



Personal Statement Workshop

*Career Development Center
Pre-Health Professions Program
Personal Comments for AMCAS and AACOMAS
Spring 2017*

“Elements of Style” (nod to Strunk and White)

- Grammar
 - Write in the first person but don't catch “I Disease”
 - Use Active Voice: Subject of sentence performs the action of the verb.
 - Follow Rules of Grammar
 - Tense agreement, plural versus singular, then versus than, etc.
 - Don't use all CAPS. conversely, use capital letters appropriately.
 - Attend to grammatical details.
 - Good handbook at hand
 - Don't use humor, slang, jargon, and questionable language
 - Proof-Read!

“Elements of Style”

- Writing Considerations
 - Draft, draft, draft!
 - Don't worry about length early in the drafting process
 - Audience (kinder to more critical)
 - Attend to principles of Unity and Coherence as defined in Composition Theory
 - Don't lecture health care professionals on health care
 - Workshop your essay

“Elements of Style”

- Writing Considerations (continued)
 - Make sure your words are consistent with your actions
 - Offer details and examples; It is best to guide your readers to the conclusions you want them to make (avoid statements such as “I am a leader,” your communication of such ideas should be more developed than such a statement)
 - Use good judgment with criticism
 - Appreciation of complexity and multiple viewpoints, use of professionalism and decorum, don’t use to make excuses, etc.

“Elements of Style”

- Structural Considerations
 - Organize your essay around a theme(s)
 - Temporal logic is typically among **least** effective ways to organize essay
 - Don't “Bury Your Lead”
 - Personal Statement should **NOT** be prose version of resume
 - Don't fall victim to thinking that the personal statement is a term paper or a lab report

“Elements of Style”

- **Miscellaneous Considerations**
 - Give thought to point of view of your audience
 - Clinically-related experience can be crucial
 - Journaling; Thoughtful Reflection
 - Make the most of this opportunity
 - Give yourself plenty of time: draft, perspective, reflection, revise. Repeat.
 - Don't spend all day on the first line
 - Primary Application is 1st of 3 major forms of communication
 - Stay away from statements that are some version of "I have always wanted to be a doctor because I like science and want to help people." If an applicant can implicitly say this through vividly detailing an experience or experiences, he or she is much better off (Asher, 2000).

Elements of Personal Statement and other Sections of Primary Application

- Personal Statement is typically limited between 4500 and 5300 characters depending on application
- With “Experiences” sections, explain why experiences are meaningful to you
- With “Experiences” sections, Use most if not all 15 without “reaching”; Do not repeat information from personal statement
- Institutional Action
 - “Medical schools understand that many individuals learn from the past and emerge stronger as a result. Full disclosure will enable the medical schools to more effectively evaluate this information within the context of your credentials.”
 - Personal Accountability and Learning from Mistakes

Elements of Personal Statement and other Sections of Primary Application

- AMCAS 2015: Use the Personal Comments essay as an opportunity to distinguish yourself from other applicants. Some questions you may want to consider while writing this essay are:
 - Why have you selected the field of medicine?
 - What motivates you to learn more about medicine?
 - What do you want medical schools to know about you that hasn't been disclosed in other sections of the application?
- In addition, you may wish to include information such as:
 - Special hardships, challenges, or obstacles that may have influenced your educational pursuits.
 - Commentary on significant fluctuations in your academic record that are not explained elsewhere in your application.
 - PH Advice: **Use Caution Here**

Essay Hall of Shame (Asher, 2000)

- Spelling errors, poor English, sloppiness...does not reflect positively on the writer.
- Anything that starts out, "I've always wanted to be a ____"
- When they just seem to be saying what they think we want to hear. We can pick up on that right away.
- The essay sounds like they want to be the next Mother Teresa, but there's nothing in the rest of the application that to back up any claims of altruism.
- We ask for dates on activities. It's a red flag if all the activities are brand new.
- It is common for students to write a whole essay on deep personal problems or excuses for past performance. The essay should be upbeat, convincing, and persuasive.
- Admissions committees often become frustrated by students who are so afraid to take a risk that they don't really tell us anything. That throws us right back on the numbers.
- Don't tell me what medicine, dentistry, optometry, or podiatry is. I know what my own discipline is! What can they be thinking? Tell me what medicine, dentistry, optometry, podiatry means to you.
- Some students think they can use the essay to manufacture a person who doesn't exist. It doesn't work.

Critique of Example Personal Statements

- Example 1
 - Strengths
 - Areas for Improvement
- Example 2
 - Strengths
 - Areas for Improvement