

AMCAS PERSONAL STATEMENT

1. There is no way around it. Writing about yourself is about the most difficult and humiliating kind of writing that you will ever have to do. Simply recognizing this fact at the outset may be a big help in getting you through the ordeal. Grit your teeth and pretend, for the first draft, that you are singing the praises of a close friend of yours. You might even try writing the first draft in the third person, to see if that makes the process any easier.
2. It's easy to get off the track and turn the essay into a mini-biography. Remember, this is not exactly what you should be focusing on. Rather, you need to always keep in mind that what you are about is telling your readers what qualities make you a "can't-miss" candidate for medical school. You should be concerned with character—what kind of person you are; with intellectual accomplishments—remember, medical school, whatever else it is, is a serious academic exercise; and with experience—including research and volunteer experience.
3. Remember that you will also be judged—even if only unconsciously—by the quality of your writing. A good personal essay should not only be well-written, it should be (and appear to be) well re-written. Make sure that you smooth over the rough edges and carefully proofread before you print out your final copy.
4. It is also important in your writing that you learn how to be specific. There should be at least one or two places in the essay where you relate a specific incident, whether academic or personal. Ask yourself in such places "Is this as specific as I can make it?" My experience in reading draft copies of personal statements is that it usually isn't. Few know how to do this well. Often, students will think they are being specific when they are still being very general. Suppose, for example, you want to make the point that you have worked your way through school, and that has made you a person who is able to take on responsibility, who knows the meaning of hard work. You might be inclined to say "I worked summers and after school at Palmer's Fish market, and learned the meaning of hard work." A more specific way of framing it would be something like this: "My third day on the job, when Mr. Palmer told me to get into the big lobster tank and clean it out, I learned the meaning of hard work." You should ask yourself whether anything in your school work, your research, your volunteering, or your extra-curricular activities lends itself to this kind of specificity. Your ability to do this will keep your statement from sounding generic.
5. Don't be afraid to be creative, but don't let creativity substitute for substance. If there is something unique that you have done, or that has

happened to you, by all means put it in and highlight it. But don't push too far, that is, don't make this unique thing take the place of the variety of accomplishments that you need to show in order to make yourself look compelling to those who will read your statement.

6. Make sure others get to read the essay before you print out the final copy. This is not just, or even primarily, for proofreading, though this is important. You can miss the mark in an essay like this by being too humble, or by being too arrogant. it is often easier for someone else to pick up this kind of thing that for you to pick it up yourself.

7. You might use as a kind of checklist the kind of questions that your readers are likely to ask. What are the strategies/interests of this candidate? How is this candidate different from other potential candidates? Is this applicant serious/motivated?