



WRITING A PERSONAL STATEMENT

What is a Personal Statement?

A personal statement is an opportunity for you to support or enhance other parts of your application. It is your first chance to help the admissions committee understand your motivation for pursuing this career while giving them a sense of who you are. The personal statement tells your story and the context that shaped who you are as a person – your values, interests and goals. Your statement should breathe life into your application and make the admission committee feel something.

Why is the Personal Statement Important?

The biggest “cut” in the admission process is based on application content, and your personal statement is part of the application. You will be applying with other students who may be academically similar to you. The personal statement can help you to stand out in a positive way. Simply by telling your story, you have the opportunity to highlight your uniqueness and how you will positively contribute to the health professions community.

Themes to Avoid in Your Personal Statement

- **Clichés:** “I like science and want to help people.” – This is a job requirement, not something that makes you stand out.
- **Epiphany into Healthcare/Manifest Destiny:** Your pursuit of the health professions should be a result of a series of thoughtful, conscious, and reflective decisions, not an instantaneous realization or something you’ve “always known”.
- **The Narrative Resume:** Do not rehash all of your activities and achievements. Your statement should focus on one or two significant experiences that offer sincere insight into you.
- **Grandiosity:** While it’s good to have goals, claiming in your personal statement that you are going to “cure cancer” or “eliminate healthcare disparities” shows a lack of understanding of the problem you’re planning to solve.
- **Excuses:** There are much better uses for your personal statement than justifying poor grades, conduct violations, etc. However, if you choose to address this, make it brief and focus should be on what you learned from the incident.
- **Name Dropping:** Your experiences are what make you unique, not who you know. Keep the focus on you.
- **Inflammatory/Controversial Remarks:** You do not know the values, beliefs, and background of the person who is reading your essay. Refrain from making strong statements on politics, religion, and other polarizing topics.
- **Lies:** This not only includes blatant lies, but also includes providing information that may be factually accurate but is presented in a misleading way. It will not take an admission committee long to figure out when you are embellishing.
- **Quotations:** You have around 5,000 characters for your personal statement. Don’t waste them using someone else’s words.
- **Unusual Format:** Do not try to stand out by using an unusual format. Do not submit artwork, videos, or poems. You do not need gimmicks to stand out.
- **Experience providing any treatments you are not licensed to provide:** If you have ever participated in treatments while shadowing or volunteering do not discuss this experience unless you are licensed. Please see the AAMC’s policy regarding such behavior [HERE](#) and ADEA’s policy [HERE](#).



Steps for Writing Your Personal Statement

This process will be different for everyone, but these steps can guide you through the process of telling your story.

Step 1: Reflect

Take a moment to reassess why you want to join this profession. If you've kept a reflection journal from your activities, now is the time to review it! Use these questions to help guide your reflection and use a notebook to write down reflections:

Motivation:

- Why are you applying?
- What inspires you to pursue this profession?
- What makes you so passionate about this?

Fit:

- What are your values?
- How do these align with the values of the profession?
- What personal qualities do you have that will enable you to positively contribute to the profession?

Capacity:

- What are your most defining experiences?
- What competencies did you develop/demonstrate through these experiences?
- What errors or regrets have taught you something about yourself?
- How have you changed/grown from your experiences?

Vision:

- What do you want to do and be (professionally speaking)?
- What impact do you want to have?

Step 2: Brainstorm

Start thinking about what you want your central message to be. Set aside time when you will not be rushed. Read the Personal Statement question/prompt. Using your notes from your reflection, start grouping like thoughts and look for an emerging theme. Remember, this is YOUR personal statement. Think about the aspect of yourself you want to convey to the admissions committee.

Possible Topics:

- Explain your clinical experience and what you have learned about the patient-provider relationship.
- A diverse/unique experience or event and how it shaped you.
- A leadership role you played and how it challenged you.
- Athletes: How has your discipline and teamwork molded you?
- Study Abroad: How has your appreciation for diversity and gaining a global perspective shaped your outlook?
- Actors/Artists/Musicians: How has your focus, discipline, and/or creative energy contributed to your passion for healthcare?
- Volunteers: How can you apply your compassion, altruism, appreciation for others and dedication of time and energy to medicine?



Step 3: Execution

Once you have a well-developed thesis statement, start writing! At this point, focus on your message and save editing for later. You should open with a hook and conclude by reinforcing your thesis. It is helpful to use an essay outline to make sure your statement stays on point and paragraph outlines to keep structure within the paragraph and help with flow.

Essay Outline:

- Introduction (Motivation)
 - Initial inspiration, provides context
- Body (Fit and Capacity)
 - Action/Experiences
 - Change
 - Insight into change/growth
- Conclusion (Vision)
 - Future goals
 - What impact do you want to have

Paragraph Outline:

- Point (Introduction to the main point of the paragraph)
- Evidence
- Explanation of how/why it is relevant to the profession
- Link (transition to next paragraph)

*Not all paragraphs will follow the outline in the exact order, but all elements of the outline should be present in each category.

Tips:

- Open with a hook and conclude by reinforcing your thesis.
- Use examples to go with your statements.
- Write with a distinct voice.
- Be clear and concise.

Step 4: Take a break!

After finishing your draft, set it aside for a few days. Come back to it with fresh eyes and perspective.

Step 5: Editing and Proofing

Read over your essay and analyze it line by line. Double space so you have plenty of room to mark up the page. As your reading, ask yourself if this essay could apply to any other profession. If so, it is not specific enough. Ask yourself what is missing, what works/doesn't work, is the message clear?

Identify trusted proofreaders. After they read the essay, ask them what your central message was. If they interpreted it differently than you intended, you may not have been clear enough. Be open to their suggestions, but make sure the statement still has your sentiment.

Utilize the Writing Center for grammatical reviews and the Career Center's Document Critique Service for content reviews.



Things to watch out for:

- Too many thoughts – stay focused on one or two strong ideas
- Wordiness/Using the same word repeatedly
- Slang, contractions, informal tone
- Too many \$10 words
- Passive voice

Character Limits and Prompts*

**Based on the 2020 application cycle*

AADSAS (Dentistry): *“Please explain why you want to pursue a dental career.”* – 4,500 characters

AACOMAS (Osteopathic Medicine): No official prompt is provided. However, your personal statement should express your motivation or desire to become a DO. – 5,300 characters

AACPMAS (Podiatry): *“State below why you are interested in becoming a Doctor of Podiatric Medicine. Provide information about your development for a career in Podiatric Medicine”* – 4,500 characters

AMCAS (Allopathic Medicine): One Personal Statement, Three Meaningful Activities Essays

- *“Use the space provided to explain why you want to go to medical school.”* - 5,300 characters

Applicants will have the option to write 3 additional essays on their most meaningful activities:

- *“When writing your response, you might want to consider the transformative nature of the experience: the impact you made while engaging in the activity and the personal growth you experienced as a result of your participation.”* - 1,325 character limit

If applying to MD/PhD programs, you will write two additional essays:

- *“Why are you pursuing an MD/PhD?”* – 3,000 characters
- *“Describe your significant research (name, affiliation, duration, nature of problem, contribution, etc.)”* – 10,000 characters

CASPA (PA): *“In the space provided write a brief statement expressing your motivation or desire to become a physician assistant.”* - 5,000

OptomCAS (Optometry): Essays can be customized for each individual Optometry program. Most Optometry schools include this as their main essay question:

- *“Please describe what inspires your decision for becoming an optometrist, including your preparation for training in this profession, your aptitude and motivation, the basis for your interest in optometry, and your future career goals.”* - 4,500 characters

OTCAS (Occupational Therapy): *“Your Personal Statement should address why you selected OT as a career and how an Occupational Therapy degree relates to your immediate and long-term professional goals. Describe how your personal, educational, and professional background will help you achieve your goals.”* –No character limit specified.



PTCAS (Physical Therapy): *"Reflect on a meaningful experience in your life and share how that experience influenced your personal growth, such as your attitudes or perceptions."* - 4,500 characters

PharmCAS (Pharmacy): *"Your Personal Essay should address why you selected pharmacy as a career; how the Doctor of Pharmacy degree relates to your immediate and long-term professional goals. You should describe how your personal, educational, and professional background will help you achieve your goals."* - 4,500 characters

SOPHAS (Public Health): Essays can be customized for each individual Public Health program. Most programs will want you to describe:

- Your education, experience, and professional career objectives; check with the school or program to which you will be applying to determine if there are any additional questions you should answer in your statement. – Character limits vary

TMDSAS (Texas Medical and Dental): Two required statements, one optional

- Required Medical: *"Explain your motivation to seek a career in medicine. Be sure to include the value of your experiences that prepare you to be a physician."* – 5,000 characters
- Required Dental: *"Explain your motivation to seek a career in dentistry. You are asked to discuss your philosophy of the dental profession and indicate your goals relevant to the profession."* -5,000 characters
- Required Medical and Dental: *"Learning from others is enhanced in educational settings that include individuals from diverse backgrounds and experiences. Please describe your personal characteristics (background, talents, skills, etc.) or experiences that would add to the educational experience of others."* – 2,500 characters
- Optional Medical and Dental: *"Briefly discuss any unique circumstances or life experiences that are relevant to your application which have not previously been presented."* -2,500 characters

VMCAS (Veterinary Medicine): Three essays

- *"There are many career choices within the veterinary profession. What are your future career goals and why?"* – 1,000 characters
- *"In what ways do veterinarians contribute to society and what do you hope to contribute?"* – 1,000 characters
- *"Consider the breadth of society which veterinarians serve. What attributes do you believe are essential to be successful within the veterinary profession? Of these attributes, which do you possess and how have you demonstrated these in the past?"* - 1,000 characters