



CAS Career Services

Personal Statement

Things to Consider

- Start your first draft early, and use first-person tense
 - It is important to begin the writing process, even if you are unsure how to write it
 - Avoid starting every sentence with “I”
- Prepare your materials (e.g., transcripts, resumes) to guide your writing process
- Make a list of important and relevant experiences
- Make sure that you are within the character/word/page limit
- Proofread, proofread, proofread!
 - Once you submit, you cannot change/update your materials
 - Get feedback to make sure your personal statement is clear and concise

Content:

- Be sure to answer the writing prompts/questions
 - Using a theme and supporting motifs will focus your personal statement
 - Theme: A central idea or message in your writing
 - Motif: A recurring image, idea or symbol that can explain a theme
- Avoid repeating yourself in other parts of the application
 - This is your opportunity to go beyond the technical aspects of your application
- Start with a strong introduction to gain the reader’s attention
- Develop supporting paragraphs to address specific questions from the application
 - Discuss your strengths and qualifications for a particular program
 - Clarify any inconsistencies that are in your application
 - Explain any challenges or failures that you overcame
 - Appear confident, not arrogant; demonstrate resiliency, not inadequacy
- Finish with a strong conclusion to help the reader remember you

Other Considerations:

- Some programs may use a centralized application system and have count characters:
 - 2000: HAMPCAS
 - 4500: AACOMAS, AADSAS, PharmCAS, OptomCAS, AACPMAS, PTCAS, ATCAS
 - 5000: VMCAS, CASPA, TMDSAS
 - 5300: AMCAS
 - 7500: OTCAS
 - 18,000: SOPHAS

Personal Statements and Application Letters. (n.d.). Retrieved May 01, 2017, from http://wts.indiana.edu/pamphlets/personal_statements.shtml

DO:

Make your essay personal. It is called a *personal* statement. The essay should sound like you and reflect your personality. Copying another essay or using a website template will not really fit you.

Use real life stories. It is better to “show” rather than “tell.” Real-life examples not only make the essay more interesting and easy to read, but also humanize you and make you memorable to the reader.

Write with feeling! Admissions committees are looking for a passion for the profession. One way to convey passion is to talk about feelings. It is not just the facts about your path to an education; it is about demonstrating why you chose this path and how it fits your personality, skills, interests and goals.

Go deep. What is it about the profession that excites you? What can you do as a member of this profession that you could not do in other professions? How does this profession represent your passion?

Explain weaknesses. Take responsibility for your decisions, especially regarding the use of your time. Do not try to hide, make excuses for, or lie about weaknesses or failures. However, try to frame them in ways that indicate how you have overcome them or learned from them. Be honest and confident.

Use everyday words. Rather than show off your vocabulary of obscure words, use a variety of appropriate words. The reader should not have to look for a dictionary. It is important to show that you can communicate clearly with people from a variety of backgrounds.

Constructively fill the space provided. You should not use fluff to fill space. Be concise with wording.

Avoid criticizing various professionals. Arguing that you want to be a [insert profession here] because you think you can do a better job than some you have seen sets a negative tone and leads to defensive reactions. Saying one professional role is more important than another makes you sound judgmental or egotistical.

Avoid overusing the pronoun “I.” Vary structure, especially at the beginning of sentences. Instead of “I learned by working in a hospital...” try “Working in a hospital taught me...”

Vary your sentence structure to keep the reader interested. Avoid a series of sentence or paragraphs beginning with “I” or using the word “I” too often. Give your essay the “I” test. Count the number of times you use the pronoun “I.” Try to think of other ways to express the idea you are expressing without using “I.” Consider visiting the Writing Center for assistance.

Have readers review your statement. Make sure your essay is absolutely perfect in spelling, grammar, and mechanics. Have friends, parents, advisors, and Career Services review your statement.

DO NOT:

Write what you think the admissions committee wants to hear. You are probably wrong, and everyone else is probably doing the same thing. You do not want to blend into the crowd.

Use overly sentimental, flowery terms or clichés. Examples: “I am a people person,” “I have wanted to be a doctor my whole life,” “It was then I knew everything would be OK,” or “I love to help people.”

Repeat information directly contained within the application itself. The reader already knows your major, grade point average, etc. Information should be repeated only for further elaboration.

Try to be too funny. The reader may not get the joke. Humor is often hard to convey when someone does not know your sense of humor or personality. It could be misinterpreted.

(Adapted from Paul Crosby “Writing Personal Statements” retrieved Feb. 21, 2007 from the University of Kansas Premedical Advising website: <http://www.medadvising.ku.edu/essaytips.shtml>)

Building Content for Your Personal Statement

1. Who are you?

- Who/what are the most influential people/events in your life? How have they influenced you?
- How have you changed over time?
- What are your core values? Why are they important to you? How do they relate to medicine/law/research/academia?
- How are you different from other applicants?
- How do you demonstrate: work ethic, interpersonal skills, time management, leadership qualities, strengths, personality, communication, etc.?
- How have you been involved in your community and/or campus?
- How have you shown ability to live/work with other cultures?
- What attributes do you believe are essential to be successful within the profession?
- Of these attributes, which do you possess and how have you demonstrated these in the past?

2. How have you prepared for the profession of your interest?

- How did you decide to become a doctor/lawyer/researcher/professor/etc.?
- How have you demonstrated passion for the profession?
- How have you worked with people (e.g., patients, clients, researchers) in your field?
- How has your experience and education prepared you?
- Do you intend to serve an underserved population or community? If so, how?
- What have you learned from a health care professional or health environment?
- What are your professional goals and why?

3. How do you explain difficulties in your application?

- If you are reapplying, what have you done since your last application?
- Why are there gaps (e.g., multiple withdraws, poor grades) in your academic and work records?
- Why have there been changes in your academic performance or work history?
- Why are there inconsistencies between academic record and test scores?

4. Adding reflection

- What impact did the person/situation have on you (short and/or long term)?
- What did you learn or think about for the first time after the experience?
- How is this experience significant to you?
- How did the experience change you, help you grow, or make you think differently?
- How did the experience help you evaluate your fit with a certain professional field?
- How would working in this profession make you contribute to society?
- What do you hope to contribute?

Evaluating Your Content

Content

Are you answering the actual question given in the prompt?

Is your essay within the word/character/page limit?

How will your reader find the essay interesting?

How does your introduction grab the reader's attention?

Will your essay help you stand out and let the reader get to know you well?

Structure

Do your paragraphs flow smoothly?

Have you written insightful transitions and reflections that highlight your key themes?

Have you varied your sentence structures?

Are your stories well integrated into your essay?

Anatomy of a Personal Statement

Basic Moves of a Personal Statement

1. Motivation for studying -- opening paragraph -- anecdotal/narrative (**why area of focus?**)
2. Qualities/Experiences -- told by example -- a few focused, well-developed arguments -- no listing, re-hashing of resume (**why you?**)
3. Future Plans -- what work settings, positions, or research are you interested in? Not set in stone, but need some indication (**what are your plans?**)
4. School Choice -- why this program? Argument shows "this is me, this is you, this is why we are a perfect match" (**why us?**)

Best Practices

- **Most Important Rule** -- say **nothing** in your personal statement that isn't directly relevant to helping an admissions committee make a decision about your merit as a graduate student. This especially includes quoting other people (why should they care what Einstein or Maya Angelou or Luke/Mark/ John or anyone else has ever said? What does it have to do with *your* ability to succeed?),
- **Be truthful.** You can manage vocabulary choice (and you should), but you may not say something that isn't true. If you want to address any concerns (e.g., poor academic performance), explain what happened and how you grew from that experience.
- **Keep it positive.** Do not write negatively about yourself or your profession or anyone else! If you need to explain a dip in grades, do so briefly and objectively; do not belabor whatever trauma/situation caused the problem. Always find the "positive" (meaning not negative, not meaning ridiculously idealistic) way of communicating the same information.
- **Details sell.** Lists do not. Do not rehash your resume. Instead, choose a few experiences that were particularly meaningful and/or can illustrate qualities that you want the admissions committee to know. To succeed as illustrative examples, experiences must have the following 3 parts (you can't expect the readers to fill in missing parts -- they have too many essays to read to spend time performing literary interpretation):
 - What did you do? (what happened)
 - Why did you do it, and what did you gain from it?
 - How will it contribute to your success in graduate school and a career?

Building an Outline

I. Intro Topic(s):

A.

B.

C.

Thesis:

II. Body Paragraph Topic:

A.

1.

2.

B.

1.

2.

C.

1.

2.

III. Body Paragraph Topic:

A.

1.

2.

B.

1.

2.

C.

1.

2.

IV. Body Paragraph Topic:

A.

1.

2.

B.

1.

2.

C.

1.

2.

V. Conclusion:

A.

B.