Personal Statement

Your personal statement is an integral part of a successful application. Unless a program’s faculty or residents know you personally through a rotation, your application—including personal statement—presents your entire professional persona to those who extend interview invitations. Competitive programs have hundreds of qualified applicants, so your personal statement must help you stand out.

Programs differ in how they use personal statements, so even an excellent essay doesn’t guarantee an interview. Number-oriented programs may “screen out” applicants whose numbers (e.g., USMLE scores) fall below their standards. Fortunately, a well-written personal statement can connect you with those who review applications more holistically.

Your personal statement should achieve these broad goals:

- communicate passion for and describe how specific experiences sparked and developed your commitment to your specialty,
- address sensitive issues (e.g., course repeats) to alleviate reviewer concerns, and
- provide interviewers a base from which to ask questions during your interview.

In short, your essay can help you secure interviews and establish rapport with those who influence where you’re placed on a program’s Rank Order List (ROL).

Additionally, program directors and faculty who screen applications want personal statements to

**be personal.** Tell your story so reviewers want to meet you.

**portray marketable abilities.** Describe experiences (e.g., community service learning, jobs) that honed your interpersonal and communication skills.

**describe specialty-specific attributes.** Integrate specific abilities (e.g., ability to focus under pressure) possessed by successful residents in your specialty.

**demonstrate personal responsibility.** Address potential issues (e.g., repeated Step 1) directly and describe how you overcame the challenge.

**be easy to read.** Write using short to moderate-length sentences.

**be professional.** Eliminate typographical, syntax, and grammatical errors. These errors will likely produce an undesired outcome.

Also avoid

**using a quotation.** If you include one, be able to discuss how it relates to you during an interview.

**claiming an attribute you’re expected to possess.** Write your essay so the reader concludes you are a hard worker or behave professionally.

**making a request.** Reviewers are seldom moved by “Please allow me to interview at your program.”

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James Tysinger, Ph.D.
Distinguished Teaching Professor and Vice-Chair for Professional Development
Department of Family and Community Medicine, The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio

Mark T. Nadeau, M.D., M.B.A., F.A.A.F.P.
Professor, Clinical Vice-Chair for Graduate Medical Education, and Residency Director
Department of Family and Community Medicine, The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio
References