

Approaching the Personal Statement

Overview

The personal statement is a truthful but curated narrative unique to your journey in life as to why you want to go into a particular health career (*e.g.*, medical doctor) and what makes you a good candidate for admission. It is also an example of your written communication skills. Give yourself time to write a strong cohesive narrative of several months. We suggest a couple months of self-reflection and assessment followed by multiple months to write including multiple drafts of revision, editing, and refinement with multiple people providing feedback throughout.

While your statement should be consistent with the rest of your materials, it shouldn't be a rehash of your resume, transcript, and other sections of your application. With your statement, you should be amplifying and augmenting the rest of your application. Your statement should convey to programs with evidence that you have thought deeply about your future career, are passionate and dedicated to the career, and are making an informed decision, while highlighting the key strengths you are bringing to their program by showing and not simply telling.

For example, if you are good listener convey that through a key moment in your life where your listening skills resulted in a positive outcome for another person (showing through evidence) rather than stating you are a good listener (telling). Such an anecdote also highlights that you are empathetic and care for others.

Remember the members of the application committees are busy people who will be reading numerous applications and essays. Your statement needs to stand out and to be clear and concise. Like any narrative, it needs to bring the reader in and be well written. The limits are as follows:

- AMCAS - 5,300 characters
- AACOMAS -5,300 characters
- AADSAS - 4,500 characters
- VMCAS – 5,000 characters

In terms of pages, 5,300 characters is about 1.5 pages with Times New Roman font, single-spaced. You will need to be economical with the writing of your final draft. In that final version, every word and sentence need to be there; you shouldn't have any extra words or phrasing.

In terms of structure, you will want to have an introductory paragraph that captures the attention of the readers (*i.e.*, the admissions committee) with the central theme of your statement. It can be a key experience or anecdote that highlights why you want to be a medical professional. The body of the statement will be focus on the 3-4 key experiences that highlight your desire to study in the field, future plans, and the strengths you will be bringing to the profession. The structure and number of paragraphs will vary from person to person in keeping with the unique and personal nature of the statement. The final paragraph should summarize the rest of the statement, tying back into the introduction, to make it clear why you want the career and your future goals. The entire statement should flow together as one cohesive narrative.

Remember you want to capture your compassion for others and desire/passion to help them

through health care (in particular in your desired career where you will interact with your patients and their loved ones), your academic strengths and intellectual curiosity, your dedication and discipline, your resilience and adaptability, and your interpersonal and professional skills.

Preparation to Write (The Summer-Fall before you apply, two years before you plan to attend)

- Review what is a [personal statement and example statements on the HPAC page](#) as well as additional resources available. However, realize there isn't a single template for writing a personal statement as the statement should fit who you are and your unique journey of maturation and development.
- Reflect on why you want to become a particular health care professional (*e.g.*, medical doctor, dentist, veterinarian, physician assistant, etc.). As you do, consider the following:
 - What motivates you to work in health care and this particular career?
 - What draws you to or excites you about the particular career?
 - Why not a different career in health care (*e.g.*, medical doctor vs. nurse practitioner vs. physician assistant)? It is helpful to review the [HPAC Exploring Health Professions](#) page.
 - What competencies and skills do you need for that career?
 - What competencies and skills do you have?
 - What strengths do you have, especially as it pertains to your application? What areas for improvement do you have, especially as it pertains to your application?
 - Looking back, what has led you to the point where you are applying to medical school?
 - What life experiences or key moments inform your decision?
 - What academic, volunteer, and work experiences inform your decision?
 - Who were key people along the way that motivated you? Why were they key?
 - What challenges did you have along the way?
 - Why did you keep going?
 - How did you overcome the challenges?
 - What did you learn from those challenging experiences?
 - Are there anecdotes from those experiences and interactions with others that would help summarize your journey, motivation, and development?
- Complete the HPAC Competencies and Experience Worksheet. The Worksheet is a way for you to catalog for HPAC the key academic, volunteer, and work experiences you have had and connect them to the competencies that programs are looking for. Completing the worksheet thus helps you to prepare to write and revise your personal statement. For medical school applications through AMCAS, they will ask for up to 15 experiences to highlight your work experience, extracurricular activities, awards, honors, and publications. You will have up to 700 characters for each experience to describe them. You may identify up to three of the experiences as the most meaningful with an additional 1325 characters total to explain why they are. The HPAC Competencies and Experience Worksheet provides the starting point for writing those sections of your application. For

your application, the AMCAS experiences and your personal statement should augment and amplify one another and not simply repeat information.

Starting to Write Your Statement (Late Fall/Early Winter before you apply)

- Review your experience and reflections.
- Identify what you value most about your health career of interest, the key experiences that provide evidence, and the three to four strengths you want to highlight to the admissions committee.
- Outline your initial statement (doesn't need to be perfect, goal is to start)
- Write the body of your initial draft of your statement followed by the conclusion and introduction.
- Remember at this stage you want to get ideas on the page. The process of writing is one of inquiry and learning. By starting to write, you will develop new ideas.
- Look at the experiences, strengths, and order presented.
- Do different experiences and strengths need to be highlighted?
- Does the order make sense or would rearranging work better?
- Revise your statement multiple times.
- Have others read your draft to provide feedback on the overall narrative and experiences used.
- Continue to revise.
- Meet with Rachel Chase in the Career Development Center and your HPAC advisor to have them read over a draft of your statement to provide feedback.

Refining Statement (Late Winter/Spring before you apply)

- Continue to refine statement to make it clear and concise with a cohesive narrative.
- Continue to solicit and incorporate.
- Have your HPAC advisor read your revised statement to provide feedback along with Rachel Chase in the Career Development Center.
- Proofread statement and repeat.
- Have someone edit your work and refine accordingly.
- Proofread again ahead of submitting to HPAC in early April. Incorporate feedback from your May interview with HPAC.
- Refine your statement as needed.
- Proofread your statement three more times at least before submitting.

Common Errors to Avoid

- Do not rehash your resume/CV and transcripts – The admissions committee already has that information. You are providing them with additional evidence through your cohesive narrative.
Do not embellish or fabricate your stories – You need to be truthful throughout your statement. Anything untruthful would be grounds to revoke inviting you for an interview, your application, and your acceptance.
- Do not go over the character limit – You will have to edit on the fly and your submitted statement won't be as eloquent as desired.

- Do not go significantly below the character limit – If you are under the limit, you likely could have added evidence to strengthen your statement.
- Do not explain health professions to health professionals (e.g., do not tell a medical doctor what medicine is all about) – The admissions committee knows the field and don't need to be told by you.
- Do not disparage health care professionals, patients, professors, or others – It comes across as unprofessional.
- Do not use cliches and generic statements (e.g., I love science, I like helping people) – You want the focus on your maturation and development with evidence, your unique story and motivation, and not statements are true of people in many different professions both in and out of health care.
- Do not overuse the word I – It can come across as arrogant and typically means you are stating accomplishments rather than telling a narrative. Remember with your statement you want to show with evidence and not tell the admissions committee.
- Do not wait to the last minute – The statement requires self-reflection and assessment, which takes times. Good writing is rewriting. You need to give yourself time to explore through writing and to sufficiently go through multiple rounds of revision, feedback, editing, and refinement.
- Do not ask or beg for an interview or to be accepted – It comes across as unprofessional. In addition, it takes space away from the evidence that gets you an interview and accepted.
- Do not have spelling and grammar errors in your submitted statement – Attention to detail is important in health care. Do not give admissions committees the impression that you don't pay attention to details. Also, the statement is a means for you to demonstrate your writing skills.