

Your Personal Statement: *how and what to write*

William J. Higgins
Department of Biology
University of Maryland



“Bad writing makes you look
stupid.

Good writing covers a
multitude of shortcomings.”

R. Compton, 2004

What do I write?

How do I write it?

It is not that difficult!

Remember the point

and

Stop over-thinking it!

Medical School Application:

What do I say?

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.

My personal favorite site:

<http://www.amsa.org/premed/premedguide/pstatement.cfm>



It Takes More Than Medical School to Make a Physician



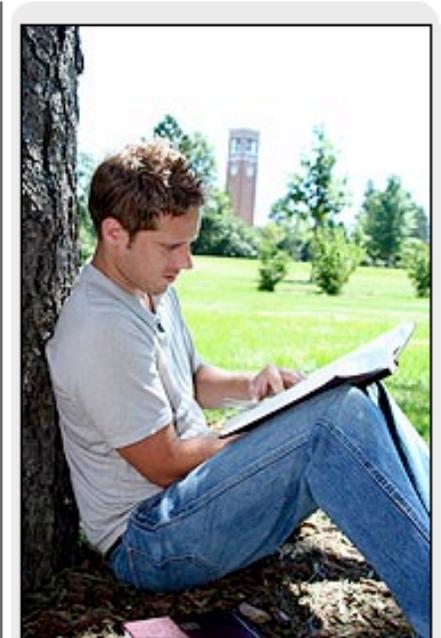
Search

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

So many others....

[Advanced Search](#)
[Preferences](#)

Web

Results 1 - 10 of about 30,100 for [amcas personal statements](#). (0.43 seconds)

[Medical School Admissions: Personal statements and application essays](#)

You're in the midst of applying to medical school, and it's time to write your **AMCAS** and non-**AMCAS personal statements**. But first, before you start filling ...

[www.accepted.com/Medical/](#) - 27k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

[Medical Section: AMCAS Essay](#)

Do's and Don'ts, Twenty succinct Do's and Don'ts for your **AMCAS** and non-**AMCAS personal statements**. Secondary Essays, Make sure your secondary essays add ...

[www.accepted.com/medical/AmcasEssay.aspx](#) - 30k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

[Medical School Personal Statement](#)

In the **AMCAS personal statement** you need to make a general sell - explain why you will make a good physician. You must tell your **personal** story in a ...

[www.studentdoc.com/medical-school-personal-statements.html](#) - 17k -

[Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

[AMCAS - Personal Statement - Student Doctor Network Wiki](#)

Jan 2, 2007 ... **AMCAS - Personal Statement**. From Student Doctor Network Wiki. With so much riding on the **personal statement**, you should be very careful in ...

[www.studentdoctor.net/wiki/index.php/AMCAS_-_Personal_Statement](#) - 20k -

[Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

[AMCAS Personal Statement : PANDA BEAR, MD](#)

(As those of you applying to medical school know, the **personal statement** on the **AMCAS** application is, at least by conventional wisdom, one of the most ...

[www.studentdoctor.net/pandabearmd/category/amcas-personal-statement/](#) - 26k -

[Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

[More results from www.studentdoctor.net »](#)

Sponsored Links

[AMCAS Essay Help](#)

Get Help From Professional Editors. Prices as Low as \$124.95!

[www.EssayEdge.com](#)

There are two questions you must remember to address when writing your personal statement.

What do the admissions folks
want to know about me?

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

Why do I want to become a
physician?

Why will I be a good
physician?

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

Your statement

- Be positive and enthusiastic!
 - No downers, please
- Don't just tell a story, evaluate and assess!

**Always answer the question or
respond to the directive!**

Support with specific abilities and skills,
e.g., leadership, communication skills,
analytical skills (research), etc.

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

I was born.....

Suggestions:

- “I want to help people...”
- “I want to cure cancer....”
- 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.

You don't know anything
about medicine, so don't
pretend you do!

Med School Admissions Articles, Advice, & Tips

[Do's and Don'ts](#)

Twenty succinct Do's and Don'ts for your AMCAS and non-AMCAS personal statements.

[Secondary Essays](#)

Make sure your secondary essays add value to your application.

[10 Secrets of Good Writing](#)

Discover the key elements to good writing and improve anything you have to put on paper.

[Non-Science Background](#)

Your non-science background can be a tremendous advantage. Guarantee that it is by answering the 3 critical questions raised in this article.

[Research Background](#)

Take advantage of your strong science background and show that you are a well-rounded human being.

[Older Applicants](#)

Learn how to profit from your maturity while making sure you answer the unasked questions about older applicants.

[Letters of Rec](#)

Ten tips for writers of letters of recommendation.

[Residency Essays](#)

Four essential elements of an outstanding residency essay.

<http://www.accepted.com/medical/AmcasEssay.aspx>

Personal Statements: The Do's:

1. Unite your essay and give it direction with a theme or thesis. The thesis is the main point you want to communicate.
2. Before you begin writing, choose what you want to discuss and the order in which you want to discuss it.
3. Use concrete examples from your life experience to support your thesis and distinguish yourself from other applicants.
4. Write about what interests you, excites you. That's what the admissions staff wants to read.
5. Start your essay with an attention-grabbing lead--an anecdote, quote, question, or engaging description of a scene.

<http://www.accepted.com/medical/dosdents.aspx>

Personal Statements: The Do's:

6. End your essay with a conclusion that refers back to the lead and restates your thesis.
7. Revise your essay at least three times.
8. In addition to your editing, ask someone else to critique your personal statement.
9. Proofread your personal statement by reading it out loud or reading it into a tape recorder and playing back the tape.
10. Write clearly, succinctly.

<http://www.accepted.com/medical/dosdents.aspx>

The Don't's

1. Don't include information that doesn't support your thesis.
2. Don't start your essay with "I was born in..." or "My parents came from..."
3. Don't write an autobiography, itinerary, or resume in prose.
4. Don't try to be a clown (but gentle humor is OK).
5. Don't be afraid to start over if the essay just isn't working or doesn't answer the essay question.

<http://www.accepted.com/medical/dosdonts.aspx>

The Don't's

6. Don't try to impress your reader with your vocabulary.
7. Don't rely exclusively on your computer to check your spelling.
8. Don't provide a collection of generic statements and platitudes.
9. Don't give mealy-mouthed, weak excuses for your GPA or test scores.
10. Don't make things up.

<http://www.accepted.com/medical/dosdonts.aspx>

Fatal Flaws

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

What is in a grad school
application essay?

Grad school statement:

- I am interested in...
 - How I got to this decision
- Summarize past research efforts
 - Identify the question or hypothesis
 - Describe how you answered or tested it
 - Where it goes next
 - Methods or technology are rarely important
 - What YOU accomplished
- Why this program
 - Drop names here

What do I write?

How do I write it?

We were taught to write

- To satisfy a page or word limit
- To evoke imagery
- On topics that are of little interest or use to us
- On topics about which we know little
- By English teachers who encourage creativity and an expanded use of vocabulary
- Without a proper writing strategy

All of these encouraged the use of flowery language, complex sentence structures, and an unfamiliar, artificial style.

**Examples of imagery that
result from such teaching
strategies**

McBride fell 12 stories, hitting the pavement like a Hefty bag filled with vegetable soup.

She had deep, throaty laugh, like that sound a dog makes just before it throws up.

Her hair glistened in the rain like a nose hair just after a sneeze.

She walked into my office like a centipede with 98 missing legs.

Good writing is important,
and many of your future
successes depend upon it.

Writing:

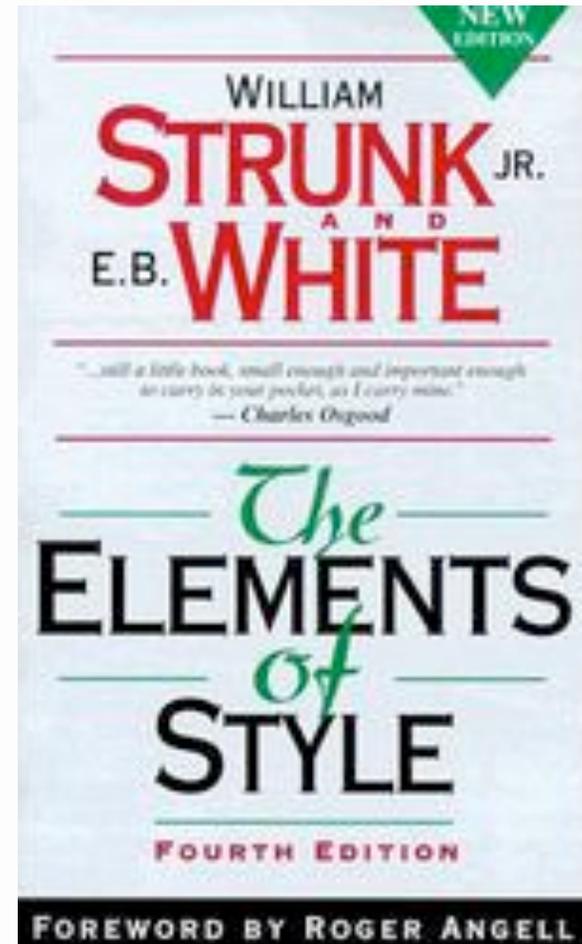
- Step 1: the use of an essential resource
- Step 2: the actual writing process
- Step 3: review a few simple rules
- Step 4: the proper method for editing your own work

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!

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!

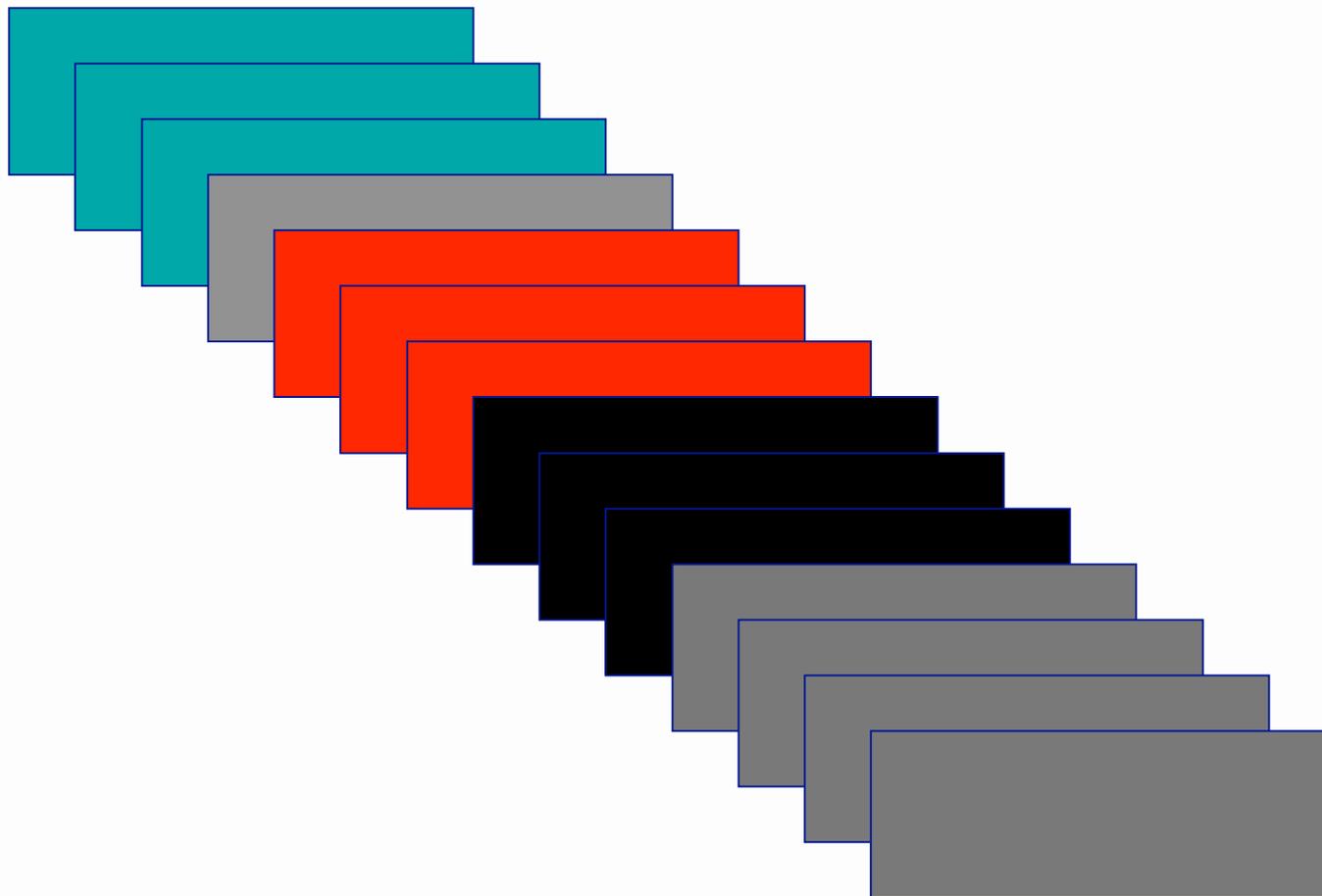
Organize your ideas

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

From this



To this!



Then write!

Organize your ideas

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

Your *Story*.....

Check for linearity!

**Focus: you cannot
address everything**

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....**

Eliminate needless
~~non-essential~~ words!

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

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?

Step 4: Editing

Patience & Diligence

Patience: you must wait two days to edit your own work.

Diligence

Begin by reading it aloud.

If you wouldn't say it in conversation, don't write it!

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 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?

higginsw@mail.nih.gov