

Getting Started on your Personal Statement

Prehealth Applicants

Purposes

There are two main questions to answer in your personal statement:

1. *Why do you want to be a doctor/dentist?* Try to be specific—yes, it’s good that you want to help people, but you can help people as a social worker, school teacher, etc. Why do you specifically want to be a doctor/dentist? What experiences have you had in your life that led you to this decision? How have you prepared yourself for medical/dental school?
2. *Who are you?* What are some of your best qualities? How did you develop these qualities? Why do others know you have these qualities? What experiences have you had that demonstrate these qualities? How will these qualities help you be successful as a doctor/dentist?

Talk to friends and family

Your personal statement is about you—you’re selling yourself to the admissions committee. It can be tough to identify your best qualities on your own, so take the time to talk to your friends and family. These are the people that know you best, so get their opinion. Don’t tell them that this is for medical/dental school—otherwise you may get some cliché answers like how you helped your friend when she broke her arm. Instead, ask them, “What are my best qualities?” You may be surprised at what they say, and their answers can help spark ideas you never would have considered on your own.

Write a Timeline of Your Life

Take the time to write out a timeline. Include anything that was meaningful to you, like running a marathon, taking a road trip, breaking off an engagement, volunteering, etc. This is a quick, easy way to get you thinking about the most important theme of your essay: *you!* Use this timeline to help you pick experiences that answer the two main questions.

Free-write

Often students obsess about writing their personal statement in a two-hour chunk of time they have set aside. This can lead to frustration and writer’s block. Instead, using all the information you have from your timeline and conversations with friends and family, sit down and free-write for a few minutes about one theme or idea that you find interesting. Sometimes ideas or stories you think are great just don’t translate well to paper. Free-writing in small time increments will help you find which stories work best for you.

Find a Theme

Once you’ve gone through the free-write process, look at what worked best and ask yourself, “What is my theme?” What exactly do I want the admissions committee to know about me and do these experiences illustrate that? You may want to choose several stories that all showcase the same strength; you could also focus on different aspects of the same story. Either way, choosing a specific theme will help keep the essay unified and focused.

Polish, polish, polish

Although you are not writing this paper for a “grade,” the basics of good writing are still important! Does every paragraph have a topic sentence? Do your paragraphs flow smoothly and include appropriate transitions? Have you checked and rechecked the spelling, grammar, and punctuation? The editor can help you through every step. Be willing to work through multiple drafts before you are ready to submit the finished product.