Northeastern University
PreMed and PreHealth Advising Program

The Personal Statement

A guide for medical, dental, podiatry, optometry, physician assistant, and veterinary applicants

Agenda

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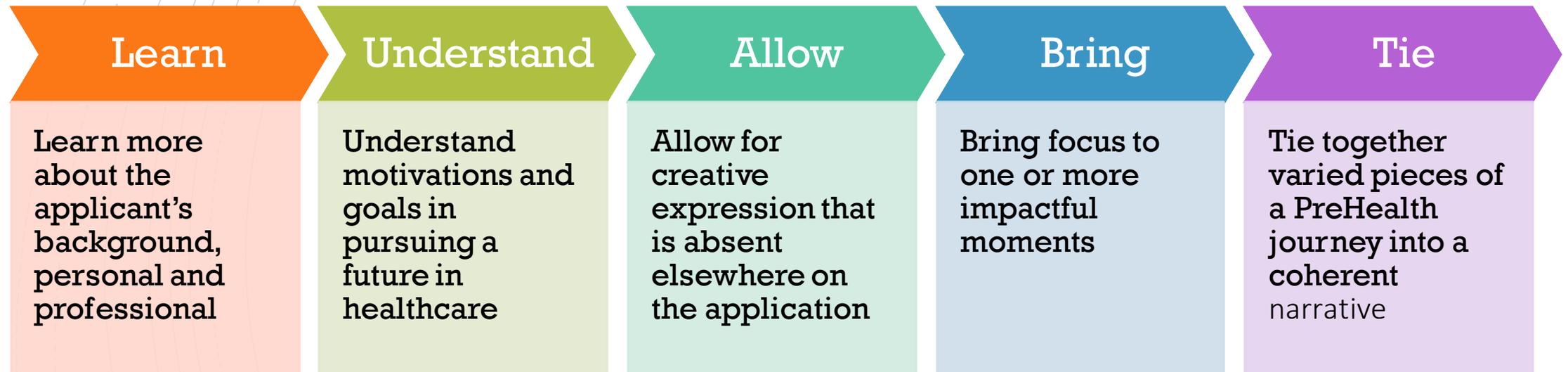
Purpose

What is the purpose of the personal statement?

Learn	Understand	Allow	Bring	Tie
Learn more about the applicant's background, personal and professional	Understand motivations and goals in pursuing a future in healthcare	Allow for creative expression that is absent elsewhere on the application	Bring focus to one or more impactful moments	Tie together varied pieces of a PreHealth journey into a coherent narrative

Prompts

Prompts & Character Limits by application

AMCAS (MD)

- Use the space provided to explain why you want to go to medical school.
- 5300 characters, including spaces

AMCAS (MD/PhD)

- MD/PhD Essay: Use the MD/PhD Essay to state your reasons for pursuing the combined MD/PhD degree. (3,000 characters)
- Significant Research Experience Essay: In addition to the MD/PhD Essay, you are required to write an essay that describes your significant research experiences. In this essay, please specify your research supervisor's name and affiliation, the duration of the experience, the nature of the problem studied, and your contributions to the research effort. (10,000 characters)

AACOMAS (DO)

- In the space provided write a brief statement expressing your motivation or desire to become a DO. Keep your statement general as the same essay will be sent to all schools you will apply to.
- 5300 characters, including spaces

ADEA AADSAS (Dental)

- Your personal statement is a one-page essay that gives dental schools a clear picture of who you are and, most importantly, why you want to pursue a career in dentistry.
- 4500 characters, including spaces

Prompts & Character Limits by application (continued)

CASPA (PA)

- This section is where you can write a brief statement expressing why you are interested in being a Physician Assistant.
- 5,000 character limit

OPTOMCAS (Optometry)

- Please describe what inspires your decision for becoming an optometrist, including your preparation for training in this profession, your aptitude and motivation, the basis for your interest in optometry, and your future career goals.
- 4,500 character limit

VMCAS (Veterinary)

- Your personal statement is a one-page essay that gives veterinary admissions committees a clear picture of who you are and, most importantly, why you want to pursue a career in veterinary medicine.
- 3,000 character limit

AACPMAS (Podiatry)

- This section is where you can write a brief statement expressing why you are interested in becoming a Doctor of Podiatric Medicine. Provide information about your development for a career in Podiatric Medicine.
- 4,500 character limit

Prompts & Character Limits by application (continued) - Texas Schools

TMDSAS (MD/DO)

- The personal essay asks you to explain your motivation to seek a career in medicine. You are asked to include the value of your experiences that prepare you to be a physician.
- 5000 characters, including spaces

TMDSAS (Dental)

- The personal essay asks you to explain your motivation to seek a career in dentistry. You are asked to discuss your philosophy of the dental profession and indicate your goals relevant to the profession.
- 5000 characters, including spaces

TMDSAS (Veterinary)

- The personal essay asks you to describes opportunities and challenges (veterinary-related and non-veterinary-related) you have experienced and how these have helped to prepare you to enter the veterinary profession.
- 5000 characters, including spaces

Brainstorming

Activity!

- Take out a piece of paper or open a notes document on your phone or computer.

Acceptance	Courage	Genius	Optimism	Smart
Accomplishment	Courtesy	Giving	Order	Solitude
Accountability	Creation	Goodness	Organization	Spirit
Accuracy	Creativity	Grace	Originality	Spirituality
Achievement	Credibility	Gratitude	Passion	Spontaneous
Adaptability	Curiosity	Greatness	Patience	Stability
Alertness	Decisive	Growth	Peace	Status
Altruism	Decisiveness	Happiness	Performance	Stewardship
Ambition	Dedication	Hard work	Persistence	Strength
Amusement	Dependability	Harmony	Playfulness	Structure
Assertiveness	Determination	Health	Poise	Success
Attentive	Development	Honesty	Potential	Support
Awareness	Devotion	Honor	Power	Surprise
Balance	Dignity	Hope	Present	Sustainability
Beauty	Discipline	Humility	Productivity	Talent
Boldness	Discovery	Imagination	Professionalism	Teamwork
Bravery	Drive	Improvement	Prosperity	Temperance
Brilliance	Effectiveness	Independence	Purpose	Thankful
Calm	Efficiency	Individuality	Quality	Thorough
Candor	Empathy	Innovation	Realistic	Thoughtful
Capable	Empower	Inquisitive	Reason	Timeliness
Careful	Endurance	Insightful	Recognition	Tolerance
Certainty	Energy	Inspiring	Recreation	Toughness
Challenge	Enjoyment	Integrity	Reflective	Traditional
Charity	Enthusiasm	Intelligence	Respect	Tranquility
Cleanliness	Equality	Intensity	Responsibility	Transparency
Clear	Ethical	Intuitive	Restraint	Trust
Clever	Excellence	Irreverent	Results-oriented	Trustworthy
Comfort	Experience	Joy	Reverence	Truth
Commitment	Exploration	Justice	Rigor	Understanding
Common sense	Expressive	Kindness	Risk	Uniqueness
Communication	Fairness	Knowledge	Satisfaction	Unity
Community	Family	Lawful	Security	Valor
Compassion	Famous	Leadership	Self-reliance	Victory
Competence	Fearless	Learning	Selfless	Vigor
Concentration	Feelings	Liberty	Sensitivity	Vision
Confidence	Ferocious	Logic	Serenity	Vitality
Connection	Fidelity	Love	Service	Wealth
Consciousness	Focus	Loyalty	Sharing	Welcoming
Consistency	Foresight	Mastery	Significance	Winning
Contentment	Fortitude	Maturity	Silence	Wisdom
Contribution	Freedom	Meaning	Simplicity	Wonder
Control	Friendship	Moderation	Sincerity	
Conviction	Fun	Motivation	Skill	
Cooperation	Generosity	Openness	Skillfulness	

- Identify 3 core values that are important to you.

- You can use this list for inspiration, or you can write your own.

- Value: A person's principles or standards of behavior; one's judgment of what is important in life.

Reflect & Journal

How did you choose these values?

Why are these values important to you?

How will you use these values to help you achieve your goal/in daily practice?

Can you think of examples in your life that personify these values?

Continue to Reflect

As you review your brainstorming, think about:

- What were the most common themes/connections I noticed?
- Do I believe that one of these themes represents my goals/motivations for my future profession?
- Will a statement focusing on this theme show an admissions committee who I am, why I am choosing to pursue this field, and how I have proven my commitment?

Reflection is something that you will be doing constantly throughout the application cycle

- Consider keeping a journal to record memorable events
- Talk through your journey with friends/family/mentors to see a different point of view
- Review AAMC Core Competencies to help connect your experiences to your profession of choice

Use of AI

AI can be *a good tool* to help you brainstorm personal statement themes or ideas, but SHOULD NOT be writing the essay for you.

AI tends to be generalized and impersonal. Only you will be able to tell your story and have it sound like you.

You could input excerpts or ideas into AI and ask it to help identify themes, or assist with grammar, but it should not be writing your essay from the start.

Page 64 of AAMC Applicant Guide: "These essays should reflect your personal perspective and experiences accurately and must be your own work and not the work of another author or the product of artificial intelligence."

Examples & Pointers

Common Items to include

- Explain a defining moment that helped steer you toward a career in your field. Consider using that moment as the focal point of your essay.

- Be colorful, positive, imaginative and personal when discussing why you're a good candidate for your program of choice. Ask yourself—in a pile of 100 applications, would I enjoy reading my statement? Be sure to convey your passion for your field in your statement.

- Be yourself. Don't use jargon, clichés or big phrases that you would not use in daily conversation. Remember, health professions programs want to know about the real you.

- Be original and thoughtful: Discuss how you would contribute to the profession and patient/animal care, all of which will help you stand out from other applicants.

- What do you want programs to know about you that hasn't been disclosed in other sections of the application?

- Unique hardships, challenges, or obstacles that may have influenced your educational pursuits.

- Comments/Context on significant fluctuations in your academic record that are not explained elsewhere in your application. (when appropriate)

Narrative Approaches to consider

The Journey

- Begins with a hook, perhaps of one of the experiences you want to focus on, then switches to a slower buildup of several experiences
- Usually includes two to three anecdotes that follow a singular theme
- Conclusion drives home several idea:
  - Why is the path before you the only one that makes sense for your goals?
  - What is your ideology on your chosen profession (i.e. what do you see as its role in the world, and how do you plan on contributing?)
  - Final statement of theme

The Deep Dive

- Totally focused on one anecdote
- Still adhering to a central theme
- Breaks down event and explains impacts/outcomes/lessons learned
- Conclusion pulls anecdote into the present:
  - How did this experience help you arrive to where you are today?
  - How has it solidified your motivation to enter your chosen profession?
  - Final mention of theme

Items to Avoid

Generic, interchangeable, highly-applicable examples

Too many quotes, to where your own voice is drowned out

A focus on the negative, or complaining about a job/supervisor

An attempt to cover your entire resume

Leave items open to misinterpretation, generally being unclear

Boast or label yourself in over-laudatory terms

Forget to address the main question at hand

Applications don't allow varied formatting/spacing/indenting, so ensure you are happy with how it looks as plain text

I felt fortunate to awaken from my weeks-long life-threatening coma in the Zimbabwe orphanage in which I was raised from infancy, until I realized the building was ablaze. After evacuating all the inhabitants including any stray insects who were drawn to the flames, I doused the fire with a water pump I had improvised from an old accordion bellows (on which I often played Bach fugues a la Albert Schweitzer) and a bamboo-like plant I had discovered in the jungle. I named the plant Medusa Abandona after my now forgiven American born mother, who forsook me in my cradle, only after it turned out to be an unknown genus and promised to have exciting anti-cancer medicinal qualities as well. When I was convinced that everyone in the orphanage was safe, I escaped the holocaust in the solar powered wheel chair I had developed to give myself more mobility after the unfortunate accident I had as a child, breaking my seventh vertebra while wrestling a lion that had terrorized the village.

Reminders

This is a personal essay – **be personal**!

Aim for an organized essay that flows from paragraph to paragraph and is anchored to a central theme

Ensure the flow is easy to follow (i.e. introduce items chronologically when possible)

Use direct, active language – help the reader see through your eyes instead of feeling distant

Ensure there are **no grammatical errors**

The essay should be from your point of view with yourself as the main character

Having seen medicine's different sides, I view medicine as a multi-faceted profession. I have witnessed its power as a healing agent in rural Chacala, and I have seen its weakness when I met death face-to-face as an EMT. Inspired by the Latino community of Houston, I realize the benefits of viewing it from a holistic, culturally aware perspective. And whatever the outcome of the cry, "Call 911!" I look forward as a physician to experiencing the satisfaction of saving lives, curing ailments, alleviating pain, and overall making life better for my patients.

Sensitive information

- Consider before including:
  - Is it an important part of your journey to your chosen profession?
  - Can you speak to growth that has taken place because of this?
  - Will it impact your future practice as a healthcare professional?
  - How may it be perceived by different readers?

Resources

Feedback & Resources

- Seeking feedback is a part of every writing process – being open to criticism and review is a sign of strength and will lead to a more solid statement

- Who should you ask?
    - People who know you personally (does it sound like *me*?)
    - People who know you professionally (what did you *learn* about me?)
    - PreHealth Advisor (how will this be *interpreted* by admissions committees?)

- Utilize The Writing Center
    - Open to all students and alumni!

- 7 Tips for Writing Your AMCAS Personal Comments Essay

- ADEA AADSAS Personal Statement Tips

- New England College of Optometry: How to write a wicked awesome personal statement

- Do's and Don'ts for Writing a Strong CASPA Personal Statement

Next steps

Jump in!

Start early

- Even if you are focusing the majority of your time on the MCAT, spend a day or two brainstorming and getting your thoughts down to revisit later

Accountability

Consider building writing into your schedule

- Add blocks of time into your calendar and set personal goals for additional brainstorming, first draft, first major edit, etc.
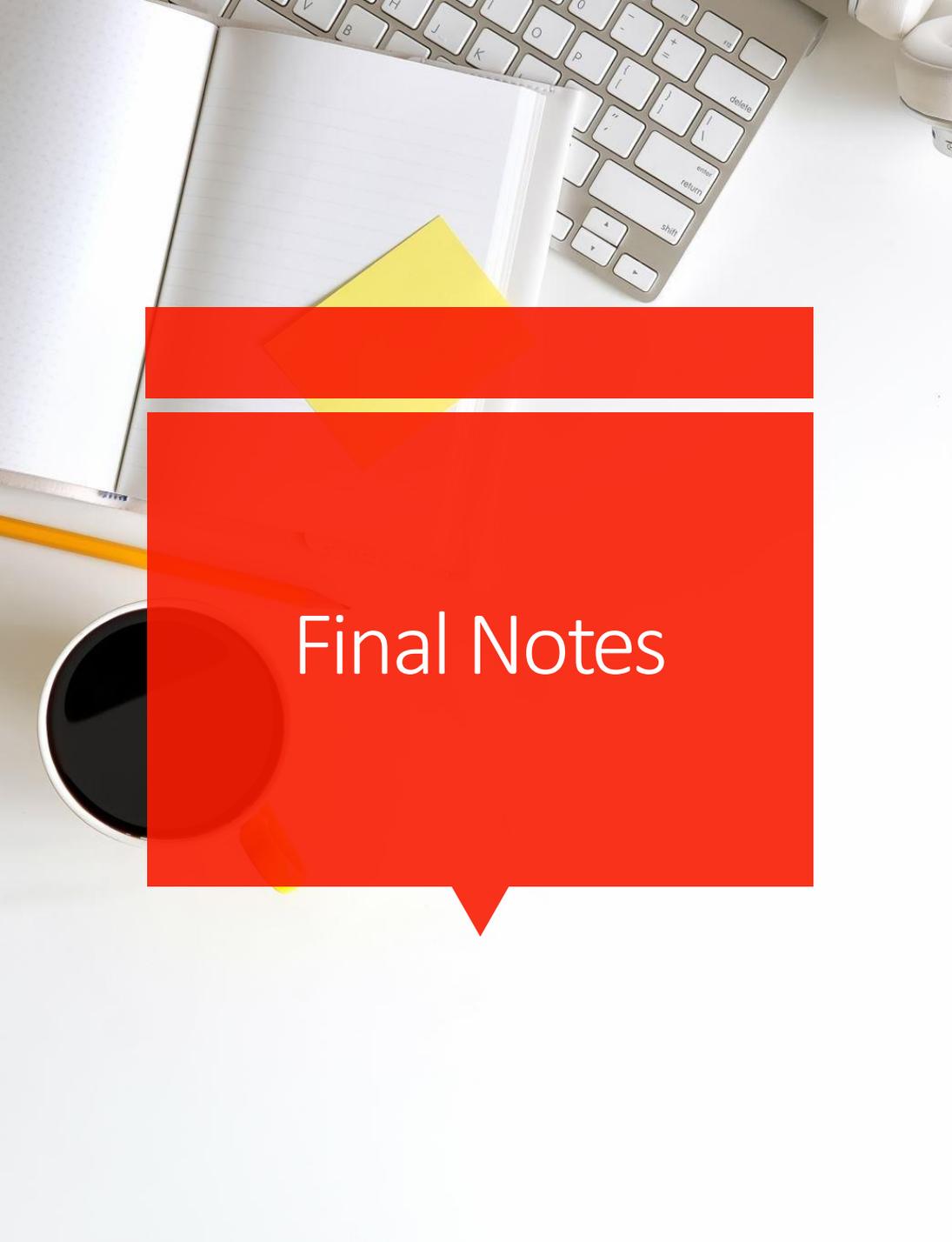
Scan for Errors

Do not rely on spellcheck!

- Read and re-read, and share your statement with others to ensure any errors you missed are eliminated

Speak Up

Read your drafts out loud to listen for flow and identify awkward areas

Final Notes

- Try not to worry about what your peers/the Internet are doing/writing about: it has no relevance to your journey

- You'll "know" when it is done when you feel confident that it represents your motivations and goals

- There is *no one way* to craft a personal statement. Be creative, but not outlandish

Questions