Writing Your Personal Statement for Health Professional School

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Overview

• Specific Requirements

• Purpose of the Personal Statement

• Getting Started

• During the Writing Process

• Brainstorming Exercise
Know “The Rules”

- Character limitations?
- Formatting?
- Specific prompt?
- Edit after submission?
- What if reapplying?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AMCAS</th>
<th>PTCAS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• 5,300 characters</td>
<td>• 4,500 characters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Most meaningful experience</td>
<td>• Specific Prompt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No specific prompt</td>
<td>➢ 2014: APTA's vision for physical therapy is “Transforming society by optimizing movement to improve the human experience.” How will you embody this vision as a future physical therapist?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• MD/PhD</td>
<td>➢ 2013: Describe your decision making process in choosing physical therapy as a career choice versus other health care careers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ 2 additional essays</td>
<td></td>
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Common Restrictions/Requirements

• Formatting
  - Some formatting will not display properly (such as **BOLD**, *underline*, and *italics*)

• No editing after submission
  - No spell check in the application
  - Proof read carefully before you submit…and then proof read it again

• Reapplying?
  - **Yes**, you will need to overhaul your essay
Secondary Essays

• Know your deadlines

• Generally specific to the program

• Examples:
  ➢ What is your specific interest in the MD Program at GW? What opportunities would you take advantage of as a student here? Why? (2000 characters) – GW Med School secondary
  ➢ Essay should describe an experience where you encountered an obstacle and how you approached the situation. What about your approach worked well and what do you wish you would have done differently? – UW OT program secondary
What Are “They” Looking For?

(They = admissions staff, faculty, students, alumni)

• Effective communication skills
• Motivation
• Understanding
• “Show, don’t tell”
• Personal qualities
• What isn’t in your application? (and what is?)
Getting Started – Brainstorming

Re-examine and reflect on purpose of writing the personal statement
• Why I am writing this personal statement?
• Who will be reading this?
• What do I want them to know about me, as it pertains to my candidacy for admission?

Begin to collect your thoughts – what do I want to include?

Perform a self-inventory of your relevant experiences, influences, and attributes

• About me – what do I tell, and what do I not tell?
• Qualifications and Relevant Experiences (e.g., education, internships, jobs, volunteering, research, shadowing, informational interviewing, study abroad, honors and awards)
• Why am I applying to this specific school/program?
• What are my post-graduation plans?
• What applicable personal qualities and attributes should they know about me?
• Why would I make an excellent candidate for their program?
Brainstorming

Long & Short-Term Goals

• Are there any specific faculty members at this academic institution whose work interests you? With whom would you most like to study?

• What specifically do you hope to gain from the academic program to which you are applying?

• What are your career aspirations, and how can this academic program help you to reach them?

• What is your dream job? What would you ideally like to be doing in 5 years? 10? 20?
Brainstorming – Skills & Characteristics

• This is an area where it is far better to *show* the reader how you embody these qualities, rather than simply *tell* them that you possess them.

• You need to make *strong connections* between your experiences and the qualities you wish to convey.

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• Seriousness of Purpose
• Intellectual Ability
• Intellectual Curiosity
• Creativity
• Open-Mindedness
• Maturity & Confidence
• Concern/Compassion for Others
• Initiative
• Organization

• Sense of Humor
• Diligence/Persistence
• Leadership & Entrepreneurship
• Team Player
• Risk Taking
• Insight
• Optimism
• Compromise
• Adaptability / Overcoming Adversity
Brainstorming – Skills & Qualities

• Why are you a stronger candidate for graduate school than other applicants?

• What do you have to offer the school—to your fellow students, to the faculty, to the broader community?

• Why do you think you will succeed in this academic program?

• What are the most compelling reasons you can give for the admissions committee to be interested in you?

• Why do you think you will be successful in your chosen career?
Brainstorming – Accomplishments (Personal)

- What's special, unique, distinctive, or impressive about you or your life story? What details of your life might help the committee better understand you or help set you apart from other applicants?

- Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacles or hardships (e.g., economic, familial, physical) in your life?

- Have you bore significant care-giving responsibilities for family members? How has this impacted you?

- If work experiences have consumed significant periods of time during college, what have you learned (e.g., leadership or managerial skills), and how has the work contributed to your personal growth?
Brainstorming – Accomplishments (Academic)

• When did you originally become interested in this field?

• What have you since learned about the field (through classes, readings, seminars, work or other experiences, or conversations with people already in the field)—and about yourself—that has further stimulated your interest and reinforced your belief that you are well suited to this field?

• What is one or two areas where you feel you have excelled, or have gone significantly above what was required of you academically (e.g. class project, report, research project)?

• Can you recall a specific incident that convinced you that you had chosen the right career path?
Taking Notes – Document

Start with draft “master” or “overall” statement of purpose

• This draft will include a rough outline of all materials you wish to include

• You may or may not use all of this in your statement, the goal here is to begin with a broad, encompassing starting point that includes any possible items you wish to include

• Do not worry too much about grammar, spelling, or format for now, just get the ideas on the paper
Taking Notes – Document

Draft “master” or “overall” statement of purpose

• **Step 1**: Write down any potential items you think may be worth including in the statement; and, make sure to document any future events or activities as they take place.

• **Step 2**: Organize “like” or related items together in this list.

• **Step 3**: Begin to prioritize or rank items you feel most important that closely relate to 1) the program you are applying to, and 2) your intent and goals for the statement of purpose.

• **Step 4**: Begin to formulate and expand on these prioritized points into language that you may use in the actual personal statement essay.
Consult Friends, Relatives, Colleagues, Medical/Healthcare Professionals & Professors for Ideas

Often others can see us differently than we see ourselves. You may be overlooking some aspect of your personality or qualifications that might be obvious to others who know you well.

Preparatory Questionnaire

I am applying to _________ and must prepare a personal statement as a part of that process. I want to be sure to include all relevant information about myself and my background, so I am seeking feedback from individuals who know me and whose judgment I value. Thank you for your help.

• 1. What do you think is most important for the admissions committee to know about me?
• 2. What do you regard as most distinctive, unique, and/or impressive about me?
• 3. Are there any special qualities or skills that I possess that tend to make you think I would be successful in graduate school and in my chosen field?
Identifying your Theme

• What do you want the overall theme, message, or takeaway from your statement of purpose to be?

• Again, reflect back on your interests, values, and goals, as they should form the basis, or foundation of your theme.

• Does your statement tell a story?

• Does your statement flow well, is it easy to read, intuitive to decipher, etc.?
Identifying your Theme

• How do you want to start the letter? End the letter? Do these two connect, or come full circle?

• Does your theme tie into the mission or culture of the program you are applying to?

• It’s okay to ask around and look online for ideas, but make sure the statement of purpose is in your own voice, not someone else

• Authentic and Honest
Creating a Draft: Things to Consider

Focus
• What is the prompt asking me to address?
• What experiences am I going to describe?
• What points am I going to address?

Organization
• Order and progression of ideas
• Paragraph focus and length

Examples, Experiences, Explanations
• Be specific and detailed.
• Explain why the examples or experiences you include are significant.
Creating a Draft: Introductions

What should I start with?

- A personal experience
- An example/story that has inspired you
- An interesting explanation that addresses an aspect of the prompt
Creating a Draft

Examples:

“The AIDS hospice reeked from disease and neglect. On my first day there, after an hour of "training," I met Paul, a tall, emaciated, forty-year-old AIDS victim who was recovering from a stroke that had severely affected his speech.”

“On the first day that I walked into the Church Nursing Home, I was unsure of what to expect. A jumble of questions ran through my mind simultaneously: Is this the right job for me? Will I be capable of aiding the elderly residents? Will I enjoy what I do?”
Creating a Draft: Conclusions

How should I end my personal statement?

With a sentence or two that...

- Wraps up the points you’ve discussed and doesn’t leave readers with a “cliffhanger ending”
- Refers to the experiences you’ve described
- Addresses or reiterates what you have taken from these experiences
- Addresses or reiterates your interest in the profession
Creating a Draft

Conclusion example:

“Yes, medicine involves problem solving and analysis of symptoms as I learned at the Family Clinic. And yes, medicine frequently involves clinical approximation as Dr. Nelson taught me. But more than any of the above, as I learned at the AIDS hospice, medicine requires compassion and caring — and sometimes a Big Mac.”
Creating a Draft

Conclusion example:

“Travel has not only had a formative and decisive impact on my decision to pursue a career in medicine; it has also broadened my horizons -- whether in a prosperous city on the Rhine or an impoverished village on the Nile. In dealing with patients or addressing research puzzles, I intend to bring the inquiring mind fostered in school, lab, and volunteer experiences. But above all, I intend to bring the open mind formed through travel.”
Revising and Editing

• Re-read the prompt instructions and make sure you have addressed everything that it’s asking for.

• Ask others for feedback:
  o What are the strongest parts of my personal statement?
  o Was anything confusing?
  o Are there any sentences that seem unnecessary?
  o Are there any places where more detail or explanation would make my personal statement stronger?
  o Was it easy to follow?
  o Did it flow smoothly?

• Proof-read for spelling/grammar/punctuation errors.
Brainstorm - Writing Your Statement

Style

• Consider your audience
• Own voice
• Active voice – not passive verbs
• Syntax – clear, organized and specific
• Consider your field
• Good transitions – flow
• Use good quality examples, not generalities
• Conclusion – persuasive essay
Personal Statement Examples
Dos and Don'ts
As the time approached for me to set my personal and professional goals, I made a conscientious decision to enter a field which would provide me with a sense of achievement and, at the same time, produce a positive impact on mankind. It became apparent to me that the practice of medicine would fulfill these objectives.

In retrospect, my ever-growing commitment to medicine has been crystallizing for years. My intense interest in social issues, education, and athletics seems particularly appropriate to this field and has prepared me well for such a critical choice...

I’ve been asked many times why I wish to become a physician. Upon considerable reflection, the thought of possessing the ability to help others provides me with tremendous internal gratification and offers the feeling that my life’s efforts have been focused in a positive direction. Becoming a physician is the culmination of a lifelong dream; and I am prepared to dedicate myself, as I have in the past, to achieving this goal.
I have taken the liberty of enclosing my CV for your review. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

I lately realized that I have been missing my calling in life. I am a very caring person with the desire to build effective relationships with patients. This is why I would love to pursue a career as in health care admin. I have over 7 years of successful sales and marketing experience.

I offer you the following:
• A strong communicator; excellent people skills
• A professional demeanor
• Enthusiasm and high energy!

I feel through my previous experiences, and appreciation for health care I would have a lot to offer the University of Iowa. I feel I am more than qualified for the graduate program in health care admin at The University of Indiana, and would appreciate the opportunity to talk with you further to see if my experiences would translate well with your schools philosophy and environment. Thanks!
EXAMPLE 3

I have shadowed a wide range of physicians: an orthopedic surgeon, a neurologist, and a large number of family physicians. Each had a different perspective on medicine. I was also able to observe physicians in small, middle, and large cities. This contrast allowed me to see the differences in doctor-patient interaction as well as the different role a physician takes on in a different setting. In addition to seeing a wide variety of clinical interaction, I was also able to see the success and the perils of the daily lives of a physician.

I spent five hours a week with a pediatric cardiothoracic surgeon. Watching open heart surgery has been my most impressive medical experience. It was so inspiring to watch the surgery team take complete control of the patient's heart during the operation. It is amazing how doctors have found a way to stop a patient's heart from beating, and reroute the blood to a machine that oxygenates it. It underscored for me the power and responsibility physicians have over their patients.
Brainstorming Exercise

MIND MAPPING
“Brain Dump”

- Did you take/are you taking any interesting classes?
- Did you have a memorable summer experience?
- What are some things you’re most proud of?
- Did you face a tough challenge?
- Did/do you have any interesting hobbies?
- How did/do you spend your free time?
- What was your favorite time in school?
Campus Resources

Career Center
www.uidaho.edu/careercenter
208-885-6121
M-F 8:00-5:00
Drop-Ins: M-F 11:00-1:00
Graduate School Application Personal Statement Resources:
http://www.uidaho.edu/careercenter/Students/4graduate-professional-school/Application%20Material

Writing Center
http://www.uidaho.edu/class/english/writingcenter
208-885-6644
M-TH 9:00-5:00, 6:00-8:00
F 9:00-4:00

Pre-Health Professions Advising
http://www.uidaho.edu/sci/pre-health
TLC 231-C
ebryant@uidaho.edu