

Hints for Writing Personal Statements

Personal Statements (PS) should be carefully constructed, then polished. Throughout your college career you will be provided with many opportunities to practice writing about yourself: scholarships, special programs, summer programs and your HPAP Application for Sponsorship. Use these opportunities to begin the process of examining who you are and what you've done before writing the ultimate one – that on the application for admission to health professional school. Make your PS personal.

Present yourself:

What have you learned about yourself (strengths, weaknesses)?
What have you learned about your area of study?
Give the reader information about you as a person; are you unique.

Write your Personal Statement as if you were writing a newspaper article about yourself.

Remember who, what, when, where, why and how.
Do not model yourself after sample Personal Statements.
Avoid using quotes.
Avoid I think; I feel; I believe; In my opinion.

Avoid grand announcements or phrases: “I have dreamed of being a doctor since I was five years old”; “The purpose of...”; “My name is...”. “I want to help people.” “The human body fascinates me.” “This career would be rewarding and challenging.” If it helps you get something down on paper just to get started, eliminate these phrases when you rewrite the essay.

Discuss your interests, goals and ideas. Do not preach. This is your chance to “show off” and demonstrate that you are proud of, but somewhat modest about, your achievements. Do not be redundant, duplicating information found elsewhere on your application. Do not make a list of activities; select one or two and tell the reader a story — what did you get out of the experience(s)?

Be specific and give instances and examples. The reader probably knows nothing about you except what you volunteer to tell her/him.

Be determined, not wishful.
Be positive. Do not bore the reader by whining.
Consider your audience—who are they?
Conservative, pressed for time, reading hundreds of statements?

Be persuasive. Sell yourself. Why are you a good candidate for medical, dental, optometry, veterinary, podiatry, physician assistant, physical therapist, etc., school?

Be positive. Do not bore the reader by whining. Talk about what you got OUT of your work, activities, or life experience — not what you put IN; address what you learned and stress that point.

Separate yourself from the pack. Remember others. No “heroism”. Remember, there is a fine line between arrogance and confidence.

Your final personal statement should have perfect grammar, proper word usage, spelling and punctuation. It is the one part of your application you have control over and you should look at it as an opportunity to distinguish yourself from other candidates. Talk directly to the admissions committee and explain your motivation. There are more qualified applicants than there are spaces and the committee wants a sense of who you are.

Questions You Might Ask Yourself

When did you first become interested in this field and what have you since learned about it?

What details of your life have shaped you or influenced your goals (family members, professionals, education, work, research)?

Consider others, family, education, work, volunteerism, *etc.*

Is there anything that has reinforced your goal?

Have you had to overcome a unusual obstacles in your life?

What skills (leadership, communication, analytical) do you possess?

What makes you different from all other qualified applicants?

A personal statement tells people who you are by describing the experiences and events that shaped your personality, values, and goals. This differs from a résumé, which tells what you have done. In the end, be honest with yourself and ask, does the writing sound like me? Is it personal, is it positive rather than uptight or stiff?

Why students struggle with personal statements:

- most students do not enjoy writing about themselves
- most students don't recognize their unique talents and traits
- students tend to compare themselves with others in a competitive applicant pool
- most students try to write personal statements without a strategy
- some students have so much to write that they don't know where to begin

Additional Personal Statement Resources available in the HPAP Resource Room are: *The Personal Statement Handbook* and *Writing About Me: A step by step guide to developing powerful personal statements* by Barbara Huntington, Director of the San Diego State University Preprofessional Health Advising and Linda Masse.