

Personal Statements for Medical School

AMCAS requires a one page, 5,300 character essay and suggests applicants consider the following questions in their essays:

- 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 has not been disclosed in another section of the application?**

In addition, you may want to include information such as:

- Special hardships, challenges, or obstacles that may have influenced your educational pursuits
- Commentary on significant fluctuations in your academic record which are not explained elsewhere in your application

Writing a good personal statement is difficult and time consuming but it is vital to the success of an application. **Do not underestimate the importance of the personal statement. It will be read and reread and used as material for questions in interviews.** Give yourself plenty of time to write multiple drafts of the essay.

Start by brainstorming. Create a list of your skills, defining personality traits, mentors, defining life experiences, long and short term goals. Here are some questions to ask yourself:

- What is special, unique, distinctive, and/or impressive about you or your life story?
- What details of your life (personal or family problems, history, people or events that have shaped you or influenced your goals) might help the committee better understand you or help set you apart from other applicants?
- When did you become interested in medicine and what have you learned about it (and about yourself) that has further stimulated your interest and reinforced your conviction that you are well suited to this field? What insights have you gained?
- How have you learned about this field--through classes, readings, seminars, work or other experiences, or conversations with people already in the field?
- If you have worked a lot during your college years, what have you learned (leadership or managerial skills, for example), and how has that work contributed to your growth?
- Are there any gaps or discrepancies in your academic record that you should explain (great grades but mediocre MCAT scores, for example, or a distinct upward pattern to your GPA if it was only average in the beginning)?
- Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships (for example, economic, familial, or physical) in your life?
- What personal characteristics (for example: integrity, compassion, persistence) do you possess that would improve your prospects for success in the field or profession? Is there a way to demonstrate or document that you have these characteristics?
- What skills (for example, leadership, communicative, analytical) do you possess?
- Why might you be a stronger candidate for medical school--and more successful and effective in the profession or field than other applicants?
- What are the most compelling reasons you can give for the admissions committee to be interested in you?
- Briefly explain anything that might seem weak in your application. However, be sure not to apologize, make excuses or to criticize or blame your school or teachers.

Outline. Once you have brainstormed, select what you think are the most important points and create an outline. Use points that help develop a portrait of you as a real person who has the potential to succeed as a physician.

REVISE, REVISE, REVISE

Focus. You only have one page. Do not try to make too many points. The more is better theory does not work here.

Make the essay personal and specific. Give concrete examples to support your points. Try to think of incidents or anecdotes that are unique to you and your experience. This is the one place where you have the opportunity to give the admissions committees a sense of who you are as an individual among the thousands of applicants who “love science and want to help people.” Avoid using a quotation unless it is extremely relevant and clearly livens up your main point. Don’t use worn-out, clichéd quotes to substitute for your own words. You should be able to describe a variety of medically related experiences that support and give credence to your motivation to pursue a medical career. It is tricky to write about yourself without sounding either egotistical or self-critical. Try to discuss your accomplishments in the context of your gratefulness for the opportunities you have had. Be enthusiastic about your potential but don’t be arrogant. Use a highlighter and highlight all portions that only you could say about your goals and experiences. Make sure that you write about yourself, not family members. Have close friends and family read early drafts. Once you feel comfortable with the essay (still considering it a draft), ask people who don’t know you well to read it. This will provide you with new perspective.

Have strong organization. Begin with a clear, powerful statement of theme expressed in your first paragraph and subtly reiterated as a unifier throughout the essay. Use the body of the essay to develop your theme with specific points. Sum up with a conclusion that is strong and, hopefully, helps the committee focus on your abilities and passion for medicine.

Proofread. Grammatical correctness, organization, flow, and unity are vital to any successful essay. Use spellcheck to catch the obvious errors but also have careful human readers to find the errors your computer cannot. Once you upload the essay into your AMCAS application, you may not edit it in any way so it has to be perfect.

*Note: If you are applying to DO schools instead of, or in addition to, MD schools, do not simply use the same essay. First, DO schools have different length requirements. Second, be sure to address your commitment to the DO profession and to the DO philosophy in your AACOMAS personal statement.

Some sample essays can be found at: <http://www.accepted.com/medical/sampleessays>