

What to Keep in Mind when Writing a Personal Statement – Advanced Medical Careers

Focus on goals – both those you’ve achieved and those you hope to achieve:

- *Personal* – what goals did you set for yourself and achieve? How is this opportunity for further education another goal you want to achieve?
 - Ex (the basics): I wanted to go on at least one mission trip while I was in college. So, when the opportunity arose to go to Haiti, I took the chance. Now that I have seen how much medical knowledge women are not provided with there, I want to do more. This drive to do more means I need to go to medical school.
- *Academic* – what classes inspire(d) you? What do you hope to get out of furthering your education in law school, medical school, graduate school, etc.?
 - Ex (the basics): You took an anatomy course in undergrad that allowed you to examine the inner forms of the body and this experience, combined with your physiology course, made you realize how privileged you were to learn about the human body and how much you wanted to share that knowledge with others.
- *Professional/ Career* – how will you impact change in your chosen career field? What experience(s) have prepared you for this field?
 - Ex (the basics): You want to volunteer for Doctors without Borders at least once during your medical career to give back the way you were given back to.

Catch your reader’s eye with an engrossing opening. Some options include:

- *Narrative* – tell readers a short story (no more than a paragraph) and make sure to relate it clearly to your goals.
 - Ex (the basics): A mission trip you took where you saw how desperately some women needed education about childbirth. Give details and then link to your personal goals – you wanted to go on a mission trip; academic goals – a course taught you about the needs of women in developing nations; and professional/career goals – you realize you can do more to help others if you are accepted to an advanced nursing degree program.
- *Quotation* –
 - Ex (the basics): You read an essay written by a MD that persuaded you of the need for empathy in the medical profession. Since then, you have worked as a volunteer at a hospital, as an advocate for social justice and welfare, and in a variety of other positions. As a result, you open your essay with the words of this MD (after introducing them) and then relate those words to your goals and desire to be a medical practitioner.
- *Introduction*—
 - Ex (the basics): Share your experiences thus far in the medical field as a lead-in to what you can do and what you want to learn more about. Perhaps you worked as a

TA in a gross anatomy lab, or maybe you did research for a professor in the nursing program, whatever it might be, if it inspired you, open with it!

Common mistakes in medical professional personal statements:

- Writing too much about an experience but not relating it to the job/ future academic endeavors. Ex: Instead of just writing about your mission trip/ volunteer experience/ shadowing, write about that AND how it relates to future goals.
- Not clarifying demonstrative pronouns. Ex: instead of writing “This inspired me.” Clarify, what does “this” refer to? Write: “This course inspired me” and then make sure to explain why.
- Starting with an opening that’s “been done.” Ex: Ever since my parents bought me a Fisher Price doctor kit, I knew what I wanted to do. Or: When I was five, I fell and broke my arm. As the doctor set it in the ER, I realized this was the field for me.
- Going over word/character count or page length (less common now that most applications are 100% online).
- Formatting errors: Not having paragraphs separated, not running spell check, not checking your spacing, not having someone else read it to catch errors, not reading it out loud, and so forth.
- Downplaying the role for which you are applying: ex: Because I am not really good at labs but am fascinated by biology, I’ve decided to become a physician assistant (PA) instead of a doctor. If you want to be a PA, you have to have a better reason!
- Abbreviating without explanation. Make sure to clarify what MD, PA, DO, RN, BSN, APN, etc. mean. Always put the abbreviation after the full title the first time. *Then* you can abbreviate. Ex: As an advanced practice nurse (APN), I will work more fully with patients to address their care holistically.
- For medical school: Not connecting specifically to DO or MD (especially if you are applying for both.) By being too generic in your personal statement instead of creating one for each discipline, you run the risk of alienating your audience because it looks like you don’t know enough about the career path.

Would you like more resources on writing your personal statement in order to get accepted to graduate school for a career in medicine? Here are some we recommend:

Gale, Sadie Levy. "7 last-minute checks you should make on your personal statement; Be positive. Don't mention your passion for heli-skiing. Here are the dos and don'ts of writing the form that could dictate the course of your future." *Telegraph Online*, 13 Oct. 2015. *Gale In Context: World History*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A431509487/WHIC?u=uiuc_iwu&sid=WHIC&xid=eadfe9f7. Accessed 7 August 2019.

Lafond, Anthony. “Avoid Common Mistakes on the Medical School Personal Statement.” *USNews.Com*, 2015. *EBSCOhost*, http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A489516056/ITOF?u=uiuc_iwu&sid=ITOF&xid=0c496349. Accessed 2 August 2019.

Lotfi, Ali. “4 Points to Include in Every Medical School Personal Statement.” *USNews.Com*, 2018. *EBSCOhost*, http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A543623483/ITOF?u=uiuc_iwu&sid=ITOF&xid=8accf46. Accessed 7 August 2019