

HEALTH PROFESSIONS OFFICE

WRITING A PERSONAL STATEMENT

You can't do anything about your grades and MCAT scores but you have complete control over your personal statement. A superb personal statement can get you an interview in spite of not having the highest grades and MCAT scores, and a weak personal statement can be an immediate ticket to a rejection. Remember, the way you present the information can tell an admissions committee a great deal about you and your personality.

There are some examples of personal statements in the Health Science Office. Do not copy these for obvious reasons and also because, since they are actual personal statements, the medical schools have copies of them. The Health Science Library has some books that contain good hints about writing personal statements and lots of examples.

Sources:

"Medical School Admission" by Mark Allen Goldstein, M.D., pp. 51-77;

"Medical School Admissions" by J. A. Zebala, D. B. Jones, and S. B. Jones, pp. 70-186).

One of the best sources is "Write for Success"; it has sample personal statements and critiques of their strong and weak points by admission officers at 3 medical schools

Here are some things to think about before you sit down to write:

1. Imagine that an interviewer has brought home 200 personal statements to read that night. The first paragraph in your personal statement must be written in a way that makes the reader want to know more about you. If it doesn't grab the reader's attention, it may cause him to skim the rest of your statement so he can get to the next one. What ever you do, do not put the reader to sleep or make him think "oh, no, not another one."
2. After the interviewer has read the 200 personal statements, you want him to remember yours. There must be something in your personal statement that makes you stand out from the crowd.
3. Use all the space they give you. Do not use a large font so they think you are filling up the page with as little effort as possible; do not use a font that is too small to read easily. Check (and recheck) grammar and spelling. Medical schools expect that you will ask others to read your statement and comment on it in its various stages. But be certain to actually write it yourself. Some medical schools have students write an essay when they come for an interview just to make certain that the student has the writing skills demonstrated in their personal statement.
4. Remember medical schools are looking for evidence that you possess the following traits: integrity, responsibility, self-discipline, concern with helping others, social maturity, motivation, curiosity, strong work ethic, common sense, breadth of interests, communication skills, and the ability to work with others.
5. Do not use the personal statement to list the things that are listed elsewhere in your application. This is the opportunity to expand on them. For example: Are any of your extracurricular activities particularly relevant. What have you learned from them? What have you learned about yourself through them?
6. You might want to give some well thought out reasons for pursuing a career in medicine using specific examples to illustrate points: When did you decide and what circumstances were involved? Any role models? How have you tested yourself in this environment? Depth and specifics of your clinical experiences. How have they affected you? What did you learn from them?

7. Turn “negatives” into “positives” by explaining what you learned from the experience.

NO: I would have made better grades during my freshman year but I had a lot of personal problems and unfair professors.

YES: My grades during my freshman year suffered as a result of my concern for my mother as she fought breast cancer. However, I gained valuable insights into my own feelings about terminal illness. I also gained a strong sense of the needs of both the patient and her family during these times.

8. Avoid generalizations that anyone can make. Make statements that only you can make.

NO: It is important for a physician to be well organized.

YES: Working full time as a secretary for a professor of mathematics while going to school has taught me to be organized and efficient.

9. Do not make statements that may antagonize the reader. Do not make critical statements about any aspects of the health profession.

NO: Unlike many physicians today, I do not plan to drive a Mercedes or set up a practice in Beverly Hills.

NO: I want to practice in a poor rural area to serve the underprivileged so I can avoid the bureaucratic paperwork required by the insurance companies.

10. Avoid being overly sentimental because the admissions committee member may be the non-sentimental type.

NO: I have wanted to be a doctor since I was eight years old and our family hamster, after eating its last meal lay dying after being run over by a car, and all I could do was stand helplessly, blinking back the tears. I know then that I wanted to do something to help those who are sick and injured animals.

11. Do not try to be overly humorous unless you can pull it off with finesse.

12. Do not use abbreviations that are particular to UCSB (Bio 199, RA, IV, etc.)

And the best advice: TAKE Writing 109HP