

Personal Statements

A Personal Statement Is: A written document requested by many universities, graduate programs, scholarships, and grants that is meant to give an idea of who you, as the applicant, are, and why you should be considered.

Before You Begin:

- Do some research. What about this program, university, or grant is interesting to you? What is unique about it? What types of people have they accepted in the past?
- Think about yourself. What about you should interest the program, university, or grant? What is unique about you? What qualities do you have that are specifically related? What experiences have you had in the past that make you suited to this?
- Think about the future. What goals do you hope to accomplish that would be made more realized through the acceptance of this award? Remember, they are making an investment in you—what will they gain by accepting you?
- Make sure you read the entire prompt. Are there specific questions you must answer?

Tips and Tricks:

- Start with a story. Capture your reader's attention by placing them in an interesting point your life. Don't just tell them who you are, show them. If you can hook them in your first paragraph, they'll read through the end.
- Focus on unique and applicable characteristics—lots of people are hard-working and want to help people. Likewise, lots of people are adventurous and desire to experience other cultures. What makes you different, and why do your unique qualities mean you have to go to medical school/receive a study abroad scholarship/become a lawyer?
- If there are things you need to explain about your past in order to remain competitive, explain them: for instance, if you had a sudden dip in GPA, if your GPA has steadily risen, or if there are gaps in your education, consider addressing the issue and let the readers know why they shouldn't be concerned.
- Make your conclusion clear and memorable. Your first and last paragraphs should be carefully constructed to help you stand out.

Remember:

- Your personal statement is a formal document, so try to avoid conjunctions (ex: "don't" should be "do not") and informal writing.
- Grammar and mechanics are important. Read your paper with someone you trust in order to catch any mistakes before you submit. Double-check for things like punctuation at the ends of sentences.
- Don't trust your computer to spell-check. A misspelled word can distract readers, so have a real human being proofread for any spelling errors.

Personal Statement Example

I stuck my gloved hand inside the blue Tupperware container and carefully, slowly extracted a human heart. Only a few days earlier, I had touched my first cadaver, manipulating an arm to examine the extension and flexion of every muscle. In other classes, I had studied pictures of hearts, learned the flow of blood and the components of a heartbeat. This anatomy laboratory had transformed my knowledge of the human body from regurgitated information to revered understanding. Balancing the heart in one hand, I stuck my finger into the aorta, traced the path through the atrium and ventricle, astounded that this one single organ could pump blood through my entire body. In that moment, my passion for medicine awoke from the pages of a book and became a living, breathing desire.

Comment [AW1]: The student starts with a compelling story that relates to her main goal: she wants to attend medical school.

My mother laughed as she retold the story of the first question I remember asking: "Mommy, how are lips attached?" I don't remember the answer she gave, but I know my need to understand the human body has not waned in the passing years. Now, I understand the different layers of the skin and how connective tissue holds my body together. The more knowledge I have, however, the more questions it seems to create. Classes discussing human physiology or pathophysiology have easily been my favorite. While shadowing physicians, I take care to capitalize on my experience – which is necessary, due to my limited availability. When I shadowed the Chief of Anesthesiology at Detroit Receiving Hospital, I was able to see how various sedation techniques are employed during a hip replacement surgery and a thyroid surgery. However, it was only by asking if I could take a closer look that I truly capitalized on the experience. I watched as the physicians made the initial incision on a hip replacement and stared into the cavity of the thyroid surgery. Without the drive to learn more and the need to seek out additional information, I would have missed seeing the skin of the hip part to reveal muscle, or the depth of the neck incision. My thirst for more knowledge and need to exceed the expectation will stay with me as I continue my education. I know a career as a physician is a dedication to lifelong learning and a constant thirst for knowledge – and I revel in it.

Comment [AW2]: The student highlights valuable experiences that make her a good candidate for acceptance.

I am a woman of contradictions, held together by a deep-seated interest in a variety of activities. Few rugby players choose to join a sorority and few science majors love writing. Each of my responsibilities has helped me grow into who I am today, and whenever I become overwhelmed by my schedule, I remind myself of the lessons I have learned. As a student involved in athletics, volunteering, leading student organizations, and working throughout the school year, my time is limited. For more than a year, I worked two jobs to pay for my education, while still fulfilling my other obligations. Throughout that year, I learned the value of my time. I come from a diverse background matched by few – I draw on experiences from people from many different walks of life. I know medical school will further try my scheduling abilities, and I will be busier than I have ever been. I can think of no better way I would like to spend the next four years and my career than to help relieve the pain of others.

Comment [AW3]: Here, the student lists her best qualities—and reminds the reader why she would be a good doctor.

Comment [AW4]: The student focuses on interests and events that make her unique, but also tells the reader a) what qualities she has gained from her experiences and b) why those interests and qualities make her a viable candidate for medical school.

As an undergraduate student, I have gained an appreciation for science, an understanding about assuaging pain, and an ability to properly schedule my time. When I first held that human heart, I knew I was called to a career in medicine. I know medical school will continue to build on the awe I found in that classroom, and that it will integrate my diverse dimensions to help me become a curious, compassionate, and knowledgeable physician. As a curious physician, I will strive to learn more about my patients' diseases. As a compassionate physician, I will learn more about my patients' lives. And as a knowledgeable physician, I will learn more about my patients' health. My experiences have shaped my life so far into who I am today, but it will be medical school that shapes the physician I will become.

Comment [AW5]: The student uses "will" instead of "might" or "could." This makes her appear more confident.

Comment [AW6]: The student's conclusion touches on all of her main points without sounding repetitive—and, once again, reminds the reader of her purpose: med school or bust.

For Additional Resources and Suggestions: The Purdue OWL on Personal Statements: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/642/01/>