

Writing a Personal Statement for Medical School

The personal statement is a crucial part of any graduate school application. However, the medical school personal statement is unique in several ways. Please see the "Writing Your Graduate School Application Essay" handout for more general information about writing your application essay.

What is the purpose of a medical school personal statement?

The purpose of the medical school statement is to show the admissions committee the person behind the MCAT scores and GPA, and provide context to your application.

Your statement should communicate:

- Who you are

- What makes you unique from other applicants

- What motivates you to pursue a career in medicine

This statement also serves as a sample of your writing for the admissions committee, and may become conversation material in an interview.

Successful medical school statements will:

1. Explain why you want to become a doctor or a medical professional.

Be sure to explain the MOTIVATION behind your decision to pursue a career in medicine.

While your answer can include academic reasons, it can also address your personal or emotional motives for pursuing this career. You may also want to talk about how you hope to have an impact in the medical field.

Avoid clichés.

Be careful not to explain your motivation using clichés, such as wanting to help others. Cliché reasons have been used countless times in personal statements and will not help you stand out to a committee. If one of these clichés is, in fact, your reason for pursuing a medical degree, try to make your experience unique. For instance, why do you want to help others *as a doctor*, rather than as a social worker?

2. Demonstrate what makes you unique for a career in the health profession.

Medical school admissions committees read many personal statements each year; you want your statement to stand out from the rest. Avoid making general statements; instead, focus your statement on SPECIFIC and UNIQUE experiences, motivations, and goals that set you apart from other applicants.

Give your statement as sense of individuality by:

Providing specific details about your research

Explaining *how* an experience impacted you personally

Write with your own "voice" so your personality shines through

Being authentic (not just saying what you think the committee wants to hear)

Covering those two content points is crucial, but there are also things to consider when drafting your statement:

1. Create an overarching or central theme to your statement.

Having a central theme to your statement will make your essay cohesive and leave an impression on the committee. This theme could be an experience, personality trait, or philosophy. You can still include multiple past experiences – just ensure each idea in your essay fits within your theme.

This theme can be...

1. An experience that challenged or changed your perspective about medicine
2. A relationship with a mentor or another inspiring individual
3. An overview of a significant academic or life experience
4. An insight into the nature of medical practice

2. Provide details. Show, don't tell.

Answer the "what," "why," and "how" of the experience(s) you discuss. Do not just say that you volunteered at a hospital. Explain *why* that was a significant experience for you and *how* that experience has led you to pursue a career in medicine.

Use clear, direct language to express these details. You want to write in a simple, concise, and strong manner. Avoid unnecessarily verbose language. Remember: you only have about one page to write about yourself, so every word is crucial.

Medical School Personal Statement Example

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? A couple of hours later, these questions were largely forgotten as I slowly cut chicken pieces and fed them to Frau Meyer. Soon afterwards, I was strolling through the garden with Herr Schmidt, listening to him tell of his tour of duty in World War II. By the end of the day, I realized how much I enjoyed the whole experience and at the same time smiled at the irony of it all. I needed to travel to Heidelberg, Germany to confirm my interest in clinical medicine.

Experiences like my volunteer work in the German nursing home illustrate the decisive role that travel has played in my life. For instance, I had volunteered at a local hospital in New York but was not satisfied. With virtually no patient contact, my exposure to clinical medicine in this setting was unenlightening and uninspiring. However, in Heidelberg, despite the fact that I frequently changed diapers for the incontinent and dealt with occasionally cantankerous elderly, I loved my twice-weekly visits to the nursing home. There, I felt that I was needed and wanted. That rewarding feeling of fulfillment attracts me to the practice of medicine.

My year abroad in Germany also enriched and diversified my experience with research. Although I had a tremendously valuable exposure to research as a summer intern investigating chemotherapeutic resistance in human carcinomas, I found disconcerting the constant cost-benefit analysis required in applied biomedical research. In contrast, my work at the University of Heidelberg gave me a broader view of basic research and demonstrated how it can expand knowledge -- even without the promise of immediate profit. I am currently attempting to characterize the role of an enzyme during neural development. Even though the benefit of such research is not yet apparent, it will ultimately contribute to a vast body of information.

My different reactions to research and medicine just exemplify the intrinsically broadening impact of travel. For example, on a recent trip to Egypt I visited a small village on the banks of the Nile. This impoverished hamlet boasted a large textile factory in its center where many children worked in clean, bright, and cheerful conditions weaving carpets and rugs. After a discussion with the foreman of the plant, I discovered that the children of the village learned trades at a young age to prepare them to enter the job market and to support their families. If I had just heard about this factory, I would have recoiled in horror with visions of sweatshops

running through my head. However, watching the skill and precision each child displayed, in addition to his or her endless creativity, soon made me realize that it is impossible to judge this country's attempts to deal with its poverty using American standards and experience. I hope to apply this nonjudgmental stance to patients in my future medical career, making sure to take a patient's background and perspectives into mind when advising them on their health. Although I would be a medical professional offering credible advice about how to improve or treat a patient's health condition, I vow to focus on treating the holistic individual, including their values and beliefs – even if they are different from my own. Further, I believe having had many diverse travel experiences, like the one in Egypt, have allowed me to broaden my own understanding of how others lead their lives.

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.¹