



PHYSICIANS MEDICAL FORUM

Dedicated to Encouraging Recruitment & Retention of African American Physicians

Virtual Workshop

THE STORY THAT COUNTS

*FINDING AND DEVELOPING
YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT*

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What is a Personal Statement?

*"A written **description** of one's **achievements, interests, etc.**, included as part of an application for a job or to an educational program."*

This is misleading. A statement is MUCH more.
It's **YOUR narrative.**

What is a Personal Statement?

Your voice, expressing how your background, your abilities, and your life experiences align you with a given purpose.

- It is both subjective and objective
- It contains expert opinion
- It's the preamble to you.



Utility of a Personal Statement

- **Required** by all major pathways to medicine and dentistry
- Most U.S. **Scholarships** require one
- Useful in minor **Publications** or in providing background
- Often helpful in courting **Letters of Recommendation**
- Provides background details for **Speaking opportunities**



What is a Personal Statement?

- Addresses the question: **WHY?**
 - What will make you a good physician?
 - How are you prepared for this occupation?
- Individualized
 - Tailored to your journey; as specific as you prefer
- Includes Self-reflection and personal experiences
 - Deep enough to draw the reader in
 - But focused enough to drive home a point



Building the Narrative

- Establish Your ***Premise***
 - Concise statement articulating YOUR Why
 - Identify an ***Anchor***
 - A leading trait or characteristic that makes you fit for being a physician
 - Find the ***Pivot Points***
 - Significant moments or “forks in the road” that led you to where you are now
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Building the Narrative

- Soft flex vs Hard flex
 - **"Soft flex"** = *indirect* mention of your strength/strengths
 - **"Hard flex"** = *direct* mention of your strength/strengths
 - **Acknowledge/Address Weaknesses with Authority**
 - Do not avoid or gloss over
 - Demonstrate learning from mistakes or show improvement
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Building the Narrative



- Layer & Coordinate
 - Echo elements found throughout application materials; create a compound picture
- The **Boomerang** Effect
 - All supporting arguments boomerang back to your anchor or premise

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- Prompt → Statement → Support → Restate
 - Prompt can be a quote or a lead-in anecdote
 - Statement is affirmative in tone; Support given in body to strengthen statement
 - Recapitulate and Reiterate initial statement

*Writing
Structures:
Ex. 1*

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- Setting → Rise → Climax → Fall → Resolution
 - Consistent story/plot throughout
 - Minor points found in details
 - Arrive at a resolution that answers a lingering question

*Writing
Structures:
Ex. 2*



*Writing
Structures:
Ex. 3*

- Three major qualities → Examples → Synthesize
 - Opening introduces major qualities in context
 - Body provides specific examples of each quality (usually by citing an experience as evidence)
 - All elements brought to a boil, creates a uniform sentiment



Pro Tips

- Access a successful applicant's statement
 - Speak with a health careers advisor OR person who serves on an admissions committee
 - What keeps them reading? What makes a statement memorable?
 - Steer away from internet advice (not from verifiable sources)
 - READ, READ, READ!
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Timeline

- Start EARLY!
 - 1st draft – aim for a page, go further if possible
 - Allow two weeks for each batch of revisions
 - Follow-up for feedback
 - 2nd draft – more concise, improved flow
 - Subsequent drafts – focus on maximizing character count
 - Final draft ready appx 4-6 weeks prior to submission deadline
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Feedback



- Constructive criticism HELPS
- Have TRUSTED eyes read your statement
 - Friends in Law/Political science, English, Philosophy, Religion
 - Access/Compare to a successful applicant's statement
- Incorporate what amplifies your statement
- Be mindful of the timeline.

Weak Example

I've been asked many times why I wish to become a physician. Upon considerable reflection, the thought of possessing the ability to help others provides me with tremendous internal gratification and offers the feeling that my life's efforts have been focused in a positive direction. Becoming a physician is the culmination of a lifelong dream; and I am prepared to dedicate myself, as I have in the past, to achieving this goal.



Critique of Weak Example

- Too Vague
 - Fails to include personal experience
 - Grammatically unstable
 - Spelling error
 - Does not answer “Why”
 - Offers no support
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Strong Example


Many share the aspiration of becoming a physician. As a farmer's son, one would think that these two spheres have limited overlap. However, I understand the level of dedication required to practice medicine; in fact, this commitment to service drives my pursuit. For 10 years, I have wakened early and returned home late after long days of working in the fields with my father. I have experienced uncertainties, obstacles, and have had to problem solve in real time; this is similar to the daily lives of physicians. But like my mentor, Dr. Smith and his lab/clinical work, I can find happiness and satisfaction in performing tough tasks consistently. I understand that physicians confront hardships regularly, sifting through stress and long hours to help others. My father also shoulders stress of growing and harvesting produce for others. From him, I have learned that my shoulders are broad and can handle challenges.




Critique of Strong Example

- Shares personal story within context
 - Forms bridge between life experience and interest in medicine
 - Appropriate grammar
 - No spelling errors
 - Offers adequate support for why medicine.
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Common Pitfalls

- Do NOT be cliché
 - References to TV shows
 - Sick parents/grandparents
 - Your personal drama
 - Error-Free Writing
 - Spell Check
 - Grammatical Errors
 - Tone: Passive? Rhetorical questions
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Common Pitfalls

- Use of improper vernacular
 - Doctor vs physician
 - Vocabulary that sets the tone
 - Fabrication
 - Do not lie or sell a dream
 - Have familiarity with all points referenced in writing
 - Late submission
 - Usually due to procrastination or poor adherence to initial timeline
 - Start early – get revisions on time
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Personal Statement Brainstorming Exercise

1. Write down one premise.
 2. Write down one anchor.
 3. Write three pivot points.
 4. Write one boomerang sentence.
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Key Take Home Points

- Tell your narrative as it relates to your interest in medicine.
- Use the revision process to sculpt your statement.
- Plan and time manage appropriately.
- Submit and prepare for the interview!

QUESTIONS???
