

Personal Statements

These essays are a one-page clear and concise narrative about why a particular specialty interests you and how your interest for it developed. It is an opportunity for you to introduce yourself to the interviewer.

The statement often includes a description of an influential experience or of an individual who inspired your career choice. It provides an opportunity to touch on your future goals within the specialty. This is the opportunity to show your personality and style. It should include what you are looking for in a residency program and may include your career goals.

A great resource is on the AAMC's Careers in Medicine website:

<https://www.aamc.org/cim/residency/application/applying/337864/writingyourpersonalstatement.html>

Questions to ask yourself before begin writing:

1. Is there an experience that sparked your interest in this specialty?
2. Is there a mentor who influenced your decision to enter this field?
3. Did you face adversity that shaped you and your interest in medicine?
4. Is there an experience with a patient that illustrates what drew you to this specialty or describes how it is a good match for your interests?
5. Is there something about your background that shaped you as an individual and led you to medicine or this particular specialty?
6. What aspects of this specialty fascinate you?
7. Can you pick a theme or a thread that can tie your essay together so when you write your last paragraph, you can refer back to your first paragraph?
8. How have you grown?
9. What kinds of contributions to the field do you hope to make? Research, teaching, ensuring access to the underserved?

Common essay themes:

1. How adversity shaped you
2. A patient encounter to illustrate what drew you to this specialty
3. A patient encounter in which you learned something about yourself
4. Describing your background to emphasize your values and/or your specialty choice
5. Describing an influential mentor as the pathway into your specialty choice

General structure:

1. The first paragraph should introduce the reader to you (Who Am I?).

2. The second paragraph should let the reader know how you arrived at your choice of the specialty.
3. The third paragraph should confirm why you think this choice is right for you, and could include such things as research, extracurricular or work experiences that are pertinent.
4. The fourth paragraph should inform the reader what you see as your long-term goals, or how you see yourself in this specialty.

Be aware of these pitfalls:

1. Don't tell a story in which you out-performed another team member (e.g., picking up on a finding missed by a resident.) It puts you at risk for appearing boastful and not a team player.
2. Don't include a detailed description of a patient's disease. This is unnecessary and could violate HIPAA.
3. Don't include negative descriptions of other health care providers or specialties. You may risk being seen as a complainer.
4. Don't overly romanticize your specialty area. Residency directors are looking for students who are realistic about their discipline and have developed a clear understanding of the specialty.
5. Don't self-aggrandize. You can talk about your strengths through examples without specifically telling how empathic, skillful, smart and successful you are.
6. Don't plagiarize.
7. Don't write a statement that emphasizes "why you wanted to go into medicine". You will soon be accomplishing this goal.
8. Avoid the use of quotes. Use your own words, this can be more powerful and effective.

Personal Statement Conclusions:

1. Use it to outline your career goals.
2. Use it to specify what you are looking for in a residency program.
3. Use it to pull together and highlight why you love this specialty.
4. Tie your essay together in the last paragraph. Consider referring back to a theme you introduced earlier in the essay.

At the end of the essay, the reader should have a portrait of who you are in relationship to your medical career choice.

Things to Remember:

1. The quality of your writing is as important as the content itself. An essay with grammatical errors and spelling mistakes may undermine your success in getting interviews.

2. Each experience should illustrate something related to medicine, whether it is why you to your specialty, why it is a perfect choice for you, the qualities that you possess that will make you a good physician, etc.
3. To make it less generic, you can personalize your essay for one or two programs that you particularly hope to match to (**BUT BE CAREFUL, IF YOU SEND THE WRONG LETTER TO THE WRONG PROGRAM THROUGH ERAS, YOU'RE TOAST AT THAT PROGRAM!!!**)
Also, if you are applying to a program that is out of state and you have some connection to that geographical area (e.g., you have family there, or you did an away rotation in the area, you can include that in your personal statement to illustrate your genuine interest in the program).
4. Use active rather than passive verb tense. E.g. "Dr. X delivered me" instead of "I was delivered by Dr. X."
5. After you complete your essay, put it aside and come back to it a few days later. Distance will give you a better perspective on what is working and what isn't.
6. Don't submit your final essay until you have had someone else read it through for errors.
7. Show, don't tell. You want the reader to understand that you are hard-working, inquisitive, persistent, and dedicated to your specialty choice without coming out and saying "I am hard-working and committed to this specialty." Use examples that exemplify these traits.
8. Think about the qualities that drew you to this specialty. For example, if it's family medicine, it might be your desire to work with the underserved, the opportunity to see people across their life span, or your commitment to prevention. Then illustrate your interest with examples. In the end, whatever examples you choose must exemplify how this particular experience influenced your decision-making.
9. Make your descriptions of your experiences come alive. Highlight what you learned from them, how they influenced you. At the end of the essay, the reader should have a portrait of who you are in relationship to your medical career choice.
10. There are a handful of successful essays that don't begin with a focus on the specialty choice itself, yet indicate through another experience the very qualities that are shared by doctors in their chosen field.
11. A few final don'ts: don't be too cute or too over the top in your essay; don't use all "I"s to start your sentences, and don't say something that will hurt yourself (e.g. avoid political issues and controversies – this is not a place to give voice to what's all wrong in the world).