

## Pre-Med Day 2009

Crafting Your Personal Statement

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## What is a Personal Statement?

- One of the most important documents you will ever write
- Required by AMCAS (American Medical College Application Service) as part of the application process
  - you may have to write a second one for the medical schools to which you apply
- An opportunity for you to write about WHO YOU ARE without hard data (GPA, MCATs, transcripts, etc.)

## Why Do I Have To Write About Myself?

- Technical and intellectual ability are important in medicine, but.....
- What you write about in your personal statement and say at the interview:
  - tells how you will relate to patients and members of the medical team
  - tells that medicine is about treating people and treatment includes personal interaction!
  - expresses your values and qualities that will make you a good physician

## Choosing Content for Personal Statements

- This can feel like a daunting task
- Give it a lot of thought
- This statement goes to all of the medical schools to which you apply
- Start early
- Create an outline
- Think about structure



## Central Theme or Focus

- Build your story around a central theme or area of focus
- How do I choose it?
- Create a frame for your focus
- Here's an example
- Concluding observation
- Transitions

## Central Theme or Focus

- Build your story around a central theme or area of focus
  - Focus is the main point of your statement
    - “Why Should I be Accepted to Medical School?” - but make it personal or more subtle
    - A value or an observation that has shaped you as a person
    - An abstract quality: the desire to help others, the importance of individual contribution, the drive to unite science and compassion

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## Central Theme or Focus

- How do I choose it?
  - Start by making a list of the experiences that have had impact on your life
  - Determine what it was about the experiences that were so important
  - This exercise will often yield a good focus, one that is:
    - unique, that you can write about with passion, conviction and authority
    - representative of you and can easily transition to other relevant aspects of your life
    - sustainable throughout your statement with depth and flexibility without repetition

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## Central Theme or Focus

- Here's an example
  - A personal experience when you or someone close to you was a patient
  - An experience in your volunteer or work experience that was a “turning point” in your life

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## Central Theme or Focus

- Create a frame for your focus
  - a frame will give your statement its shape (structure)
  - if you have come up with an experience for your focus, you can use details of the same experience for your frame
  - if the focus is abstract, the frame consists of the concrete details and anchors your focus by setting the scene
  - think of the frame as a story, starting with an anecdote that is introduced at the beginning and brought to some sort of closure at the end

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## Central Theme or Focus

- Concluding observation
  - this is a restatement of your focus that has evolved over time with a positive outcome
  - discuss how it will continue to serve you in medical school and as a physician

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## Central Theme or Focus

- Transitions
  - refers to the language you use to move from one idea to the next
  - usually transitions are accompanied by a paragraph break
  - first sentence in a paragraph should relate to the last sentence in the previous paragraph

## Giving it a Punch

- Make it easy for the reader
  - Use short sentences
  - Paragraphs and sentences should hang together
  - Use active voice
  - Get rid of the words that you really do not need

## Giving it a Punch

- Use short sentences
  - As I have gone through my premedical education I have found that I have been even more delighted in the possibilities that this field has the potential to bring to me.
  - vs.
  - I am delighted at the possibilities that a medical education will bring.

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## Giving it a Punch

- Paragraphs and sentences should hang together
  - Read the first and last sentence of a paragraph
    - Are they talking about the same thing?
  - Is the paragraph or sentence stressing what you wish to emphasize?
    - Although one expects new information near the end of a sentence, is there so much “stuff” in the beginning that the reader is lost before they get to it?

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## Giving it a Punch

- Use Active Voice
  - Easier to comprehend
  - Engages the reader
    - The entrance exam **was failed** by over one-third of the applicants to medical school.
    - vs.
    - Over one-third of the applicants to medical school **failed** the entrance exam.

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## Giving it a Punch

- Get rid of the words that you really do not need
  - Can weaken a personal statement
    - Get rid of the words that you really do not need.
    - vs.
    - Get rid of unneeded words (and sentences too).

## Other Considerations

- Does my introduction engage the reader?  
Does my conclusion provide closure?
- Do I use concrete experiences as supporting details?
- Do I distinguish myself from others?
- Revise, revise, revise
- Proofread carefully!

## Other Considerations

- Rather than telling the readers your attributes, skills, and traits, you want THEM to come to these conclusions based on what you have done!
- Do not SAY who you are, but DEMONSTRATE who you are

## What you do NOT want to do!

- Do not use clichés (“I want to be a doctor to help people”)
- Do not demonstrate prejudices (“I wouldn’t treat someone with \_\_\_\_\_”)
- Do not use jargon
- Do not bring up topics that embarrass you
- Do not write an essay on how to be a good doctor and do not preach
- Do not generalize – use personal details
- Do not write a resume

## Logistics

- Maximum of 5300 characters or approximately one page
- AMCAS recommends that you type directly onto the online application to avoid formatting errors
- To cut and paste use a text only format
- You can not run spell check on the AMCAS application

## Logistics

- You may NOT change or add to the essay once the application is submitted
- Plagiarisms and misrepresentations will prompt an investigation
- Do not repeat information listed in other sections of the application
- Enter all information exactly as you wish medical schools to see it

## Own the Challenge!

