

Writing Your Personal Statement
for Professional School

William J. Higgins





“Bad writing makes you look stupid.
Good writing covers a multitude of shortcomings.”

R. Compton, 2004



According to AMCAS,
your personal statement,

- Attaches your personality to the rest of the application,
- Clarifies how you have prepared yourself for success in medical school,
- Explains why you want to pursue a career in medicine,
- Argues why you will make a good doctor.

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It is not that difficult!

Relax. Remember the objective
and
stop over-thinking it!

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**What do I want the admissions
folks to know about me?**

**What do the admissions folks want
to know about me?**

(Same question, different sides of the conversation)

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**Why do I want to become a
physician?**

Why will I be a good one?



Let us begin writing your statement.....



Incorporate and build around the **one** or **two** themes or points you want to make.



Unite your essay and give it direction with a theme or thesis. The thesis is the main point you want to communicate.

After you have determined your theme(s), then select the anecdotes and experiences that provide the substance and proof.

Focus!

You cannot address everything

The readers want to get to know **you**, not your record!



Write about what interests you, excites you.
That's what the admissions staff wants to read.



Your statement

- Be positive and enthusiastic!
 - No downers, please
- Don't just tell a story! **S**upport, **E**valuate and **A**ssess!



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

“Start your essay with an attention-grabbing lead—an anecdote, quote, question, or engaging description of a scene.”

Maybe, but not always...

Don't include information that doesn't support your thesis.

Don't try to be a clown (but gentle humor is OK).

Don't provide a collection of generic statements and platitudes.

Don't give mealy-mouthed, weak excuses for your GPA or test scores.

You don't know much about the practice of medicine, so don't pretend you do!

End your essay with a conclusion that refers back to the lead and restates your thesis.

The essay must flow and be linear, but does not have to be a story!

I was born.....

•My additional suggestions after reading statements from > 250 IRTAs:

- Limit the emotion
- Delete one-half of your adjectives
- Add to the 'hard' facts
- Research experience is only part of your statement and life

More Suggestions:

- "I want to help people..."
- "I want to cure cancer...."
- "I want to save the medical profession..."
- Humility
- Limit the use of "passion" to twice at most!
- Controversial social issues
- Name dropping (good and bad)
- Excuses are out!
 - There is an art to explaining vs. giving an excuse.

Fatal Flaws

- Lack of substance and supportive evidence
- Whining
- Failure to address the point
- Cliché ridden
- Superficial
- Unfocused

“I look for a sustained understanding of why the candidate wants to enter medicine, how they’ve tested their interest, and how they’ve prepared for the rigors of medical school.”

“While it is not necessary to be a stellar writer in the medical profession, good writing in general conveys your intelligence and your ability to articulate your thoughts in a clear, concise, and professional manner. To that end, it is important to ensure that your personal statement flows well and doesn’t break any major grammatical rules.”

“Touch on your passion to pursue medicine. For many, medicine is akin to a calling, and the evaluator must get a sense that they are hearing and responding to the same motivation.”

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One helpful site:

http://www.amsa.org/premed/premedguide/ps
tatement.cfm

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amsa
It Takes More Than Medical School to Make a Physician

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**Personal Statements:
Completing your Medical School Application**

- What is a personal statement?
- Who reads medical school applications?
- Why do I have to write about myself?
- Getting Started
- Dealing with the Blank White Page
- Questions to Ask Yourself Before you Write
- Personal Statement Format
- Revising
- Top 10 Rules to Write By
- Mistakes to Avoid with Your Personal Statement
- General Advice From the Professionals
- Sample Successful Personal Statements

What is a personal statement?

Medical school application requires two types of personal statements. As you write these statements, remember that this is your opportunity to describe who you are, in such a way that is not possible through your hard data, such as your MCAT score, GPA and college transcript.



Welcome

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What do I write?
➔ How do I write it?

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Writing:

- Step 1: the use of an essential resource
- Step 2: the actual writing process
- Step 3: review a few simple rules
- Step 4: the proper method for editing your own work

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First, let us remember and pity
your reader.....

Step 1: *the Resource*

Strunk & White

*The Elements
of Style*



Read *The Elements of Style*
twice in the next two weeks and
then twice each year for the rest
of your life.

Step 2: *The Writing Process*

Once you have it down on paper,
it is almost too late!
You may already be toast!

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Do not sit at the keyboard and begin to think and type.

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Finding your time

- In advance of the deadline
 - You must avoid writing under stress.
- Each day as part of your routine
- Making notes
 - Not an outline!
- Use the Wall Method!
 - Do not use a written outline constructed in order in one sitting!

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Organize your ideas

Only after you are finished assembling ideas and the outline flows, do you dare begin the actual writing process.

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From this

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To this!

Then write!

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Organize your ideas

- Determine the flow
 - *Always put your Cadillacs in the front row of the lot*
- Begin to form the *story and theme*



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Check for linearity and flow!



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Focus: you cannot
address everything



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Remember

- Tell them what you are going to tell them.
- Tell them what you want to tell them.
- Tell them what you told them.



Step 3: A matter of style and grammar.



Good writing begins with strong verbs!

- ~ Always use the active voice.
- Write positive statements! Avoid the negative!
- Simple declarative sentences gives strength and structure to your writing.



A word about subject - verb relationships....

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Eliminate needless
non-~~essential~~ words!

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Higgins's list of useless phrases:

- In terms of
- The ability to
- Based on
- Studies have shown that
- The data indicate that
- By means of
- Are able to

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Higgins's list of useless phrases:

- Function by
- It is believed that
- Appear to be
- Underlie
- Is thought to be
- Interacts with
- What happened was

Higgins's list of useless phrases:

- Is involved with
- Is associated with
- Alters or changes

Correlation implies statistics.

Relationship implies love.

Punctuate your sentences correctly!

- Semicolon or comma?
- Colon?
- Dash?

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Step 4: *Editing*

Patience & Diligence

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Diligence

Begin by reading it aloud.
If you wouldn't say it in conversation,
don't write it!

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Diligence

- Underline the subject and verb in each sentence.
- Is the verb
 - in the active voice?
 - definite and strong?
 - appropriate for the subject?

Diligence: check each paragraph

- Identify the structure
- Check for the transition
- Read each one aloud
- Delete empty phrases and extra words
 - Remove one-half of your adjectives.

Diligence: threads of continuity

Documents should be linear!
Outline your document after your are
finished to be certain!

Spell check!

Edit your essay:

- Subject verb agreement
- Active voice verbs
- Definite verbs
- Avoid empty killer phrases
 - It is
- Limit your use of “passion”
- Read it aloud!
- Outline it when you are finished

The final edit by a ‘friend’

Is it clear, linear, readable, and
you?

Thank you!

Questions?

Appointments may be scheduled (for those in the NIH Summer Internship Program and Postbac IRTA program

via:

https://www.training.nih.gov/career_services/appointments
