

# Personal Statement Packet



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# Writing your Personal Statement for Medical/Dental School

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Personal statements are often called “application essays” or “statements of purpose.” They are an essential part of the application process for medical, dental and other health professional schools. The statements are closely evaluated by admissions officers. It is the first opportunity for the applicant to provide the admissions officer with subjective information about their qualifications and suitability for a career in the health industry.

There are generally very few, if any, instructions given for the style and content of the essay. It should be thought of as an opportunity to allow admissions committees to hear your voice. You should make your statement engaging to the reader and attempt to demonstrate how you are unique and qualified. In other words, tell your story in a polished, engaging way. It should be written in your own words and be realistic.

The personal statement should be reflective, demonstrating that you have thought about and have a clear perspective of what health professional school entails. Keep in mind that admissions committees will read hundreds of personal statements; you should write in a way that attracts their attention and keeps them interested in what you have to say. Instead of a “laundry list” of events and experiences, admissions committees are much more interested in what you have gained from these experiences and how they have affected you. Don’t just tell them your experience but also include why they matter and what impact they had on you.

The admission essay must be clear and concise. You are generally limited to 1- 1 1/2 pages.

AMCAS= 5300 characters

AACOMAS= 3000 characters

AADSAS= 4500 Characters

TMDSAS= 4960 {62 lines of 80 characters}

Therefore, you must make your point quickly and effectively. You must be well organized and prioritize what you feel is most important for the admissions committee to know about you. You should try to engage the reader in the first paragraph by building a thesis and then argue this thesis throughout the essay. Each piece of information you give throughout the essay should somehow build on your original thesis.

Most experts suggest that you make a list of everything that you want the reader to know about you. This may include personal qualities, experiences that you have had, accomplishments, or contributions you have made. Once you have listed these items, try to organize them in coherent groups that fit together. You will then need to prioritize. You have limited space, so try to determine what you feel is the most compelling information about you. Pick two or three main topics to talk about and build on these throughout the essay. Your first paragraph is the most important, so spend time trying to develop this portion into an attention grabbing “hook” that will make the reader want to continue reading as you build on your chosen topics. If you edit, don’t cut the information that paints the picture for the reader. Be descriptive and engaging without cutting the details that describe you and your experiences.

Proof read your statement frequently. Make sure to have friends and family read your statement for content as well as spelling and grammar. Career Services can also assist with edits and composition. Their advice should be paramount to making a final draft. You can schedule an appointment online at [cascareers.okstate.edu](http://cascareers.okstate.edu) or visit 213 Life Science East.

## DO:

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**Make your essay personal.** It is called a “personal” statement. The essay should sound like you and reflect your personality. Copying a friend’s essay or using a website template will not really “fit” you.

**Organize your statement.** Many use a chronological format. If you do this, maintain it throughout. . Many essays use chronology of life events, important activities, influential people or recurring themes from your life.

**Use real life stories.** It is better to “show” rather than “tell”. “Real life” examples not only make the essay more interesting and easy to read, but also humanize you and make you memorable to the reader.

**Write with feeling!** Admissions committees are looking for a passion for the profession. One way to convey passion is to talk about feelings. It’s not just the facts about your path to an education; it’s about demonstrating why you choose this path and how it fits your personality, skills, interests and goals.

**Go deep.** What is it about the profession that excites you? What can you do as a member of this profession that you could not do in other professions? How does this profession represent your passion?

**Explain weaknesses.** Take responsibility for your decisions, especially regarding the use of your time. Do not try to hide, make excuses for, or lie about weaknesses or failures. However, try to frame them in ways that indicate how you have overcome them or learned from them. Be honest and confident in your statements.

**Use everyday words.** Rather than show off your vocabulary of obscure words, use a variety of appropriate words. The reader should not have to look for a dictionary. It is important to show that you can communicate clearly with people from a variety of backgrounds.

**Constructively fill the space provided.** You should not use fluff to fill space. Be concise with wording.

**Avoid criticizing health professionals.** Arguing that you want to be a doctor/dentist because you think you can do a better job than some you have seen sets a negative tone and leads to defensive reactions. Saying one health role is more important than another health role makes you sound judgmental or egotistical.

**Avoid overusing the pronoun “I”.** Vary structure, especially at the beginning of sentences. Instead of “I learned by working in a hospital...” try “Working in a hospital taught me...”

**Vary your sentence structure to keep the reader interested.** Avoid a series of sentence or paragraphs beginning with “I” or using the word “I” too often. Give your essay the “I” test. Count the number of times you use the pronoun “I”. Try to think of other ways to express the idea you are expressing without using “I”.

**Have readers review your statement.** Make sure your essay is absolutely perfect in spelling, grammar, and mechanics. Proofread over and over! Have friends, parents, advisors, and career services review your statement.

## DON’T:

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**Write what you think the admissions committee “wants to hear”.** You are probably wrong and everyone else is probably doing the same thing. You do not want to blend into the crowd.

**Use overly sentimental, flowery terms or clichés.** Examples: “I am a people person”, “I have wanted to be a doctor my whole life”, “It was then I knew everything would be OK”, “I love to help people”.

**Repeat information directly contained within the application itself.** The reader already knows your major, grade point average, etc. Information should be repeated only for further elaboration of your chosen thesis.

**Try to be too funny.** The reader may not get the joke. Humor is often hard to convey when someone does not know your sense of humor or personality. It could be misinterpreted.

(Adapted from Paul Crosby “Writing Personal Statements’ retrieved Feb. 21, 2007 from the University of Kansas Premedical Advising website: <http://www.medadvising.ku.edu/essaytips.shtml>)

## Building Content for Your Personal Statement

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### 1. Who are you?

- Who are the most influential people in your life?
- How have you changed over time?
- What were the most important events in your life?
- What are your core values? Why are they important to you?
- How are you different from other applicants?
- How do you demonstrate: work ethic, communication skills, time management, leadership qualities?
- How have you been involved in your community, campus?
- How have you shown ability to live/work with other cultures?

### 2. How have you prepared for the health professions?

- How did you decide to become a doctor/dentist/optometrist?
- How have you demonstrated passion for the profession?
- How have you worked with patients and health professionals?
- How have you been involved in science research?
- How would working in the health professions make you feel?
- Do you intend to serve an underserved population or community?
- What have you learned from a health care professional or health environment?
- What are your professional goals?

### 3. How do you explain difficulties in your application?

- If you are reapplying, what have you done since last application?
- Why are there gaps in your academic and work records?
- Why have there been changes in your academic performance?
- Why do you have so many “W” grades on your transcript?
- Why the inconsistencies between academic record and test scores?

### 4. Adding reflection

- How did the experience make you feel?
- What impact did the person/situation have on you (short and/or long term)?
- What did you learn or think about for the first time after the experience?
- What made this experience significant to you?
- How did the experience change you, help you grow, or make you think differently?
- How did the experience help you evaluate your fit within healthcare?

## Evaluating Your Content

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### Content

Are you answering the actual question given in the prompt?

Is your essay within the word limit?

Will your reader find the essay interesting?

Does your introduction grab the reader's attention?

Will your essay help you stand out and let the reader get to know you well?

### Structure

Do your paragraphs flow smoothly?

Have you written insightful transitions and reflections that highlight your key themes?

Have you varied your sentence constructions?

Are your stories well integrated into your essay?

## Building an Outline

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I. Intro Topic(s):

A.

B.

C.

Thesis:

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II. Body Paragraph Topic:

A.

1.

2.

B.

1.

2.

C.

1.

2.

III. Body Paragraph Topic:

A.

1.

2.

B.

1.

2.

C.

1.

2.

IV. Body Paragraph Topic:

A.

1.

2.

B.

1.

2.

C.

1.

2.

V. Conclusion:

A.

B.

C.

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graph TD; A([People, events, situations and education that influenced my decision to work in health care]) --- B[ ]; A --- C[ ]; A --- D[ ]; A --- E[ ]; A --- F[ ]; A --- G[ ]
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**People, events, situations and education that influenced my decision to work in health care**