



University of Vermont Graduate Writing Center Writing a Personal Statement for Medical School

The purpose of the medical school statement is to show the admissions committee the person behind the MCAT scores and GPA and to 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

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 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. If such a cliché is, in fact, your reason for pursuing a medical degree, 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

3. 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

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

4. Show, don’t just tell. Do not just say that you volunteered at a hospital. Bring readers inside the experience, show why that was a significant experience for you, and show/explain why that experience has led you to pursue a career in medicine.

- You want to write in a simple, concise, and strong manner with strong subjects and active verbs. Avoid unnecessarily verbose language: let your nouns and verbs rather than adjectives and adverbs do the heavy lifting.

Medical School Personal Statement Dos and Don'ts (from Harvard Office of Career Services)

DO:

- Tell a story.
- Keep it interesting by using specific examples and anecdotes.
- Provide information, insight, or a perspective that cannot be found elsewhere in your application.
- Describe experiences in terms of what they mean to you and what you learned.
- Make sure the reader learns about *you*, not just *what you did*.
- Use strong action verbs and vivid images; paint a picture.
- Be concise. Make sure every sentence *needs* to be there.
- Describe what you learned in your research, not the details of the specific research project (unless writing the MD/PhD essay).
- Allow plenty of time to write, revise, reflect, and revise some more. Step away often so you can revisit your essay with fresh eyes.
- Proofread. Spell checking will not catch everything! Then, proofread again and get someone else to do the same. Read the essay out loud to catch typos your eyes may have missed.

DON'T:

- Just list or summarize your activities. This is not a resume (and your activities have their own section).
- Try to impress the reader with the use of overly flowery or erudite language.
- Directly *tell* the reader that you are compassionate, motivated, intelligent, curious, dedicated, unique, or different than most candidates (*"Show don't tell"*).
- Focus only on childhood or high school experiences.
- Use slang or forced analogies.
- Lecture the reader, e.g., on what's wrong with medicine, what doctors should be like.
- Make excuses for poor grades.
- Begin every sentence or paragraph with "I".
- Overwork the essay to the point where you lose your own voice.
- Use generalizations and clichés.
- Follow the advice of too many people.
- Try to share everything there is to know about you.

The advice in this handout is compiled from the career and/or writing centers and admissions representatives of several institutions, including Johns Hopkins University, Princeton Review, Carnegie Mellon University, U.S. News and World Report, Association of American Medical Colleges, and The Guardian.