

The College of Arts and Sciences

Advising and Academic Support

Personal Statement

The Personal Statement—Making an Impact

The personal statement is your opportunity to share your voice in the application process. There are many different ways to approach your essay. Reflect on what is most important in your experience, and be sincere. Admissions committees are comprised of real people; be *your* real self.

Writing Tips

Start Early. Writing the Personal Statement will take longer than you think. Do not wait until the last minute to write a Personal Statement. It should be carefully constructed, then polished, and reviewed by those whose opinions you value. Effective Personal Statements take *several* drafts.

It's About You. Make it *personal*; this essay is about you, not others. Be remembered for being unique. Consider family, education (Do you enjoy it? Why?), work, volunteerism, and other extracurricular experiences. Write about what interests and excites *you!*

Don't bore the reader. Go further than, "*I want to help people.*" Sure, it may be true, but there are numerous helping professions and your essay will be stronger if you can clearly articulate specifically why you want to enter the medical field vs. teaching, engineering, research, business? Share and determine which aspects of the medical profession are appealing to you. Articulate how being a health professional will best utilize and compliment your skills and interests.

Don't be cliché. Be wary of beginning or ending your essay with quotes or sentimental inspirations. Committees have seen many of these, and might be weary of yours.

Know the purpose. The purpose of this essay is to *convey to* the admissions committee that you belong in professional school and that one day you will make a worthy health professional. The committee is interested in more than your ability to succeed academically. Do not rely solely on *telling* the reader that you are prepared for school and will make a good health professional – *show them* by buttressing your claims with specific examples that illustrate each point. Don't duplicate information from other sections of the application—offer information they won't glean elsewhere.

Show. Don't tell. Be reflective. Don't just list all the things you've done; select one, two, or a few to tell about, and write from the point of view of *what you got out of the experience*, not how much you worked or how hard it was. Make a point of what you learned, or why you selected the particular experience – this will provide the reader greater insight into your initiative, values and priorities.

Provide insight. What thoughts or feelings did you have from this experience? Don't get carried away describing details of research or a medical case—space is limited and you may bite off more than you can chew. The reader will likely know more about the topic than you. Do not bore the reader or give the impression you are naïve on the topic.

Writing Tips Continued

Vary your sentences and use transitions. The best essay contains a variety of sentence lengths mixed within any given paragraph. Also, remember that transition is not limited to words like nevertheless, furthermore or consequently. Good transition flows from the natural thought progression of your argument.

Use the active voice. Passive-voice expressions are verb phrases in which the subject receives the action expressed in the verb. Passive voice employs a form of the word to be, such as, was or were. Overuse of the passive voice makes prose seem flat and uninteresting. Generally, make verbs active, not passive i.e., I helped him vs. he was helped.

Be specific and answer “why.” This is not the time to be vague. Details are important. Be honest and a real person; we all have our strengths and weaknesses. Being honest helps present a real person with self-confidence, maturity, and self-awareness that is memorable to a reader. Anytime you make a claim about yourself, ask the question “WHY” and answer it. The answer is what your written word should reflect.

Highlight your growth. Address weaknesses. Show progression throughout your past experiences, your current ambitions, and what you can offer or expect to accomplish in the future. Be positive and optimistic; however, avoid the Fairy Tale Syndrome (FTS), e.g., “*I have always dreamed that someday...*” If something in your academic record needs explanation, make one, but do not dwell on the negative. Just don’t dwell on it. No excuses, either. Take ownership of any transgressions—and the ensuing growth.

Know your audience. Consider who is reading your statement—MDs, PhDs, nurses, students, administrators, conservatives, liberals, etc. Consider how each might interpret your writing or choice of topics. Be careful not to insult or disrespect those in the health professions (i.e., “*I don’t want to go into nursing because I am seeking more of a challenge.*”) Not only could these professionals be on the admissions committee, they are your future colleagues! What message are you sending? What does it say about you?

Proofread. Does your essay flow? Check your spelling and grammar on a hard (written) copy, not on the computer screen. Have others read and comment on the statement; do not rely on a spell-checker.

Exercise judgment. Be careful with the use of “I, me, myself.” Try to use them sparingly. Do not substitute “myself” when “I” or “me” is correct. Your writing should be more sophisticated than your speech, but don’t make it so stilted that there is a question as to who wrote or assisted in writing your essay. Be careful of wordiness or redundancy.

Be concise but comprehensive. Don’t worry about drafting a longer statement than the space available. It can always be shortened. Remember, use available space, but be mindful of allotted character length.

Exercise integrity. Be honest. You must be able to defend everything that you write in your personal statement. Be honest. Don’t exaggerate, brag or lie. Admissions Committee members have well developed, highly sensitive radars. Be sincere and write the truth. Keep a copy of your application and read your essays before you go into the interview.

Topics to consider: Motivation for becoming a physician; influences of your family or early experiences on your life; insights gained through extracurricular, work, or volunteer activities; long-term goals, or a personal, social or global issue that matters to you. If applicable, consider addressing irregularities or dips in your academic record and related setbacks, or referencing a non-traditional background.