



Dos and Don'ts of Personal Statements

Logistics:

You want to start this process early. A quality essay takes time, especially for those to whom writing does not come naturally. Be aware of your deadlines and consider starting the process months in advance. Set multiple reminders as checkpoints on your calendar.

DO:

- Gather all deadlines at least 6 months in advance
- Set periodic goals
- Set reminders on your calendar
- Start writing, even if you have writer's block—don't wait for your Muse to just show up

DON'T:

- Procrastinate
- Put it off until you're "in the mood"
- Underestimate the time it will take you to write this (well)

Content:

Personal statements are just that—personal. It's hard to create a catch all formula for success, but there are some general principles to which you can abide. First, ask yourself some basic questions. Why did you pursue medicine and how has your relationship with medicine changed since medical school and residency? Why are you pursuing Gastroenterology and what do you want out of your career? What educational experiences or mentoring relationships have changed the course of your life? What patient care experiences have changed the course of your life or someone else's? What experiences and qualities make you resilient to challenges and well suited for academic or clinical success? On the day you retire, what do you want to say about your career? Most importantly, be honest when you write. The faculty reading your essay probably have read dozens if not hundreds of essays yearly, and they are a pretty savvy lot—they can tell when someone is being genuine and when someone is not.

Next, and equally important, is the narrative package which encapsulates your ideas. This is your story, and you must present it in a way that would be interesting and easily grasped by an exhausted attending who is reading dozens to hundreds of applications on nights and weekends. Start by choosing an experience, accomplishment, or character trait that will be the theme for your essay. This should underpin the introduction, set up the body paragraphs, and reappear to unify everything in the conclusion. Your body paragraphs should be predicated on one topic each that supports your unifying narrative while showcasing important details about you and your packet. Under-represented or disadvantaged status is an important aspect that may not come through on other parts of your application, so if they are a part of your personal story, care should be taken to introduce these

important elements. Humor and drama are important literary devices, but they're just that: devices. Use them, but judiciously and sparingly.

DO:

- Pick an important experience, accomplishment, or character trait to serve as the unifying theme for your essay
- Utilize this experience, accomplishment, or trait in your introduction and conclusion paragraphs and reference in your body paragraphs
- If applicable, highlight under-represented minority status and how this may have impacted your youth, education, clinical experiences, and desire to pursue Gastroenterology
- If applicable, highlight a disadvantaged background and how this may have impacted your youth, education, clinical experiences, and desire to pursue Gastroenterology
- Use humor and drama as a tool, not a crutch or focus
- Be true to yourself and your resume

DON'T:

- Be arrogant or boastful when recounting accomplishments, projects, or activities
- Use cliches
- Over-embellish
- Overplay your hand with humor or drama

Quality:

You can have the best content, but it will all unravel with poor grammar and spelling. Draft and redraft your essay, and don't be afraid to take feedback. Have family, friends, and professional acquaintances read it. Your mentors will be valuable editors as well. No easy, unforced errors = no regrets.

DO:

- Use a traditional format such as introduction→first body paragraph→second body paragraph→third body paragraph→conclusion
- Pay close attention to spelling and diction
- Pay close attention to formatting, punctuation, and sentence structure
- Have others you trust read and edit it

DON'T:

- Try to do it all in one take—draft, take a break, and come back to it
- Let sloppy formatting or grammatical mistakes detract from your voice or paint you as non-detail oriented
- Ask someone who is over-committed to read it; it will burden that person and the feedback won't be worth your time or theirs