

# TIPS FOR WRITING A PERSONAL STATEMENT

**Critical Pieces in Writing:** your personal statement would include the following topics:

- 1. Focus on the specialty.** You have “sampled” many specialties during your clerkships, and you have made a decision (or narrowed the choices). Just tell the residency committee how you reached that decision. What excited you about delivering babies? Or what thrills you about caring for babies after they are born? Use anecdotes to illustrate your story; bring out your strengths and your unique perspective. Even more importantly, where do you see yourself in the future? Make your choice clear to the reader, and demonstrate your commitment to the specialty.
- 2. Focus on your strengths.** You have gained skills and technical competence during medical school, but so have all of your classmates. Which of your skills makes you stand out, would make a residency program choose you as their #1 candidate? Think of these in context of what would be needed in the specialty. Do you have great listening skills that would make you a good choice in family medicine? Do you have quick reflexes that have prepared you for the quick technical skills necessary for emergency medicine? Will the teamwork skills that you learned through years of soccer improve your abilities as a surgeon? Select some specific examples that illustrate your unique talents.
- 3. Focus on the program.** Give them some idea of how their program is a good choice for you. Maybe you are looking for a strong research-oriented program, or a smaller, more clinically oriented program. Tailor your statement to each program; it will demonstrate that you have done your homework on the program and what it has to offer.
- 4. Tips for better writing.** Now that you have an idea of what to write, you need to figure out how to write it. Your tone should be personable, but professional. Make your story interesting, and try to draw the reader in with specific examples. Throughout your statement, keep your purpose in mind. You are trying to land an interview, not go over every aspect of your medical school career.
- 5. Example for drawing the reader into the story:**

Let’s examine techniques for creating interest. Specifically let's look at surprise, irony, and suspense.

Surprise -- Start your essay in an unexpected manner. For example, open an essay about your background by starting with yesterday or tomorrow, but make sure you spend most of the essay answering the question and discussing your past.

Irony -- "It was the best of times. It was the worst of times." Dickens understood that irony grabs interest and opened the classic, *Tale of Two Cities*, with that intriguing line. Learn from the master. Are you writing about someone who influenced you greatly? Are you in certain ways different from your mentor? Highlight the contrasts and differences, while saying that he or she was the greatest influence on you. Was your proudest accomplishment conceived in failure? Open with the failure and discuss how that failure led to your later success. Use the irony and contrast inherent in these situations to grab attention and tell your story.

Suspense -- Arouse curiosity by using suspense. Ask a question at the beginning of your essay, but don't answer it until the end.

Implicit in these suggestions: don't start with the common or expected. Don't begin your goals essay or statement of purpose with, "I want to be a doctor because . ." or "I was born in . ." Let your essays grab your readers' attention so that they will read your essay because they want to and not because they have to.

Adapted from [Cydney Foote](#), Accepted.com editor and co-author of [Write Your Way to A Residency Match](#)