 2012

Dental School Personal Statements

Topics to address (when applicable):

- Why do you wish to pursue a dental education? Where did you start?
- Explain what you have done to demonstrate your interest in dentistry. Have you observed or worked in dental offices?
- Do you have any special talents or leadership skills that could be transferrable to the practice of dentistry?
- To get to where you are today, have you had to overcome hardships or obstacles? How has this influenced your motivation for advanced education?

- Did you have to work to pay for your education? How has that made you a stronger applicant?

Tips:

- Be honest about how you became interested in studying dentistry.
- Express and demonstrate your commitment to helping others.
- Write about any experiences or qualities that make you stand out from other applicants.

Entering the Personal Statement into AADSAS

- Compose the statement as a .txt file using Notepad.
- If you use Microsoft Word, be aware that some features may not display properly once your file is pasted into the application's text box. Review the final document before submitting it.
- Your essay will be formatted in standard paragraph form before being sent to your designated dental schools as a part of your application.

*Excerpted from ADEA Guidelines
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