

PERSONAL STATEMENTS FOR RESIDENCY APPLICATIONS (MEDICINE)

UCLA Graduate Writing Center

Personal statement: getting started

- Watch this video
- Create a draft of your personal statement
- Bring your personal statement to the GWC for feedback
<https://gwc.gsrc.ucla.edu/Appointments>
- Revise personal statement
- Meet with appropriate faculty/staff in the medical school

Topics to be covered

- Overview
 - Context, purpose, audience
- Structure
 - Pointers regarding each section
- Additional Tips
 - Additional tips and further resources

Overview: Application Context

The personal statement (PS) is part of a package:

- Personal statement, CV, letters of recommendation, MSPE (medical student performance evaluation)
- How does the PS complement other documents?
- What info does the PS provide that the other documents cannot?
- What degree of overlap with other documents is appropriate?

Purpose of Personal Statement

The personal statement is an argument that persuades the audience (program director/committee) as to...

- Why you are an excellent fit for this residency
- How your experiences have prepared you (including teaching & research if appropriate)
- How this residency fits with your career path and future goals
- How this residency program would benefit from accepting you

Purpose of Personal Statement

The personal statement is a portrait that leaves an image of you in the mind of the reader/reviewer...

- Positive, serious professional (in action)
- Examples/details need to be concrete and specific
- Vivid and clear, but not flowery language
- Reflection on experiences should show ability to learn and grow, as well as professional maturity

Audience: your specialty

Address the audience of residency program directors and reviewers for your specialty/residency program:

- Why this specialty? What motivated your choice?
(If you can switch the specialty/program and the essay still works, you are speaking in terms that are too generic.)
- Skills/preparation for this specialty
- Experience working with relevant population(s)
- Other values, specifics related to specialty

Differences from medical school essay

- More professional than personal
- Anecdotes and examples should motivate your choice of and preparation for the specialty, not medicine overall
- Examples should primarily come from clinical rotations or similar clinical experience (e.g., volunteer work) that you did during medical school
- Exceptions to the above could be significant experiences before or outside of medical school if the example(s) relate directly to your specialty

Audience: academic vs. clinical

Is your focus academic medicine or clinical practice?

- If you are applying to one (academic medical institutions) or the other (community hospitals), tailor your statement to this particular type of program
- Academic medicine focus – should discuss research and teaching experience/interests prominently
- Community hospitals/clinical practice – should spend more time on relevant experience, community service, personal qualities
- If both, your statement should describe the balance of research, teaching, and service that accurately reflects your professional goals (but maybe without discussing teaching and research extensively)

Typical Structure

- Introduction (1 par) – should indicate specialty
- Body (2-3 par), e.g.:
 - Most relevant clinical experience
 - Motivation for choice of specialty
 - Most relevant research, teaching, and/or service
 - Leadership, teamwork, and other personal qualities/skills
 - Further details that support choice of specialty
- Expectations/Future Plans/Closing (1 par)

Introduction

Common types of openings:

- Anecdote or narrative example, e.g.
 - Personal (motivated choice of specialty)
 - Professional (motivated choice of specialty, shows engagement in field, professional in action)
- More direct statement of motivation/reasons for becoming a doctor in specialty X

Introduction (cont'd)

Things to avoid:

- Anecdotes that are not relevant enough, or do not motivate the specialty/personal statement well
- Clichés
 - “I’ve always wanted to be... ever since I was 3...
I have a passion for...”
- Anything that doesn’t clearly contribute to overall narrative or argument

Introduction & Structure

- Completely narrative structure begins with relevant anecdote/narrative example, and the entire PS follows a narrative arc
- Narrative/anecdotal opening followed by more thematic or analytical structure; closing does or does not revisit opening narrative
- Direct statement of reason(s) for entering specialty is followed by presentation of experiences and qualifications in thematic or analytical structure (examples are still key)

Body of PS

- Are the main points backed up with examples?
- Are the examples specific (not generic) and relevant?
- Does each example contribute something substantive and non-redundant?
- Do the examples paint a clear and positive portrait of you, show you in action as the professional you are/ are becoming?

Closing

- Summarize the most important aspects of your PS without being repetitive
- If you started with a story/anecdote, should you revisit it? (sometimes yes, sometimes no)
- Discuss future plans and career goals as appropriate

Revision Tips

- Do a backwards outline after writing a draft
- Identify specific purpose of each paragraph and main sub-points of paragraph
- Remove redundant sections/sentences.
- Remove unnecessary detail or empty, generic statements
- Read aloud to improve flow and transitions

Tips for Getting Started

- Take notes when you do clinical rotations
- When you have an interesting experience with a patient, do some reflective writing about what was interesting and what you learned through the experience.
- These notes and examples will give you material.
- Don't be afraid to write a longer, loose draft to get your ideas down—you can cut and edit later.

Final Tips

- Look at examples
- Give yourself a lot of time to revise and refine
- Make a plan to have multiple people review your work
- Embrace multiple drafts/revisions
- Use GWC appointments as one way to receive feedback (multiple times OK)

Reviewing Examples

- What do you notice about the statement structure?
- How does the writer begin the statement?
- How does the writer motivate the choice of specialty?
- What do you notice about the examples/experiences?
- Does the statement adequately address the types of experience expected for that specialty?
- Does the statement adequately address research and teaching experience if it's expected?
- What works or doesn't work overall?

Resources

- UCLA Graduate Writing Center Appointments
<https://gwc.gsrc.ucla.edu/Appointments>
- UCLA Graduate Writing Center
<https://gwc.gsrc.ucla.edu/Resources-and-Links/Writing-in-Medicine>
- UCSF Career Center Residency application advice & samples (Cover letters, CVs)
<http://career.ucsf.edu/medical-students/residency-search>