

# PERSONAL STATEMENTS FOR RESIDENCY APPLICATIONS (DENTISTRY)

---

**UCLA Graduate Writing Center**



# Personal statement process tips

- 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 the Associate Dean of Student Services



# Topics to be covered

- Preliminaries
  - 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:

- CV, personal statement, letters of recommendation, institutional 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?



# Overview: Application Context

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

- CV, personal statement, letters of recommendation, institutional 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?



# Overview: Application Context

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

- CV, personal statement, letters of recommendation, institutional 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? (If you can switch the specialty/program and the essay still works, you are speaking in terms that are too generic.)
- Why more training? (for general programs)  
Values, specifics of your specialty
- Experience working with relevant populations
- Academic dentistry: Research and teaching experience



# Differences from dental school essay

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



# 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 dentist 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  
<http://gsrc.ucla.edu/gwc/resources/writing-in-dentistry.html>
- UCSF Career Center Residency application advice & samples (Cover letters, CVs)  
<https://career.ucsf.edu/dentistry-students/jobs-residency/cvs-resumes-cover-letters>

