

Writing the Medical School Personal Statement

Presented by

WCC
WRITING & COMMUNICATIONS CENTER

Personal Statement's Role

The organizations that oversee the medical school application process require a personal statement:

American Association of Medical Colleges

- Applications overseen by American Medical College Application Service (AMCAS)

American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine

- Applications overseen by American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine Application Service (AACOMAS)

Role cont.

The personal statement is not secondary to other portions of your applications, e.g. test scores, letters of reference, etc.

Many schools rely on a “holistic review” when evaluating applicants, considering the diversity of applicant experiences.

The personal statement is where this information comes through.

What it should not include:

- Generic/clichéd material

“I have always wanted to be a doctor because I like science and want to help people.”

- Redundancies

Don't just repeat material that appears in other aspects of your application; express new ideas

- Negative statements

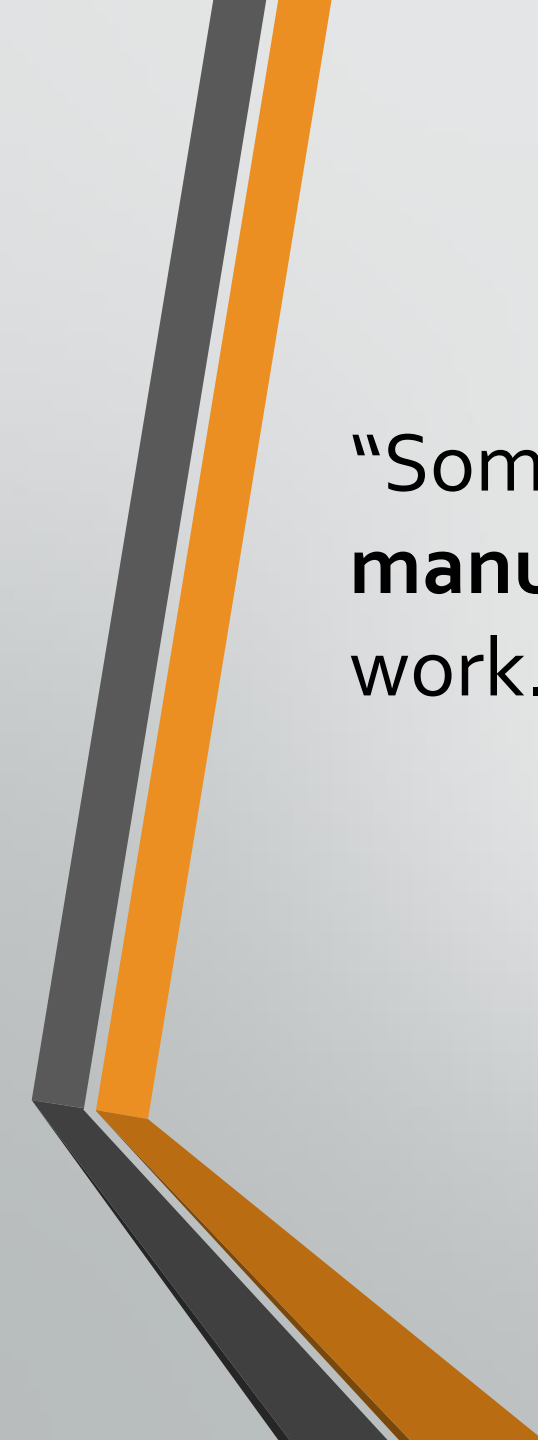
Arrogance, overly critical, etc.

- Sexist or discriminatory language

- Oversharing

What it should include:

- Insight, reflection, analysis, depth of experience and uniqueness
- Material that distinguishes yourself from other candidates
- Answers to the following questions:
 - Why do you want to go to medical school?
 - What motivates you to learn more about medicine?
 - What do you want an admissions committee to know that will not be disclosed in other aspects of your application?
- A balance between professional and personal material
- A mature recognition of difficulties



“Some students think they can use the essay **to manufacture a person who doesn’t exist.** It doesn’t work.”

Admissions Counselor

Pre-Writing Activities

A process of reflection

- Emphasize *you* and *your* experience

Goal: Build a pool of information you can draw from

- Similar to other personal statements, but with a medical slant
- What makes you unique?
- What is your academic background? Consider intellectual influences and experience with research
- Experience related to medicine, healthcare, etc.?

Free-Writing Exercise

- Who are you?
- What are your career plans?
- Where do you hope to have an impact?
- When/where/how did your interest in medicine develop? Cite specific experiences if possible.
- How have you demonstrated your interest/commitment to medicine?
- What makes you a unique candidate?

First Draft

- Don't forget that the personal statement is a persuasive genre: you are writing to persuade someone to admit you to medical school; you are making an argument
- No standard or specific structure, but similar requirements to other modes of academic writing
 - Pay attention to good writing skills, including use of the active voice, sentence structure, vocabulary, and transitions.
- Common strategies
 - Narrative approach*
 - Thematic approach*

Narrative Approach

- Tell a story about your experiences while making an argument
- Step 1: Exposition
Your story's beginning
- Step 2: Complication
How you came to be interested in medicine
- Step 3: Climax
Your most advanced thoughts and goals; your vision of your future
- Step 4: Resolution
How medical school will help you achieve your goals

Thematic Approach

- Draw from your personal experiences to craft an argument around a specific theme (e.g. a desire to provide medical care to underserved populations)
- Begin with a strong introduction that “zooms in” on your chosen theme
- Organize your argument into distinct sub-claims, each with a corresponding paragraph or section
- Find evidence to support those claims
- Formally conclude your essay by “zooming out,” explaining how medical school will help you achieve your goals

First Draft cont.

- Show, don't tell
 - Use concrete examples and personal details
 - Don't list autobiographical material: weave it into a narrative/argument (or narrative argument)
- Be aware of formal requirements, e.g. length
 - AMCAS personal statement is limited to 5,300 characters (including spaces)
 - AACOM personal statement is limited to 4,500 characters
- Be aware of submission requirements when writing
 - AMCAS requires you to input directly into their text box; copy-pasting into it can cause formatting errors
 - If you do copy-paste, do so from a program like Microsoft Notepad or Mac TextEdit

Resources

AMCAS: <https://students-residents.aamc.org/>

AAMC: <https://www.aamc.org/>

AACOM: <http://www.aacom.org/>

Students National Medical Association: <http://www.snma.org/>

Need more help?

- Come to the WCC!
- Morton 210, M-Th 9-6, F 9-4
Make appointments online
@ www.stevens.edu/wconline
- Main Hall of Library, Sun., M, & Th 3-8
Walk-in only

References

- Asher, Donald. *Graduate Admissions Essay*, 4th ed. Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2012. Print.
- Association of American Medical Colleges. "Your Path to the White Coat: 7 Tips for Writing Your AMCAS Personal Comments Essay." AAMC, 2016. Web. 11 Nov. 2016.
- ---. *2017 AMCAS Instruction Manual*. AAMC, 2016. Web. 11 Nov. 2016.