

WRITING YOUR PERSONAL ESSAY

Plan to start working on your personal statement **several months** before you plan to apply to medical school, and expect to go through many drafts as you refine and polish your words. **Get advice** from friends, from professors, and from the [Health Professional Advisory Committee](#). In particular, you might consult with [The Writing Center](#).

WHAT COMMITTEES LOOK FOR . . .

If an application committee is looking at your essay, you are already past one hurdle. The committee decided that you can handle the academic rigor of a Health Profession School. They are probably reading the essay to see whether or not they think you will be a good physician, dentist, veterinarian, or other health practitioner. What they generally look for are:

- a positive self-concept
- the ability to realistically critique yourself
- the ability to deal with racism or sexism
- commitment to long-range goals
- whether you have a strong support system
- leadership qualities
- a desire to work with people
- demonstrated interest in your field

ORGANIZING YOUR ESSAY

1. Select no more than seven or eight topics to highlight. What you leave out is just as important as what you put in; you are making a value judgment on what to include.
2. To begin your draft, put the topics in outline form so that you can make sure that topics flow and the sequence of ideas makes sense to you.
3. Develop each idea into a vivid paragraph or two.
4. Make each word count. Write clear, concise, and direct sentences. Don't be redundant. Make each sentence about you. Notice whether each sentence could have been written by someone else. If so, or if you are telling the reader what you believe a health practitioner should do or be, then it is not effective for a personal statement. Draft each sentence with care.
5. Edit all technical aspects such as grammar, usage, spelling, and punctuation.
6. Judge the tone and attitude of your essay. Edit your essay to provide the tone that reflects your personal philosophy and personality.
7. Consider the length of your essay. Generally, early drafts will be longer and these are edited to shorten the essay to the desired length.

OUTLINING YOUR ESSAY

Before you begin to write, consider the outline of your essay:

1. Begin with a paragraph that **introduces areas of your background that are unique to you**. This might be information about your family, jobs you have had, extracurricular interests, hobbies, difficulties you may have overcome or some important accomplishment in your life. This will encourage the reader to read your entire essay with interest.
2. Tell the story of **your path to the health profession you are hoping to enter**. Explain what specific people and events influenced your interest in the profession, why you wish to be a health professional, and what activities you have done to explore your goals, e.g. working in a medical or dental clinic, etc. Describe what you feel you have gotten out of these activities, what changes have occurred in your attitudes, what decisions you have made, and what you have learned about yourself from having participated in these activities.

3. Tell **vignettes about these experiences**. Communicate the influences of these experiences and your feelings about them without turning the essay into a creative writing assignment. Tell about instances which made a deep impression on you and why. Health profession schools are looking for people who are interesting and committed.
4. Discuss areas of your **life beyond** your interest in a health profession. For example, if you play sports, are involved in theater, music, or have been a leader of an organization, directed a successful event, etc., tell what you did, why you did it, and what the impacts were.
5. Many students must also work a significant number of hours per week. If this is your case, explain how it may have affected your academics. If there are any **irregularities in your academic record** give a to-the-point explanation. Do not make excuses. Show how you have met and overcome these challenges. Include this information about two-thirds through your essay, after the reader has gotten to know you.
6. Conclude with an explanation of **where you see yourself in the profession** five or ten years from now. **Be clear about your goals**, whether it is working in an inner city neighborhood, rural area, or in between; specializing in a discipline; or research. Tell the reader what you are thinking now. This does not mean that you cannot change your mind.