

THE PERSONAL STATEMENT – PREMEDICAL/PREHEALTH TRACKS

Create. Compose. Communicate.

YOUR WRITING RESOURCE

There are many ways of writing personal statements that can work well. One possibility is a narrative approach:

1. **Write four or five one-paragraph stories**, showing yourself in action, serving others and learning about your chosen profession. Stories usually include a setting, characters, an event - interaction between the characters, and synthesis - production of thoughts, feelings, values, understandings and personal development.
2. **Weave the paragraphs together**, ordering them logically and adding light transitions.
3. **And, add a brief one-paragraph conclusion**, that both reflects back - noting themes, thoughts and meaning, and points forward - toward a promising future!

Writing Tips:

- **Use your own words.** Don't derive your statement from an example on a website, and don't use quotes or clichés.
- **Show with true stories.** Rather than telling your readers you're compassionate, use a story that shows you in action, compassionately serving others.
- **Jump directly to action** - there's no need for a formal introduction.
- **Get quickly to the profession you want to enter**, no later than the second paragraph.
- **Write with feelings!** Show your passion!
- **Write meaningful stories. And, don't confuse drama with meaning.** For example, one might learn more about medicine by seeing a physician prioritize prescriptions to fit a patient's limited budget, than by watching the treatment of a patient with a dramatic emergency, like a heart attack.
- **Go deeper than wanting to help people with science.** To go beyond, it's helpful to brainstorm 20 reasons for wanting to help people, 20 reasons for appreciating science and 20 reasons for becoming this kind of professional. What can you do as a member of this profession that you cannot do in other professions?
- **Focus more on your experiential preparation, than on your personal career decision process.** What you've done is much more engaging than what you think.
- **Focus on patients**, not just procedures or illnesses. Use "person with" language - never label patients by their conditions.
- **Provide details, examples and explanations.** Name the people (except the patients) and places (towns, schools, etc.). Describe how you were involved in research projects. What you did as a health care volunteer, etc. **Who, what, when, where, how, and why.**
- **Examples first, then conclusions.** Inductive reasoning is more persuasive than deductive reasoning. If space is tight, it's usually better to give examples, and let your readers draw their own conclusions.
- **Write well, however, don't get too over-the-top creative.**
- **Think of your audience**, mostly academic (PhD) and clinical (members of the profession) faculty.

- **Don't try to impress Selection Committee Members with how much you already know about medicine.**
- **Avoid criticizing members of the profession.** Some candidates argue they want to become doctors, because they think they could do a better job than some professionals they've encountered. This may be true, but it sets a negative tone, and invites a defensive reaction.
- It's fine to include a story about an isolated illness or personal struggle, however, **please avoid listing a lot of problems and illnesses.** Frequent illnesses and personal problems aren't valid reasons for becoming a health professional, and can raise doubts about the likelihood of successfully completing a medical education.
- **Offer explanations for significant weaknesses.** Take responsibility for your decisions, especially regarding the use of your time. How have you overcome problems, and what have you learned from these experiences?
- **Show respect for research**, not just, "I tried it, and would rather work with people."
- **Keep a positive balance, tempered by realism.**
- **Keep a spirit of gratitude for the opportunities you've been given.**
- **Show integrity and consistency.**
- **Show you are a good choice for the profession**, not just you feel the profession is a good career choice for you.
- **And, end with a solid conclusion!**

Editing Tips:

- **Avoid overusing "I," "that," "have," or other words.** It's easy to fall into the trap of using too many "I's," especially at the beginning of sentences. Some strategies for reducing I's include focusing more on other people, using other personal pronouns (e.g., we), chaining (e.g., I did this. I did that. I did the other = I did this, that and the other.), and removing unnecessary double I's (e.g., I believe I want = I want).
"That's" should always be checked to see if they're grammatically necessary!
- **Use an active voice.** I have been shadowing Dr. Xavier = I shadowed Dr. Xavier.
- **It's okay to use contractions, however, keep the level of formality consistent.** If applying to schools in the northeast, you might want to write more formally.
- **Use one space between sentences, not two.**
- **Use commas after a setting in place in time, and to break out clauses in longer sentences.**
- **Do not put line breaks between paragraphs, however, don't indent your paragraphs.** Indents just waste characters.
- **"Almost all punctuation goes within quotation marks."**
- **Introduce your acronyms (IYA).**
- **Organize your statement.** Let your structure flow from the content you have chosen. Most people organize chronologically, however, don't let explaining a timeline get in the way of telling your story. There are other approaches that can work well.
- **Constructively fill most of the space you're given.** This isn't a ten-page English essay, so you don't need to fluff up your sentences, or repeat what you've already written. Keep moving forward, and usefully fill most of the space for the statement.

Adapted from the KU Undergraduate Advising Center's Premedical Advising Applicant FAQ, "How should I write the Personal Statement," <https://medadvising.ku.edu/applying-faq>

- **Have expert readers review your statement.** Have a [KU Writing Center](#) Consultant or English instructor, parent and a member of the profession review your statement.
- **Don't get too attached to your words.** Writing well involves almost as much destruction as creation.
- **Your essay will never be perfect, however, there'll come a time, usually ~July 1st, when you must let it go by submitting your application!**