

# Personal Statement Checklist

## Pre-writing

- ☐ Set deadlines for completing your pre-writing, first draft, edited draft, and final draft. (You must have some work, and preferably a first draft, ready by July 15 if you want feedback from Student Affairs. Your final draft deadline should be well before September 1.)
- ☐ Choose a writing partner, an editor, or both
- ☐ Choose a place to keep your notes for your personal statement
- ☐ Think about what information you would like to include in your personal statement, who will be reading it, and what you would like your readers to understand about you once they have read it.
- ☐ If you have a good idea of what you would like your personal statement to say, jot down the main points you would like to make and proceed to the drafting stage.
- ☐ If you're stuck, consider the following:
  - Why did you choose this specialty?
  - Are there any anecdotes or examples that might help illustrate how you made your choice?
  - What personal characteristics would a residency director in this specialty want residents to have?
  - Are there any anecdotes or examples that illustrate that you have these personal characteristics?
  - What makes you unique as a human being? As an applicant? Is this something you would like program directors to know? Is this something they will be interested in?
  - Are there any anecdotes or examples that illustrate your unique personal characteristics in a positive, appropriate way for your personal statement?
  - How do your unique personal characteristics relate to the specialty you have chosen and to the requirements for residency in that specialty?
  - What are your future plans within this specialty?
  - What are you looking for in a residency program?

## First Draft

- ☐ Transfer your notes to an electronic document (unless you write first drafts on paper).
- ☐ If seeing your ideas all together helps clarify things for you, begin to flesh out your notes.
- ☐ See whether your ideas fall into a logical order.
- ☐ Group similar ideas together and sub-sort them if possible.
- ☐ Decide how you want to structure your personal statement.  
Like a traditional essay? Chronologically? Based on a theme or metaphor?
- ☐ Decide what the basic purpose or theme of each paragraph will be.
- ☐ Begin writing your paragraphs. Don't edit yourself as you go along. Consider leaving your introduction until after you have finished the rest of your essay.

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## Editing

- ☐ Check that each paragraph has a clear topic sentence.
- ☐ Make sure that there are clear, logical transitions between paragraphs.
- ☐ If you haven't yet written your first paragraph, draft one that clearly outlines the structure of your personal statement, its main theme, or both.
- ☐ Make sure that your personal statement doesn't include any of the following:
  - Potentially damaging information about yourself
  - Negative impressions of any specialty, program, region of the country, etc.
  - Discussion of lifestyle concerns
  - Abbreviations
- ☐ Read your essay aloud to yourself and consider the following questions:
  - Does your writing sound like your natural voice? Is the language appropriate for the audience you are addressing, but still comfortable? If something sounds awkward to you, consider how you would say the same thing if you had to explain it out loud to a friend or an advisor.
  - Do the ideas in each of your sentences build on one another?
  - Do your first and last paragraphs work well together? Do they touch on similar themes?
- ☐ Read through your statement once more, looking for the verb "to be" (is, was, am, are, were, and be). Re-write passive and awkward sentences as necessary.
- ☐ Read each sentence to make sure that it is as concise as possible. Delete unneeded words (adverbs are prime candidates).
- ☐ Read your essay out loud again, to someone else. Have that person stop you if something sounds awkward or they don't understand the idea you are trying to convey.
- ☐ Have your editing partner read your essay aloud to you. Fix anything that is awkward or confusing.

## Proofreading

- ☐ Print out your personal statement.
- ☐ Read your personal statement several times, checking for different types of errors each time. Do not try to proof everything at one time.
- ☐ Make a special check for errors that you know you are prone to.
- ☐ Check for homophones (it's/its, there/their/they're, effect/affect, principle/principal, roll/role, led/lead, etc.).
- ☐ Begin at the end, reading each sentence aloud.
- ☐ Begin at the end, reading each word separately.
- ☐ Use a ruler or a sheet of blank paper to slow your eyes down by exposing only one line at a time.
- ☐ Look at small words like "it," "is," "or," "of," "a," "an," and "and" to ensure that you have not accidentally typed one in place of another.
- ☐ Put your personal statement away for a while and do something else.
- ☐ Begin the editing and proofreading process again.

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