




The Ultimate Medical School Personal Statement Guide

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Writing your medical school personal statement can feel like a daunting process. For many premeds, the thought alone causes anxiety and insecurity. Rest assured. We have read thousands of statements from both successful and unsuccessful applicants. My hope is that this guide offers you the guidance you need to write a persuasive medical school personal statement.

Dr. Jessica

Medical School Personal Statement Goals

Make sure your reader really “gets you.”

I realize this may sound pretty basic, but I am amazed that students sometimes veer away from the “personal” in the medical school personal statement. Ultimately, your reader wants to understand who you are, what motivates you, what is important to you, where you are from, how you have gotten to this point in your life, and who you hope to be in the future. Therefore, your personal statement should be what the name suggests: personal. If you write thoughtfully and introspectively about your life path, experiences, insights, and ideals, and what has led you to choose a career in medicine, you should end up with a document that is unique to you.

Think of your medical school personal statement as one piece of the puzzle.

Your personal statement is one piece of your application and is never read in isolation. Medical school admissions committees all practice holistic admissions to varying degrees. You have likely heard this term before, and I can assure you that admissions officers will review all of your written documents to get a sense of who you are. Your work and activity descriptions, secondary essays, and letters of recommendation will help paint that picture. So, when composing your personal statement, you must consider the other pieces of your application portfolio and what they will communicate about your story. In fact, your work and activity descriptions that detail all of your experiences on your path to medical school are as important as your personal statement.

Be uniquely yourself!

Medical schools seek diverse classes, filled with individuals with varied interests and expertise. This is why it's crucial to communicate the unique opportunities in your life that have led you to decide on medicine. Undoubtedly, you've likely developed skills in an area related to medicine. For example, maybe you have explored patient advocacy in a public health internship or you have research experience in immunology that sparked your interest in a future specialization.

Think deeply about what your “expertise” is and communicate this in your personal statement (more about how to do this below). Doing this will enable medical school admissions committees to envision you at their medical school, in the hospital and clinic, in the conference room, in the labs, and out in the community, making an important contribution in the areas that interest you most!

Reflect on what drives you.

When writing about those experiences that are important to you, you must reflect deeply about WHY those experiences were valuable, offering insights about what you learned from each and how they motivated you to become a physician. The personal statement offers the opportunity to connect the dots of your personal, scholarly, extracurricular, and academic milestones to show how each has deepened your curiosity about medicine, and offered you a more mature and sophisticated understanding of it. Think critically about what you learned and how it shaped your view of patient care, the healthcare team, or your own skills. For example, if you are writing about a patient encounter, reflect on what that allowed you to learn about the patient’s experience, the coordination and cultural competence of the healthcare team, and how you comforted the patient based on what you had learned about patient care.

Use specific stories wisely.

The purpose of the medical school personal statement is, after all, to answer the question: Why medicine? However, medical school admissions officers are humans too, and it’s best to provide some element of intrigue and entertainment in your personal statement. For this reason, it is important to incorporate stories and anecdotes into your personal statement, keeping in mind that the stories you include should be related to one of your most influential experiences that has led you to medicine.

When writing your stories, think about the most impactful experiences on your path to medicine. Capture these so the reader can feel immersed in the space you describe. Bring in sensory details to engage the reader fully—what did you see, hear, smell, or feel? This approach infuses humanity into your statement, helping the reader connect with your journey. In this way, you draw the reader into your vignette(s) and, in doing so, can make them feel what you were feeling at the time. That relatability is more likely to result in the reader’s appreciating more significantly who you are and why the experience was important to you. Keep in mind that your statement should not read as a string of anecdotes. Explaining your path to medical school won’t allow more than one or maybe two well-described situations.

TIP:

We know this is a lot of information that can be overwhelming. Please keep reading and take your time as you get started on this very important part of your medical school application process.

Communicate how you hope to contribute in medical school and into the future.

Ultimately, you want your reader to picture you as a medical student in their incoming class as well as the physician you hope to be in the future. So, you want to conclude your personal statement by showing that you are forward thinking. Try to express how your past and current experiences have positioned and informed your trajectory. How do you hope to grow and how do you hope to contribute as a medical student and into the future?

By focusing less on simply making your personal statement 'stand out' and more on how your pivotal experiences have clarified your motivation for medicine, you'll create a statement that is distinctively and authentically yours. Take time to reflect on what truly drives you, and let that form the core of your personal statement.

MEDICAL SCHOOL PERSONAL STATEMENT APPLICATION CHARACTER LIMITS

American Medical College Application Service (AMCAS):
5300 characters with spaces

American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine
Application Service (AACOMAS)
5300 characters with spaces

Texas Medical and Dental Schools Application Service (TMDSAS)
5000 characters with spaces

The Personal Inventory Exercise

When composing your medical school personal statement, keep in mind that you are writing a narrative essay (throwback to freshman English class?) to tell the story of how you arrived at this point in your life. But, unlike a "story" in the creative sense, yours must also offer convincing evidence for your decision to apply to medical school.

We have found that at the start of the medical school personal statement brainstorming process, students often don't know where to begin. We get it. Knowing how important your medical school personal statement is, we realize this feels like a lot of pressure.

This is why we created the Personal Inventory Exercise.

The Personal Inventory Exercise will serve as one of the building blocks for your entire medical school application so, once you complete it, keep it within reach.

To complete this exercise, we suggest taking your time, spending a day or two, or maybe even a week, thinking about your personal and “professional” milestones. This exercise will prepare you to ponder more deeply and to reflect on those experiences and life events that have been the most significant to you on your journey to this day!

Let's get started.

Note: It is fine to complete your Personal Inventory Exercise on paper or on a computer. Choose the option that works best for you.

TIP:

Don't feel that you must complete the Personal Inventory Exercise in a single sitting. The purpose of the exercise is to reflect and think about the most meaningful events, milestones, and accomplishments in your life. This can take time.

INSTRUCTIONS:

Step 1: On the far left side of your document, create a timeline with dates from your birth to the current day.

Step 2: If you have an idea of where you want to be in the future, include future dates as well!

Step 3: Put a line down the center of your document to make two columns. Put a horizontal line at the date of your high school graduation. If you have graduated from college, include a horizontal line at your college graduation date.

Step 4: In the left column you will write down your most valuable personal milestones and events. Think of those events that have really shaped who you are (birth, where you lived or went to school, a move, a death, a divorce, an illness, personal challenges). List these events chronologically.

Step 5: In the right column you will write down your “professional” accomplishments. This includes everything that you have listed on your CV or resume. Think of your extracurricular, scholarly, academic, and accomplishment milestones. List these events chronologically.

Your goal should be to make a comprehensive Personal Inventory of every meaningful event, milestone, and accomplishment in your life. This means including events such as traveling, the birth of a sibling, transferring colleges, or landing your dream position.

Step 6: With your completed inventory, determine which personal milestones and events on the left side of your inventory you consider the most influential in your life. This step might take some time and could require several revisits. After you try this exercise, discuss your choices with someone who knows you well. See if they have any input and discuss whether or not they agree or disagree with your choices. This discussion may lead you to reevaluate what you choose.

Step 7: Now take a look at the right side of your list, and do the same thing that you did in Step 6: decide which experiences and accomplishments were the most significant to you.

Step 8: Create a new timeline, including all of the most significant items from Steps 6 and 7 and write them down chronologically.

Keep in mind that what students choose as their most important events differs tremendously. For example, for some students, personal milestones and events may represent most of their most significant events while for other students, their most influential events are their accomplishments and experiences. Some students may have few significant personal milestones while others may have a longer list.

This is where the individuality of who you are and what makes your narrative distinctive starts to take shape. There is no right or wrong in terms of what you select! Authenticity in the medical school admissions process is a key ingredient for success so always be true to yourself..

Keep your personal inventory handy as you start writing your medical school personal statement. What you selected should serve as the major nuggets for your writing piece. The timeline you created in Step 8 will establish the starting point for the experiences you will discuss in your personal statement. Keep in mind that the experiences you selected from before college should not dominate your list. And, the further you are from your college graduation date, the less your early college experiences should dominate.

Step 9: Looking at the experiences you have selected from Step 8, compose what we call a “**Foundational Statement.**” This Foundational Statement should be a concise sentence highlighting achievements that best showcase your interest in wanting to become a physician. This Foundational Statement will help you to keep a clear idea of what your strengths, niche, and foci are. As you write your documents, keep your Foundational Statement in your mind.

Example of a Foundational Statement: As an oncology researcher at Memorial Sloan Kettering and M.D. Anderson, I have taken upper level classes in the field of cancer biology and cancer genetics and founded the Camp Kesem chapter at my school.

How to Compose your Medical School Personal Statement

When creating your medical school personal statement, you must first have an idea of what life experiences and opportunities you want to write about. Your goal in writing your medical school personal statement is to tell your story in the most captivating way to explain why you want to be a doctor. This theme, why you want to be a doctor, is the theme for every medical school applicant's essay. What will distinguish your personal statement is how you tell this story and what distinctive experiences and insights you highlight.

First, let's discuss the specific type of essay medical school admissions committees want to read. Since the medical school personal statement instructions are very specific, you are nearly locked in to writing a narrative-based essay:

"Ensure that your essay is interesting, follows a logical and orderly flow, and relates to your reasons for choosing medicine and why you believe you'll be successful in medical school and as a physician." **The Association of American Medical Colleges**

What is a narrative-based essay? A narrative-based essay tells a story from the author's life, focusing on personal experiences and insights. Now, if we dig deeper to understand what makes a powerful narrative-based essay, you will also start to understand what will make for the most interesting medical school personal statement.

The Best Narrative-Based Essays:

- Have an engaging and vivid opening hook. This means they start with a story that is compelling and interesting and allows the reader to be in your shoes, hearing what you hear, feeling what you feel, seeing what you see.
- Use specifics. You don't want to use general descriptions or ideas that anyone else could write.
- Communicate a clear point of view that helps the reader understand what is important to you, what moves you, and why the reader should be invested in the your story.
- Express Ideas, values, and insights that are central and clearly important to the author.
- Have a logical progression.
- Elicit emotion, feeling, and connection.
- Offer a distinctive perspective about otherwise typical experiences.
- Communicate your strong voice and personality based on an authentic writing style.
- Merge effective storytelling with meaningful reflections.
- Showcase growth, maturity, and understanding.

So, now that we understand what makes for an excellent narrative essay, how do you approach composing one for the purposes of your medical school personal statement? First create a medical school personal statement outline.

Paragraph 1: Determine what your hook or opening story will be. To do this, we advise you to complete the MedEdits' Personal Inventory Exercise. Use vivid language to evoke as much sensory detail as possible to really draw your reader into the vignette you choose.

Paragraph 2: Reflect on the significance of the story you told in Paragraph 1. What insights did you gain from this experience or how did it help you to grow? What effect did this experience have on you? How did this experience fit in with your overall path to medical school?

Body Paragraphs: In your body paragraphs, you want to detail the other personal, extracurricular, and scholarly milestones and experiences that are the most significant on your path to medical school based on the work you did in the **Personal Inventory Exercise**. Be sure that at least some of the topics you choose to write about support the **Foundational Statement** you crafted in the **Personal Inventory Exercise**.

As you write about these most important events, do your best to reflect and explain, in your own strong voice, what you learned from each, how they contributed to your growth as a person and a premedical student, the impact each had on you, and how they paved your path to the current day. You also want to make sure that your progression is clear and helps the reader understand how each experience motivated you and informed your decisions or path forward.

Conclusion: Often, but not always, students return to their opening story in their conclusion. If there is something left “unresolved” in the story or if what the student discovered about themselves is something they want to reflect on in the current day as it is still applicable, this can be a really effective strategy. The strongest conclusion offers new insights and at least a hint of the emotional significance of how your experiences have impacted you. You want to use your conclusion to summarize the lessons you have learned from your most pivotal experiences and how that has informed who you want to be as a medical student and, perhaps, as a physician. For help on this, complete the **MedEdits Mentor Exercise**.

Writing and Revising

Once you have composed your medical school personal statement outline, start writing. This is sometimes the most difficult part of this process. Take time in your writing. Once you have a first draft, let it sit for a few days, or maybe even a week or two. Go back and see what you think can be improved. Review and revise until you are happy with your final result. And, if you are interested in professional help, feel free to reach out to us!

FINAL TIPS:

- **Be true to yourself. Everyone will have an opinion regarding what you should, and should not, write. Follow your own instincts. Your personal statement should be a reflection of you, and only you.**
- **Don't rush your work. Composing thoughtful documents takes time and you don't want your writing and ideas to be sloppy and underdeveloped.**

Good Luck!

We know the medical school personal statement writing process is a ton of work, but if you stay organized and focused, the process will run much more smoothly and be less stressful.

We also realize that this process can feel overwhelming; this is why I founded MedEdits. We have many resources to help you on your journey:

- 1) Sign up to [Talk with Us!](#)
- 2) Join the [MedEdits Facebook group](#) (it's free!)
- 3) [Work with MedEdits one on one](#)

Best wishes,

Jessica Freedman, M.D.

