

Writing the Personal Statement

The personal statement is a one-page essay outlining your motivations, interests and strengths as they pertain to being a successful resident. Use your personal statement as an opportunity to impress the selection committee by showcasing your strengths and those qualities that set you apart from other candidates.

A well written personal statement can strengthen your application and open opportunities for you. Some application reviewers only skim through the personal statement, while others read it carefully. Since you have no way of knowing how your personal statement will be read or the weight it carries at each program, it is in your best interest to develop a high quality personal statement.

Know your audience:

You are writing for the residency program director, your interviewers and perhaps other members of the selection committee. The reviewers use the personal statement to learn more about you as an individual to help them determine if you have the qualities they are seeking in a future resident. Your personal statement will support your application if it conveys to your audience that you are a mature, thoughtful, enthusiastic, responsible, and stable individual.

In addition to using your personal statement for your residency application, supply your personal statement along with your CV to those who are writing letters of recommendation for you.

Questions to address in your personal statement:

- Why am I interested in the field I have chosen?
- What am I looking for in a residency program?
- What are my professional goals in the field I have chosen?
- Why should a residency program select me?
- What are my accomplishments that are relevant to my career?
- What contributions can I make to the specialty?
- What contributions can I make to the residency program?
- What outside interests do I have?
- How have I grown during the clinical years of my medical education? (Do not focus on pre-medical school years).

Do not feel you have to answer all of these questions in your personal statement, but be sure to strike a balance between past, present, and future as well as between professional and personal realms. Work with you advisor to make sure your personal statement is relevant to your specialty area.

Well written personal statement:

- Be sure to create a logical flow in your personal statement. Do not jump from one topic to another. Include transitions between sentences and paragraphs.
- Create a strong structure with each paragraph focused on a central idea.
- Be concise and direct in your writing.
- Check for spelling and grammatical errors.
- Do not use clichés, tired analogies or metaphors.
- Vary your sentence structure. Do not begin every sentence with “I.”
- Back up descriptive comments about yourself with specific examples.
- Do not exaggerate; for example you should not overstate your role in a research project. Do not lie in your personal statement.
- Make sure your personal statement is distinct from your CV; the two should not be similar. You can use your personal statement to expand on something if it will add to your attractiveness as a candidate. Be sure to include information that is relevant to the specialty for which you are applying.
- Begin and end the statement in a strong, positive and engaging manner.
- A statement should emit confidence and self-worth, not arrogance.
- Your tone of voice should be personable yet professional.
- If you feel you need to discuss serious weaknesses in your application, handle them carefully, quickly and positively.
- Stay away from financial and lifestyle reasons for choosing a specialty.

Avoid Taboo Topics

- Religion
- Political Beliefs
- Romantic Relationships
- Opinions about sex, abortion or other political issues

Getting Started on Your Personal Statement

- Begin by brainstorming answers to all of the questions to be addressed in a personal statement. Don't censor yourself – write out everything you think of as an answer to the questions.
- Identify which of your answers are most relevant or most important to your personal statement. Be sure to include what interests you the most, what excites you.
- Once you know what is most important for your personal statement, identify the theme or thesis of your personal statement. Write an outline for your personal statement based on this thesis. The thesis will unite your answers and give you direction.
- Write your personal statement. Rewrite your personal statement. Write your personal statement a third time. Be sure your writing is clear and succinct.
- Have others proofread your statement for clarity, grammar and spelling. Have your advisor read your statement for feedback regarding the content.