

Purpose of the Personal Statement

What the personal statement **IS NOT**:

- 1) It is NOT a way to brag about or list your accomplishments (though you may touch on some as part of a larger discussion)
- 2) It is NOT an opportunity to demonstrate your creative writing skills
- 3) It is NOT the time to complain about other people, specialties or patients
- 4) It is NOT a document you can write in one weekend
- 5) Will NOT get you interviews or rank list rankings that you otherwise would not get

What a personal statement **IS**:

- 1) From your perspective:
 - It may help you choose a specialty if you are still undecided
 - It refines your ideas about why you have chosen a particular specialty
 - It clarifies what you are looking for in a program
 - It prepares you for your interview
- 2) From the program perspective:
 - It provides a training program with a sense of your organization, clarity of thought, enthusiasm for medicine and career aspirations
 - It may identify candidates with undesirable personality traits
 - It provides “ice-breakers” for the interview
 - It provides a human dimension to an otherwise data laden application
 - It makes it easier to distinguish candidates as ranking discussions take place
 - It is an opportunity to reflect on your life and career after your first year of clinical work

Process of Writing a Personal Statement

1) Get pointers from the residency application resource book, the personal statement workshop and your advisors

2) Start the writing process now if you haven't already; adequate time is necessary for a good product and a rewarding experience

3) Mechanics of a rewarding personal statement experience:

- Lay out key questions to be addressed (see “Content Guide” outlined below)
- With each question, start by creating bulleted notes that address the question
- Over time (days, weeks) flesh out these bullets with more detail; this may include descriptions of role models or experiences that illustrate your bullet points
- Begin the writing process using the notes you have created to flesh out your responses to each of the questions
- Attend to grammar and punctuation
- Assess your tone and style to maximize impact and avoid red flags (see “Tone/Style Guide”)
- Take breaks between writing efforts. These breaks may be days long and are designed to permit a fresh look at your work when you return to your writing
- As your work begins to take its final shape, have others read your material: friends, enemies and ultimately your advisor
- Deadline for final draft September 1 but there is no penalty for early completion

Content of a Personal Statement

A typical approach to the residency application personal statement is structured to address all four of the following questions:

- 1) Who are you?
- 2) Why are you interested in your chosen specialty?
- 3) What are your goals for your career in this specialty?
- 4) What will you need from a training program in order to prepare yourself to tackle those goals?

Typically, 70-80% of the personal statement will focus on addressing the first two questions. The remaining of the personal statement will address questions three and four. Note that as you progress further into your career (example: application to fellowship), the thrust of your personal statement will shift towards an emphasis on questions three and four.

The additional questions below will help you build out each of the four sections of your personal statement. You are not obliged to address every point listed within each section. An effective approach to each of the four sections will use several carefully selected points that best express your thoughts and fit well together. Items that are asterisked are opportunities to add a human touch to your personal statement.

Section 1: Who are you?

- What are the experiences, events or role models that brought you to medicine?*
- What specific qualities of these events or people captured your attention?*
- What does this say about who you are?*
- How does this impact where you'd like to go with your career?*

Section 2: Why are you interested in your chosen specialty?

- When did you realize this specialty was a good fit for you and what event or person triggered this realization?*
- Do you have a role model in your specialty of choice, and, if so, what is it about them and their work that you admire?*
- Is there something about your specialty's patient population that is particularly appealing to you? Elaborate.
- Are there physiologic, pharmacologic, technologic or clinical aspects of your specialty that are a particular draw for you?
- Does your specialty offer unique opportunities to pursue scholarship in areas you have a strong interest in pursuing? Basic science, translational, clinical, quality, global health, community health etc.?

Section 3: What are your goals for your career?

- In what venue do you anticipate practicing (ex. academic, community, or international settings)?
- Are there specific clinical activities you would like to emphasize in your practice?
- Besides clinical activities, are there additional activities you envision for your career such as research, medical education, or business/administrative responsibilities?
- Are there strong personal or professional motives for pursuing these goals?*

Section 4: What do you need from a residency program in order to tackle those goals?

- What would maximize your clinical learning (ex. autonomy, strong clinical role models, a culture of excellence, available mentors, a community of hard working learners, rigorous clinical experiences)?
- If you intend to pursue research, teaching, leadership roles, or business/administrative roles as part of your career, what else could a program provide you to support this goal (ex. scholarly/research opportunities with mentorship, opportunities to teach or a formal curriculum in teaching, informal or formal leadership training)?
- Are you interested in exposure to specific kinds of practice (ex. with specific patient populations like the underserved, diverse, or high acuity populations, in particular settings like urban or rural, adequate emphasis on outpatient training, specific surgical techniques, diagnostic modalities or approaches)?

Style and Tone of a Personal Statement

Style

The literary style of your personal statement offers important clues about you and your character. For example, it can signal the presence of valuable traits such as a high level of organization, clarity of thought, ability to communicate, attention to detail, and a personal investment in the application process. Alternatively, it could signal undesirable traits such as laziness, lack of attention to detail, disorganized thought, and poor judgment.

The best way to demonstrate favorable traits is to keep it simple and forthright. Writing should be:

- Expository / Autobiographic
- First person
- Concrete (avoid abstract language and references and elaborate literary devices)
- Well organized
- Have correct grammar and punctuation
- Be no more than one page, unless absolutely necessary and no less than ¾ page (Courier, 10 point font)

Tone

Even if your literary style is optimal, the tone of your personal statement can significantly impact your application. In fact, most readers will forgive flaws in your literary style, but few will forgive even minor flaws in tone. There are some differences in preferred tone from one specialty to another, but the overlap in preferences across specialties is significant. The table below outlines desirable and undesirable elements of tone from the perspective of most specialties.

Desirable Elements	Undesirable Elements
Humility	Arrogance
Sincerity	Ingratiation, craziness, blandness
Enthusiasm	Cynicism
Competence	Overconfidence / Lack of confidence
Diligence	Laziness
Gratitude	Bitterness
"Me, the Team, and the Patient"	"Me, Me and the Me"

Tone is established through a number of means:

- How you talk about patients
- How you talk about yourself and others
- Which stories or role models you chose to discuss
- How you describe your training to date and hopes for the future
- How you outline what you need from a training program