Essay Writing for Application to Professional Health Schools: Getting It Right!

Content Outline
• Do Quick Review of Info Contained within Handout

General Opening Comments
• Least understood – yet one of the most important components
• Preparation an indication of you and your preparation
• Imagine essay ONLY part of application read
• Insight about you as future health care professional

I. WHY am I writing a Personal Statement? In other words, WHY is it so important?
• Only chance to introduce yourself through the written word.
• Distinguish yourself (set apart) from other applicants
• Serves as memory aid to admission committee members
• Can strengthen my application – “tip the scale” if other aspects more marginal.
• Provide a context for various aspects of my application – e.g., GPA.

II. How it comes into Play – All the following require Statements:
A. Prehealth Committee: 5000 characters
B. Allopathic Medicine (MD): 5300 characters (AMCAS)
C. Osteopathic Medicine (DO): AACOMAS – 5300 characters
D. Dentistry (DDS) – AADSAS: 4500 characters
E. Podiatry – (DPM) AACPMCAS: 4500 characters
F. Physician Assistant (PA): CASPA 5000 characters
G. Veterinary – (DVM): VMCAS 3 essays now. First two are 1500 characters. The last is 2000 characters.

III. What a personal statement is NOT: (SO IMPORTANT)
• NOT a repetition/reiteration of application
• NOT a list of all abstract personal qualities and activities.
  o Instead – cite a particular anecdote or story and illustrate the point through the story. SHOW, DON’T TELL.
• Watch the tone - it should not read as overly telling, chatty, casual, verbose.
• It should not read as overly formal or over sentimental.
  o Not like Shakespearean drama
• It is not boosting/bragging or arrogant – humility goes a long way.
• It should avoid expressions of overused verbiage
  o I want to cure cancer
  o Everyone in my family is a doctor
  o I played doctor at 6 years old.
• It should convey you as a mature, articulate, honest and compassionate person.
• Ask yourself – What impression does my essay convey? How do I know this? Have a number of people read it! Those that know you well and don’t know you so well.

IV. What a Personal Statement is/what it comprises:
• Opportunity for admission committees to “meet you”.
• Serves as a “written interview” and “written introduction” to meeting you.
• Helps to demonstrate why you should be selected for interview/admission
• Highlights special or unique circumstances in your life, special training, and qualifications.
• Combines an autobiography with explanation/elaboration of your desire to pursue a particular health profession.
• Why? How do you know?
• Addressing circumstances that may need an explanation (eg., grades, resignations). KEY: Do it briefly and positively.
• It’s an elaboration, illustration of a theme you pick related to your desired career path.
• It’s your path, your road taken – to this point, toward your future goals.

V. DOs and DON’Ts
• Don’t write about want to go to dental school but instead, the dental profession.
• Be honest. Don’t venture into topics where you are not well informed
• Edit/filter what is in statement unless you are prepared to be very transparent in an interview if asked. How personal do you want to be?
• Don’t criticize other health professions or express negativity about ANYTHING.
• Avoid political or religious references and topics, if possible.
• Don’t tell them info they already know about healthcare.
• Don’t get too creative.
• Be concise and succinct.
• Use active imagery.
- Keep it POSITIVE.
- Don’t list out all the qualities it takes to be a good doctor and detail how you possess each or draw analogies to other things such as putting on play, wiring a stereo, fixing a car... (actual examples).
- Strive for specificity General essays and statements come across as weak.
- Aim to EXPRESS rather than IMPRESS
- Focus on post-secondary (i.e., college) experiences.
- Make sure it’s PERFECT with organization structure, spelling grammar.

VI.  Before You Begin

- Focus your thoughts – be introspective.
- WHY do I want this career?
- Do I REALLY know what I am getting into? HOW do I know?
- Do I have the necessary qualities? HOW do I know this?
- What DO I have to offer?
- Why would anyone want me as their doctor, vet, dentist?
- What don’t I like about this profession? Do I have a realistic assessment of it?

VII. How Do I Begin?

- An anecdote
- Brief recap of your background
- An encounter with a health professional
- Tell how you plan to contribute
- Don’t forget to mention science somewhere...

**Complete Exercises** - DO EXERCISE #1 AS PRESENTED IN THE BOOKLET FOR 5 MINS

Typically, do not ask people to share

Detail where they can secure essay feedback

- EPAC (and process) (Need Appt – Please consult us last)
- Career Services (Need Appt)  
- Center for Excellence in Writing (Need Appt)

CLOSE