

Personal Statement Guide

Medical School Edition



5 STEPS TO A FIRST DRAFT



Lyman Briggs College
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

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STEP ONE: THE BASICS YOU SHOULD...

- Answer the prompt: Why would you make a strong physician?
- Make meaning of your experiences: Tell specific stories that highlight your skills, especially as they relate to the competencies
- Highlight the competencies: Visit the AAMC competencies website, (DO programs have adopted these competencies, too!) and familiarize yourself with [Competencies for Incoming Med Students](#)
- Maintain your voice: Outside opinions can be helpful, but at the end of the day your personal statement needs to sound like YOU
- Say what needs to be said: Had a tough semester? Encountered adversity personally or academically? Your personal statement is the perfect place to address any discrepancies in your application
- Write well and proofread: Your personal statement helps admissions committees to see how well you can communicate

AVOID THESE COMMON MISTAKES:

- Don't speak in clichés/ generalities: Let's be realistic, everyone who is applying to medical school "likes science and wants to help people". While this is a good basic tenet to start with, your personal statement needs to go well beyond this.
- Your trauma won't get you into med school: Many applicants feel the need to exploit or overexplain medical trauma that they experienced personally, or even second-hand. While personal stories are an important component of the personal statement, you shouldn't feel pressured into talking about traumatic events if you are not ready to talk about them.
- Avoid repeating info from your resume: You've probably heard the phrase "show, don't tell" when it comes to personal statements. To do this, we want to tell stories, explain thought processes and make meaning of our experiences, as opposed to just listing tasks you completed.

CONCEPTS TO INCLUDE

When preparing your personal statement, consider the following...



MOTIVATION

Why medicine?
How has your motivation matured over time?



FIT & CAPACITY

What experiences have you had?
What skills have you developed?
What are your values?



VISION

What kind of impact do you want to make?
How will you live your values?



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STEP TWO: LET'S TALK ABOUT YOU.

Personal statements can often feel uncomfortable because we have to talk about ourselves. But the only way for the committee to get to know YOU is for YOU to tell them all of the amazing things that YOU have done.

Are YOU sensing a theme?

In the table on the next page, tell us about the activities/experiences that you have had that have motivated you to become a physician.

These experiences could include:

- Clinical: Working with patients/in a medical environment
- Research: Working through the scientific process in or out of the classroom
- Volunteer: Anything involving serving others; think about purpose
- Leadership: Student organizations, teaching roles, etc.
- Personal experiences: Close connections to medicine personally

NOTE: Fill out only the LEFT SIDE of the table for now.

STEP THREE: TELL ME ALL ABOUT IT!

You're still not done talking about yourself. I know, I know, I know. But this part is important.

Being able to talk about WHAT you did is a good start. But in order to REALLY convey your story, we need to talk about WHAT YOU LEARNED.

Consider the following:

- What skills did you develop?
- What values did you embody?
- If you were shadowing, what did you observe from the physician?
- Think back to the AAMC Competencies: which of the competencies relate to this experience?

STEP FOUR: CONNECT THE DOTS.

Review the lessons learned on the chart. We're looking to develop a theme. A theme is a way for us to clearly define the story you are trying to tell. You may notice that you have identified values you want to embody as a physician: this could be a theme. You may have talked about several of the competencies: this could be a theme. Maybe you've shown a commitment to a specific cause/population that you'd like to serve- that's a theme too!

What themes do you see emerging in your story?
Highlight, circle or star the things that go together.



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ON THE LEFT:

ON THE RIGHT:

LESSONS LEARNED

[illegible]

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ON THE LEFT:

ON THE RIGHT:

LESSONS LEARNED

[illegible]

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STEP FIVE: BRING IT ALL TOGETHER.

This is the fun part - promise!

What experiences did you have the most to say about? What themes and competencies are represented in those experiences? Try to limit yourself to 3-5 stories to highlight throughout your statement.

Now, let's take those themes and put them into a thesis statement. This will be the end sentence in your intro paragraph. Your thesis statement introduces your themes and is the sentence that says: In this essay I will talk about...without saying that.



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FEELING AMBITIOUS?

Use these next pages to go beyond the first 5 steps and build an outline for your personal statement. An outline can be an incredibly helpful starting place when you meet with a career advisor!

Let's start to organize your stories

Go back to your experiences, and your thesis statement. What experiences and/or stories best highlight the themes that you want to discuss in your statement? This could be a personal story, a clinical experience, or maybe even a story about shadowing a physician that embodied the values/skills that you want to incorporate into your own practice.

This will become the anecdote we use in your introduction.

Your introduction paragraph should end with your thesis statement.
As a reminder, this is the sentence that says: 'In this essay I will talk about', without saying that.





OUTLINING YOUR STATEMENT

Now, let's work on your body paragraphs.

Each of your body paragraphs should represent one of the themes that you highlighted in your thesis statement. This is where we'll start to use your other experiences to tell stories that highlight your skills/interests/values.

BODY PARAGRAPH 1

THEME:

A STORY IN WHICH YOU DEMONSTRATE THIS THEME:

DESCRIBE HOW YOU WILL USE THIS THEME IN YOUR WORK:





OUTLINING YOUR STATEMENT

Now, let's work on your body paragraphs.

Each of your body paragraphs should represent one of the themes that you highlighted in your thesis statement. This is where we'll start to use your other experiences to tell stories that highlight your skills/interests/values.

BODY PARAGRAPH 2

THEME:

A STORY IN WHICH YOU DEMONSTRATE THIS THEME:

DESCRIBE HOW YOU WILL USE THIS THEME IN YOUR WORK:



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OUTLINING YOUR STATEMENT

Now, let's work on your body paragraphs.

Each of your body paragraphs should represent one of the themes that you highlighted in your thesis statement. This is where we'll start to use your other experiences to tell stories that highlight your skills/interests/values.

BODY PARAGRAPH 3

THEME:

A STORY IN WHICH YOU DEMONSTRATE THIS THEME:

DESCRIBE HOW YOU WILL USE THIS THEME IN YOUR WORK:



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LET'S WRAP IT UP

Your conclusion can be short, sweet, and simple. Use this space to make references back to your anecdote in the beginning, reiterate your thesis statement (and themes!), and overall bring the essay to a close.

CONCLUSION

YOUR OUTLINE IS DONE - CONGRATS! NOW WHAT?

You're ready to write your first draft!

Remember: don't let the character count dictate your writing too much. Tell us the story; we'll make it more concise later.

Book an appointment on Handshake with a Career Advisor.

- Log on to msu.joinhandshake.com
- Click on Career Center, then select Schedule an Appointment
- Select your appointment group (we suggest choosing your college or Interest Area Advising: Health Sciences)
- Select your appointment type
- Choose a time and date that works for your schedule

Questions? Contact us at LBcareer@msu.edu

