



Northeastern University

**PreMed and PreHealth  
Advising Program**

## The Personal Statement

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

# Agenda



**PURPOSE**



**PROMPTS**



**BRAINSTORMING**



**EXAMPLES & POINTERS**

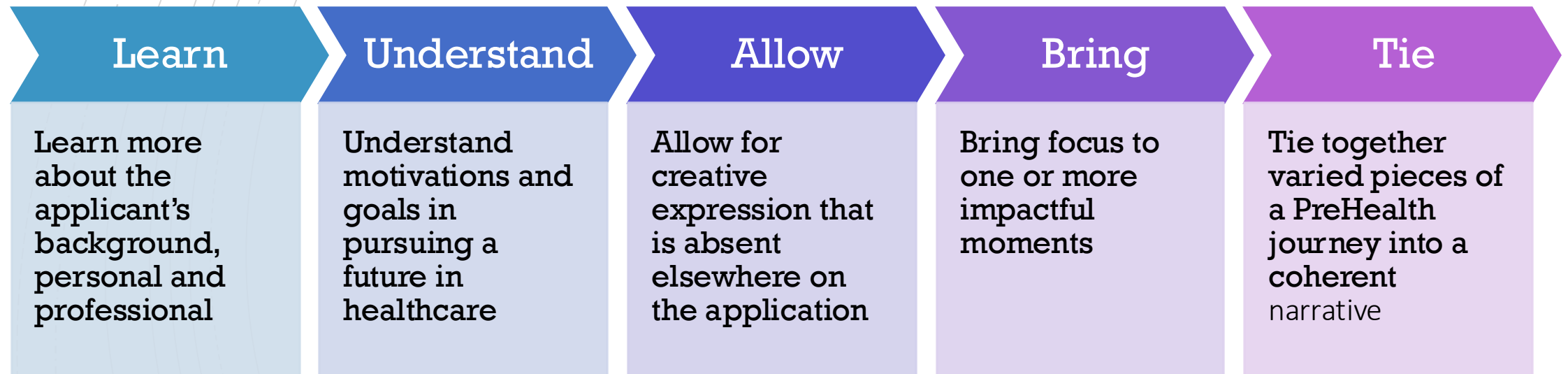


**RESOURCES**



Purpose

# What is the purpose of the personal statement?



Personal  
Statements fill  
in gaps and add  
perspective!

Your application talks  
about WHAT you did...  
Your Personal  
Statement tells us  
WHY you did it!



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





# 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)



Outline support  
provided in [personal  
statement workbook!](#)

# 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

## 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 65 of AAMC Applicant Guide:** "You may use artificial intelligence tools for brainstorming, proofreading, or editing your essays. However, it's essential to ensure that the final submission reflects your own work and accurately represents your experiences."

# 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?
  - What did it teach you about yourself?
  - How is it related to your future practice as a healthcare professional?
  - Consider how it will be perceived by a diverse audience.



# Resources

# Personal Statement Workbook

- The Personal Statement workbook is a **REQUIRED** component of your self-assessment.
- The workbook is composed of 3 parts to help you **Brainstorm, Outline, and Draft** your Personal Statement.
- You must submit at least one of the 3 parts to your self-assessment.

The Personal Statement Workbook can be found in the Self-Assessment in MAP as well as on the PMPH website!

# Support from your PreHealth Advisor

Your PreHealth Advisor is a valuable resource as you draft your personal statement!

Your PreHealth Advisor will review your Personal Statement Workbook with you during (NOT BEFORE) your Application Readiness Meeting (ARM).

Based on your stage in the writing process, your advisor will make one of the following recommendations in your ARM:

No Additional Follow-Up Required.

Almost there! Take our feedback to the Writing Center to finalize your essay!

Significant Edits are needed. Work with the Writing Center and send us a final draft for review.



# THE WRITING CENTER



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# THE WRITING CENTER

## About the Writing Center:

- Free one-on-one writing support for Northeastern students, staff, faculty, and alumni
- In-person appointments Monday thru Friday in our space in 412 Holmes
- Online appointments every day (including evenings and weekends!).
- Summer appointments are online only; we also close briefly between each term.



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# THE WRITING CENTER

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## What happens during a Writing Center appointment?

- You'll meet with a friendly & knowledgeable tutor for about 45 minutes.
  - These are *collaborative* meetings where you get to set the agenda or priorities. Your tutor will offer ideas and advice, but they won't simply edit your statement for you (we're not a proofreading service). Instead, they'll work *with* you to help you capture your ideas or elevate your phrasing.
- Tutors are UG, MA, and PhD students. You can check out [their bios](#).



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# THE WRITING

## CENTER

**When's a good time to make an appointment for help with your personal statement?**

At *any* point in your writing process, like when:

- You're brainstorming and want to bounce ideas off of someone
- You want help incorporating feedback from your pre-med/health advisors
- You want feedback on what you've written—ideas, structure, grammar, etc.

**\*Keep in mind: writing and revising takes time. Most writers have multiple sessions for the same personal statement.\***



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# THE WRITING CENTER

**To make an appointment:**

**Step 1: Create a WCOonline Account here: [neu.mywconline.com](https://neu.mywconline.com)**

Click “Register for Account” and then complete the form; you must use your Northeastern email address.

**Step 2: Check your email and click the activation link. Then, log in to view our two schedules (online and in person) and make an appointment.**

Important note: if you get an error message, just log in anyway—it should work! This is a known glitch that we’re working with IT to get fixed. If you still can log in, please email us.



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# THE WRITING CENTER

**Any questions?**

Email us at [writingcenter@northeastern.edu](mailto:writingcenter@northeastern.edu)

We look forward to supporting you in your  
personal statement writing journey!



# 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... but don't let your own voice be silenced! Avoid asking for too many opinions!
- 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?)
- [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





Questions