

Personal Statement Do's and Don'ts

Personal statements are an important part of your application to residency programs in the United States. This is your opportunity to discuss your passion for medicine and/or your chosen specialty, why you want to practice medicine in the United States, important milestones in your life that influenced your decision to become a physician, and your goals for the future. The personal statement should show what kind of person and physician you are and wish to become. The following guidelines are derived from feedback we've received from program directors and staff about what they do and do not like to see in an applicant's personal statement.

Do's

DO describe your passion for and commitment to medicine and patient care. Other documents in your application, such as your curriculum vitae (CV) and transcripts, already describe your education and experience in medicine thus far. This is your opportunity to communicate why you chose medicine as a career.

DO discuss why you would like to practice medicine and treat patients in the United States. Moving to another country is a big decision and programs want to know why you made this decision.

DO talk about something personal. Whether you are focusing on your personal experiences or personal career goals, it should be centered on you.

DO let readers know why you believe they should have you in their program. What special skills or traits do you have to offer? What makes you unique? What might set you apart from other applicants?

DO be honest. If there is a "red flag" on your application (gap in training, disciplinary action, course failures), this is your chance to explain it. Don't avoid the topic, and make sure your explanation is accurate and forthright.

DO proofread. A well-written personal statement demonstrates care, attention to detail, and good English language skills. The personal statement is the only place in your application where you can showcase your writing skills. A poorly written personal statement may cause a program to reject your application.

DO show your personal statement to others to obtain their feedback and for proofreading, but not for their rewrites. It is good to reach out to friends and colleagues for advice on your personal statement, especially those in residency positions in the United States or native English speakers; however, these individuals should not be writing the statement for you. This is about you, and you know yourself best.

DO keep your statement to one page in length. Limiting yourself to one page will help you keep your points clear, concise, and readable.

Don'ts

DON'T plagiarize. You should not copy language from any source for use in your personal statement. Samples of personal statements can be found on the Internet. Although these samples may be used as a reference when writing your own personal statement, copying any

portion of the published language and representing it as your own is plagiarism. Any reported allegations of plagiarism will prompt an investigation by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) and may result in your becoming ineligible to participate in the Main Residency Match®.

DON'T pay a for-profit service to write your statement for you. A writing service may make your personal statement read as though it were created using a template. It may also lead to an investigation of plagiarism if that service uses the same language in statements for other applicants.

DON'T have a friend, family member, colleague, or anyone else write your personal statement for you. The credibility of your personal statement will be greatly affected by having someone else write it for you.

DON'T list your accomplishments. Let your CV detail your accomplishments. Though past accomplishments are important, the personal statement is an opportunity for you to convey who you are and why you are applying to residency.

DON'T mention religion or politics. These topics are not openly discussed in most U.S. workplaces, in particular not when you are applying for a job.

DON'T discuss salary requirements. Though many job applications may ask for this information in a cover letter, this is not something you should discuss when applying to U.S. graduate medical education (GME) programs, since salary for training programs is predetermined.

DON'T speak negatively about anything or anyone. Placing blame on others or describing them in a negative way is not a desirable trait in a resident who will be working with many colleagues and taking care of patients.

DON'T rush through the writing process. Allow yourself time to make an outline about what you want to say. Time for reflection is important in setting the tone and organizing your thoughts. Allow time for revisions to make sure you communicate exactly what you intend. And, of course, take time to proofread!

Last Updated: May 20, 2022