

OLYMPIADS SCHOOL/IB/TOPS/MACS/HANDOUT 23

PART 1: PERSONAL ESSAY WRITING

Again, even though we are applying to junior high schools, it is good idea to read about and learn from college application processes. Doing so will add a level of maturity to your own personal essay writing. Read the following 10 tips from University of Pittsburg School of Medicine.

TOP 10 MEDICAL SCHOOL PERSONAL STATEMENT WRITING TIPS

–According to Geoffrey Cook, Founder EssayEdge.com

1. **Don't Resort to Cliches.**
2. **Don't Bore the Reader. Do Be Interesting.**
3. **Do Use Personal Detail. Show, Don't Tell!**
4. **Do Be Concise. Don't Be Wordy.**
5. **Do Address Your Weaknesses. Don't Dwell on Them.**
6. **Do Vary Your Sentences and Use Transitions.**
7. **Do Use Active Voice Verbs**
8. **Do Seek Multiple Opinions.**
9. **Don't Wander. Do Stay Focused.**
10. **Do Revise, Revise, Revise.**

Read the following personal statement and answer the questions that follow.

In the sweating discomfort of the summertime heat, I walked through Philadelphia International Airport with several overweight bags, tired eyes, and a bad case of *Shigella*. Approaching Customs, I noticed the intensity and seriousness on the faces of the customs officers whose responsibility were to check passports and question passengers. As I moved closer to the front of the line, I noticed someone reading a foreign newspaper. The man was reading about the Middle Eastern conflict, a clash fueled by religious intolerance. What a sharp contrast to Ghana, I thought. I had just spent three weeks in Ghana. While there I worked, studied their religions, ate their food, traveled and contracted malaria. Despite all of Ghana's economic hardships, the blending of Christianity, Islam, and traditional religion did not affect the health of the country. When I reached the front of the line, the customs officer glanced at my backpack and with authoritative curiosity asked me, "What are you studying?" I responded in a fatigued, yet polite voice, "Religious studies with a pre-med track." Surprised, the officer replied rhetorically, "Science and religion, interesting, how does that work?" This was not the

first time I had encountered the bewildered facial expression or this doubtful rhetorical question. I took a moment to think and process the question and answered, "With balance."

Throughout my young life I have made an effort to be well-rounded, improve in all facets of my personal life, and find a balance between my personal interests and my social responsibility. In my quest to understand where I fit into society, I used service to provide a link between science and my faith. Science and religion are fundamentally different; science is governed by the ability to provide evidence to prove the truth while religion's truth is grounded on the concept of faith. Physicians are constantly balancing the reality of a person's humanity and the illness in which they are caring for. The physicians I have found to be most memorable and effective were those who were equally as sensitive and perceptive of my spirits as they were of my symptoms. Therefore, my desire to become a physician has always been validated, not contradicted by my belief system.

In serving, a person must sacrifice and give altruistically. When one serves they sacrifice their self for others benefit. Being a servant is characterized by leading by example and striving to be an advocate for equity. As a seventh grade math and science teacher in the Philadelphia public school system, everyday is about sacrifice and service. I sacrifice my time before, during and after-school; tutoring, mentoring and coaching my students. I serve with vigor and purpose so that my students can have opportunities that many students from similar backgrounds do not have. However, without a balance my effectiveness as a teacher is compromised. In February, I was hospitalized twice for a series of asthma attacks. Although I had been diagnosed with asthma, I had not had an attack since I was in middle school. Consequently, the physicians attributed my attacks to high stress, lack of sleep, and poor eating habits. It had become clear to me that my unrelenting drive to provide my students with a sound math and science education without properly balancing teaching and my personal life negatively impacted my ability to serve my students. I believe this experience taught me a lesson that will prove to be invaluable as a physician. Establishing an equilibrium between my service and my personal life as a physician will allow me to remain connected to the human experience; thus enabling me to serve my patients with more compassion and effectiveness.

Throughout my travels and experiences I have seen the unfortunate consequences of not having equitable, quality health care both domestically and abroad. While many take having good health for granted, the financial, emotional, mental, and physical effects illnesses have on individuals and families can have a profound affect on them and the greater society. Illness marks a point in many people's lives where they are most vulnerable, thus making a patient's faith and health care providers vital to their healing process. My pursuit to blend the roles of science and religion formulate my firm belief that health care providers are caretakers of God's children and have a responsibility to all of humanity. Nevertheless, I realize my effectiveness and success as a physician will be predicated mostly on my ability to harmonize my ambition with my purpose. Therefore, I will always answer bewildered looks with the assurance that my faith and my abilities will allow me to serve my patients and achieve what I have always strived for and firmly believe in, balance.

1. How does the applicant begin her personal essay? Is it effective? Explain.

2. Why does the applicant describe a man reading about the Middle Eastern conflict in a foreign paper? Is she digressing, or does the “digression” serve a purpose?

3. The applicant writes that, throughout her young life, she has made an effort to be well-rounded. How does she show (rather than tell) this?

4. How does the applicant attempt to bridge science and religion? Are there *apparently* oppositional interests in your life? How would you reconcile them?

5. The applicant mentions that she strives to be an “advocate for equity.” In your own life, do you advocate for something? Are you interested in advocating for a cause?

6. What are some strengths and areas for improvement in the personal essay?

PART 2: RESPONDING TO GENERAL ESSAY PROMPTS

Again, even though we are applying to junior high school programs, we can learn a lot from college application processes. Read the following page from the University of Chicago website. How would you respond to the extended essay questions?

The University of Chicago has long been renowned for its provocative essay questions. We think of them as an opportunity for students to tell us about themselves, their tastes, and their ambitions. They can be approached with utter seriousness, complete fancy, or something in between.

Each year we email newly admitted and current College students and ask them for essay topics. We receive several hundred responses, many of which are eloquent, intriguing, or downright wacky.

As you can see by the attributions, some of the questions below were inspired by submissions by your peers.

Question 1 (Required):

How does the University of Chicago, as you know it now, satisfy your desire for a particular kind of learning, community, and future? Please address with some specificity your own wishes and how they relate to UChicago.

Question 2 (Optional):

Share with us a few of your favorite books, poems, authors, films, plays, pieces of music, musicians, performers, paintings, artists, blogs, magazines, or newspapers. Feel free to touch on one, some, or all of the categories listed, or add a category of your own.

Extended Essay Questions:
(Required; Choose one)

Essay Option 1.

Orange is the new black, fifty's the new thirty, comedy is the new rock 'n' roll, ____ is the new _____. What's in, what's out, and why is it being replaced?
—Inspired by Payton Weidenbacher, Class of 2015

Essay Option 2.

"I learned to make my mind large, as the universe is large, so that there is room for paradoxes." —Maxine Hong Kingston. What paradoxes do you live with?

—Inspired by Danna Shen, Class of 2019

Essay Option 3.

Joan of Arkansas. Queen Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Babe Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Mash up a historical figure with a new time period, environment, location, or occupation, and tell us their story.

—Inspired by Drew Donaldson, Class of 2016

Essay Option 4.

"Art is either plagiarism or revolution." —Paul Gauguin. What is your "art"? Is it plagiarism or revolution?

—Inspired by Kaitlyn Shen, Class of 2018.

Essay Option 5.

Perhceseras say it's siltl plisbsoe to raed txet wth olny the frist and lsat ltteres in palce. This is beaucse the hamun mnid can fnid oderr in dorsdier. Give us your best example of finding order in disorder. (For your reader's sake, please use full sentences with conventional spelling).

—Also inspired by Payton Weidenbacher, Class of 2015. Payton is extra-inspirational this year!

Essay Option 6.

In the spirit of adventurous inquiry, pose a question of your own. If your prompt is original and thoughtful, then you should have little trouble writing a great essay. Draw on your best qualities as a writer, thinker, visionary, social critic, sage, citizen of the world, or future citizen of the University of Chicago; take a little risk, and have fun.

Essay Option 7.

In the spirit of historically adventurous inquiry, to celebrate the University of Chicago's 125th anniversary, please feel free to select from any of our [past essay questions](#).

THE END