Writing a Personal Statement for Professional School Applications

The personal statement can be an intimidating piece of the professional school application for many students. The personal statement is not a resume that tells others what you have done (honors, awards, activities, etc.), but rather a document that gives the reader a sense of who you are and demonstrates why you want to go into medicine/dental medicine/optometry/etc.

Some excellent references:


Length:

- AMCAS provides space for approximately 5300 characters (which includes spaces and punctuation), or about one full page.
- AACOMAS provides 4500 characters (including spaces and punctuation).
- AADSAS provides space for 4500 characters (including spaces and punctuation).

Common topics in personal statements include:

- Experiences that motivated you toward your field of choice
- Influences and experiences of family and your community
- Influences of work, service, and extracurricular activities
- Long term goals and their bases in life experiences
- Personal philosophy and how it developed

Tips:

- Give yourself enough time for many revisions and rewrites over a period of time. Even after several rewrites you may still decide to change the theme and form.
- Rather than simply saying what your attributes, traits, and skills are (“telling”), aim to write so the reader comes to these conclusions based on what you have done and what you “show” in the personal statement. Crafting a strong and interesting personal statement takes thought, time, and multiple drafts.
- Utilize the resources at the Connors Writing Center located in the Dimond Library. This is not an editing service, but the staff can help you at any stage of the process: brainstorming, drafting, final read-through for clarity, conciseness, impact, etc. This works best if you come prepared with questions, concerns, or specific areas to work on. Current students can make an appointment on their website: http://www.unh.edu/writing/cwc/. Bear in mind that it may be more difficult to get an appointment at the busiest times of the semester (midterms and finals), so schedule early in advance.
• Decide what **overall idea or theme** in your personal statement will tie it all together. Having a theme helps you organize your thoughts and structure a concise and impactful statement. Identifying a theme also helps you avoid simply re-stating your resume or having a disconnected or disjointed narrative. A thematic approach helps you tie together your unique and varied experiences with an eye on the goal of being admitted to medical school and eventually becoming a physician.

• Begin with an **impactful and original first sentence** that serves to draw the reader in, but avoid being cutesy or outlandish. Consider starting out by describing an exciting incident, using a provocative quotation, relating a personal story, or discussing the event that sparked your interest in medicine. If you choose a more traditional opening paragraph, make sure it sets the theme for what will follow.

• You are writing about yourself. Use, but not overuse, the pronoun "I" and use **active verbs** rather than passive voice. **Provide examples and evidence.** Use simple sentences to make a point and avoid long, complex sentences. Avoid empty superlatives such as very and really.

• **Be concise.** Do not keep repeating the same thing over and over again in different words thinking that it will emphasize the point.

• Be absolutely certain your statement is **error-free.** Read it out loud to yourself. Have trusted friends, family, and mentors read your statement and provide feedback. Watch spelling, grammar, punctuation, and word choice.