

The Personal Statement

Writing your personal statement will be one of the more difficult and crucial parts of the whole application. It is the one element of the whole application over which you have complete control; take advantage of the opportunity. While attempting the perfect essay you may have the urge to place your entire life story and world-view within the confines of a single page -- not only is this impossible, but it will not make for a strong personal statement. **The bottom line is this: Would a reader of your essay want to meet you (i.e. invite you for an interview)?** Aim for an interview, not a Pulitzer Prize.

Notes on timing

Allow yourself plenty of time to write and revise your essay (i.e. don't expect to whip it out in one or two weeks). In general, the essay takes a long time to emerge, and requires fairly continuous work to reach its final form. Think on the order of **6 weeks** from start to finish. Write as many drafts as you need, at each stage questioning whether the result really reflects your qualities.

Notes on content

Be specific and personal, rather than vague and philosophical. *If a friend were to pick up this personal statement in the Kirkland dhall and it didn't have your name on it – the person should be able to guess that you're the author.*

The statement should open with a thesis statement that clearly declares **what led you to medicine**, and the story should revolve around a few major themes/moments/experiences. Be imaginative. Be honest. Be straightforward and clear.

Try to be detailed and convey a clear idea of your interests and personality. Describe exactly what is most important about your character and motivations to pursue a career as a doctor. It is a statement, not a résumé. The essay should provide the reader with some insights about you that are not available from the remainder of your application. Try not to write what you think some doctor on the committee wants to read, as this is usually transparent in the essay and will certainly be apparent if you are interviewed and turn out to be quite different from the image you set forth.

Possible things to consider include:

- Academic experience: what led you to select your concentration/thesis topic?
- Research experience: what did you do; why did you do it?
- Your personal interests, extracurricular activities, hobbies, community service, family circumstances, summer jobs, etc.: in what ways have these experiences been instructive and meaningful for you?
- Your interest in medicine: its history and the career you envision for yourself
- A significant life experience or person who influenced you.
- Your goals in a life of medicine
- What makes you different? What would you add to a medical school class?

Notes on getting feedback

Finally, always have several people who know you well read and criticize the essay. The more personal the material, the harder it will be to take criticism; yet this type of feedback is the only way to discover what it is that you are actually communicating. Early on the process, well before you have a "final draft", have the statement read by:

- A person who has not read it before. (Try your premedical advisor. Please do not submit the AMCAS without receiving feedback from your premed advisor.)
- A person who is truly compulsive about writing, punctuation, grammar, and spelling. This is important: we have had complaints from medical schools about poor writing skills. The Writing Center or the writing tutors in the house are possible resources.
- A person who knows you well and can tell you if your essay “sounds like you.”