Writing Personal Statements

Elizabeth Barajas
Pre-Health Staff Advisor
Personal Statements Are...

A way for you to show the admissions committees:

- Who you are beyond your transcripts, GPA, and test scores
- What is driving you to be in this healthcare field
- What kind of healthcare professional you will be
- Your competencies and attributes
- The value that you will add to your field
Personal Statements Are Not...

- A resume or list of your experiences
- A chronicle of your journey towards realizing that you want to be in your field
- An explanation of why you didn’t do something else
- A criticism of any health field or practitioner
- A place to explain your bad grades
- A place to tell someone else’s story
- A piece of super creative writing
Important Points about PSs

● The essay should be focused on YOU

● When talking about your experiences, use stories to show, not tell, what you want the readers to know about you
  ○ This is what will make you stand out. No one else has your specific experiences, so give enough details to set yourself apart.

● Avoid listing what you did in your experiences (you will have a chance to write these in your main application).

● Use this space to dive deeper into what you got out of these experiences and how they drive you to be a doctor, pharmacist, PA, etc.
General Recommendations for Starting your PS

- Start early!
- You can add experiences as you gain them and revise as needed
- Brainstorm to get ideas
  - Make a list of 10 points in your life that you think about often
  - Consider how these points have influenced you and your path and how they might be connected
- Plan to write multiple drafts
- Find and use resources to help you
- Keep a journal of your experiences with healthcare and research
  - Note your impressions of these experiences and how they relate to your health professions goals
Personal Statement Themes

Why are they beneficial?

- They provide a focus to your paper that the reader can easily follow
- They help you avoid creating an essay that is just a list of what you’ve done in your life, or that is an essay about your whole life story
- They can also help you to think of experiences that build on one another to show the reader who you are, what you care about, and what value you bring to your field
Choosing a Theme

Consider how you can link your experiences to what you want to talk about in your statement.

- Look back at your list of meaningful points in your life
- What concepts or patterns can you see that run throughout your life?
- Are there any past experiences that parallel with current activities?
- How do your potential themes relate to your future plans and motivate you to be a part of your healthcare field?
PS Character Counts

- MD – 5300
- DO – 5300
- Physician Assistant – 5000
- Pharmacy – 4500
- Dental – 4500
- Veterinary – 3000
- Nursing – varied
- Optometry – 4500

*All of these character counts include spaces
Questions to Consider

1) Why have you selected this healthcare field?

2) What motivates you to explore this field and gain more experience?

3) What value do you bring to this field and how can you show it?

4) What do you want schools to know about you that hasn't been disclosed in other sections of the application?
For numbers 1), 2), and 3), think beyond wanting to help people. Ask yourself more detailed questions, such as:

- What drives you to help people?
- Is it an experience or series of experiences that made you aware of what you can do in healthcare? Maybe one you had as a patient or a caregiver? Or something different?
- For most people, deciding to be in healthcare didn’t happen in a single moment. Rather, it happened over time and through multiple experiences.
For numbers 1), 2), and 3), think beyond wanting to help people. Ask yourself more detailed questions, such as:

- Whom do you want to help and why?
- What keeps you interested in your healthcare field?
- How have you developed this interest since you realized you wanted to go into this field? How can you show your value as a future medical professional?
- Why do you want to help people specifically through this field?
- Why not through another field? (Without specifically mentioning other fields or putting any other professions down)
Quick Note

- When you are writing about why you want to be in healthcare, be very careful not to criticize the field or any healthcare professionals.
- If you want to point out issues in healthcare today, frame them in a way that emphasizes that you want to be a part of the solution, not that you will be the solution.
For number 4), think about what else you would want the committee reading your application to know about you.* Some ideas:

- Do you have any experience working in medically underserved areas?
- Do you have study abroad experience?
- Do you have extensive research experience?
- Do you have any hobbies you want to talk about?
- Is there anything about your life growing up you think they would be interested to know?

*Not everything in your personal statement has to be directly related to healthcare, but it should be related somehow to your theme.
Personal Statement Structure

Introduction
- Catch the reader’s attention with a story or idea
- Relate the story to your interest in healthcare and your theme

Body
- Show the development of your theme and your interest in medicine by sharing stories about your experiences
- Show the connections between your experiences and how each one has built upon the others, furthering your interest in your field
- Show the value you will bring to the field through what you’ve already done

Conclusion
- Reflect back on the introduction and the theme
- Briefly summarize main points
- Look towards the future as a healthcare professional
Body Paragraph Structure

● Start out with a transition that shows purpose and intention
  o Instead of “I then found myself working in the ED at UCDMC,” say “Because shadowing Dr. Perez showed me how important it is to make these connections with patients, I decided to volunteer in the ED at UCDMC, where I was able to talk to patients’ families and comfort them.”

● Then, introduce a specific story about an interaction with a patient or a family member, for example
  o Keep a balance between talking about someone else and talking about your role within the story
  o Within that story, you’ll likely be able to show how you embody several core competencies without saying them directly

● After the story, tell the reader why this story is important.
Other Things to Keep in Mind

- If you’re applying through a Centralized Application Service, keep things general and avoid being specific about any schools. You’ll have a chance to address why you would like to attend specific schools in your secondary applications.

- When deciding which experiences to include, keep in mind the values of your healthcare field, such as the AAMC’s core competencies, that schools look for in applicants.

- You don’t need to address all of the competencies, but try to address the main ones that you feel are applicable to you.

- When talking about your experiences, remember to show, not tell, what you want the readers to know about you. Use stories to illustrate how you embody the core competencies that apply to you and why you want to be in healthcare.
Strategies and Tips

• Most important: Follow directions! (length, word count, character count, prompt, etc.)
• Break down the prompts into checklists to make sure that you address everything
• Start writing from any point in the essay – you don’t have to start with the introduction
• When brainstorming, try not to edit too much or worry about the character limits. Just get your ideas on the page and work from there.
• Start writing early! Leave yourself plenty of time to write multiple drafts – revision is an essential part of the writing process
• Get help from all resources available to you, like HPA, at any point in the writing process
• Be strategic and intentional with the content you include: Every sentence should be working towards the goal of presenting yourself as a quality candidate for admission.
Questions?