

Writing a Personal Statement for Medical School

What do “They” Look for?

Quotes by members of admissions officers are in italics.

The great challenge of the medical school application essay is how to discuss common themes in a fresh way. Later sections of this guide will provide you with tips on how to make your essay stand out, but for now we will outline the key qualities and abilities that the excellent essays demonstrate.

As we will stress throughout, the essay is meant to convey the personal characteristics that the rest of your application cannot communicate. So we will preface our list with a warning about what not to include: anything that is fully covered by another part of the application. For example, do not tell the reader your GPA or name the awards that you won in college. Avoid simply listing your extracurricular activities. If you bring any of these issues up, you should have some significant insight to add that is not evident from another part of your application.

Sincerity

Believe it or not, admissions officers rank sincerity highest in importance, above any quality seemingly more specific to medicine. Ultimately, they just want to know who you are, and in that sense, the best way to sell yourself is to be yourself. Don't focus too heavily on what you think they want to see at the expense of conveying your own message in your unique way.

My own feeling is that the essay has been more a cause of people getting downgraded than being favorably judged, usually because it is too contrived or patently insincere. As an admissions committee member, after you've gone through thirty or forty such applications in an afternoon, you're so grateful for somebody who just says something simply and straightforwardly. -- College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University

Sincerity is important to stress because it's hard for most of us to achieve, despite its apparent simplicity. The pressures and anxieties of the situation have locked us into a mindset that prevents us from writing honestly. Further, because we are not used to writing about ourselves and being so close to the subject, it can be difficult for us to assess the sincerity of our own writing. Thousands of students every year will read this same advice, whether in a guidebook or even in the application instructions themselves, and yet they just cannot put it into practice. If you can be one of the few who truly understand what it means to be sincere, then you will already have separated yourself from the pack in one crucial way.

Writing Ability

As with sincerity, you must focus on demonstrating solid writing ability before you even start worrying about the specific issues you will tackle.

I think the important thing is for the essay to be a reflection of the student and demonstrate good written communication skills. -- Harvard Medical School

The reasons for this emphasis on good writing are evident enough. First is the important role that written communication skills will play throughout your career, as they do in most other professions. Second, a well-written essay makes its points clearly and forcefully, thus strengthening whatever content you include.

Good writing means more than the ability to construct grammatically correct sentences. You also must create a coherent structure and ensure proper flow as the piece progresses. Because the process of developing ideas and putting them down on paper is so intimate and personal, all writers end up needing editors to assess the effectiveness of their product. You should consult people whose writing you respect for advice or even more hands-on help. At UNCW you can receive help with your writing at the University Learning Center, located in Westside Hall.

Motivation and Commitment

While there are some admissions officers who will insist that you can write about anything as long as it's revealing, a safer bet would address the fundamental question: "Why medicine?"

You do look for motivation because the Personal Comments [section] is the only place the applicants have to indicate this. In other words, why are they interested in medicine? I don't think there's anything else specifically that we look for, other than whatever the applicant wants to tell about himself or herself. -- UCLA School of Medicine

An effective explanation of your motivation actually accomplishes two purposes. First, it shows the reader that you have thought your goals through and have significant, worthy intentions behind them. Second, in the process of detailing your motivation, you can illuminate your most significant values and qualities.

If you discuss motivation as a more abstract element of your interest in medicine, your discussion of commitment should provide the hard evidence. For example, if you use compassion as a reason for your decision to pursue medicine, you should be able to offer concrete evidence of how you have exercised compassion in specific instances.

Specific Personal Qualities

Doctors must have the ability to work with patients as well as other medical professionals, particularly because the stakes are so high and go far beyond his or her own personal success. The reason you should make certain personal qualities your focus is that they provide balance to the academic abilities you demonstrate in objective measures like the MCAT.

Many applicants make a mistake by discussing their intellectual capabilities as a major factor in being a good candidate for medicine. The applicant is reviewed at other levels in terms of his or her capability, so this should not be the focus of the personal statement. -- School of Medicine, University of Washington

You should not try to include everything from the following list, because it would be difficult to treat each one in sufficient depth. Moreover, the goal should be to illustrate your qualities through concrete details, instead of merely writing them as a list. We will go into this lesson in more depth elsewhere, but it's a lesson worth reiterating: **Show your qualities through concrete evidence.**

I tend to be put off by too many self-congratulatory statements, such as, "I'm an excellent candidate for medical school; I have great compassion"--that kind of thing. One person wrote, "As part of my personality, I radiate a high degree of warmth and sincerity," and that was not good. -- College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University

Here are some of the qualities that make good physicians, but again, you should not treat them as buzzwords. Invoke them only if you have the evidence to back up your claims. We have grouped them roughly by the specific medical duties with which they are related:
Treating patients: compassion, empathy, sensitivity, integrity, communication skills.
Solving problems: creativity, initiative, independence, curiosity, critical thinking skills.
General: perseverance, dedication, maturity, honesty, sincerity, motivation, energy, diversity.

Personal Details

Personal details are the means by which you should demonstrate your strengths in the preceding list of qualities. Always aim for specific, personal statements rather than grand generalizations.

One very common mistake is to write a statement that is too generic--that speaks about what the ideal physician should do or be, rather than what the applicant wants to do or feels he or she should be as a physician. One has to bring it down to a personal level. -- The Pritzker School of Medicine, University of Chicago

Avoiding generalizations applies not only to your field but to yourself as well--hence our emphasis here on personal details. Not only are details more interesting to read than hackneyed generalities, but they also provide a concrete basis that helps your reader grasp your insights.

Why Medicine?

Quotes by members of admissions officers are in italics.

Because people don't usually make career decisions based on pure reason, it can be difficult to explain why you've chosen the field you have. Moreover, your basic reasons probably look a lot like everyone else's. In this section, you'll learn how to develop your ideas effectively and insightfully while emphasizing your uniqueness.

Lifelong Interest

Medicine requires such a serious commitment that few people stumble across the idea of pursuing it late in life. It's very likely that you have always wanted to be a doctor, and that's not a fact that you should hide. But you also have to watch out for two potential problems:

1) Don't offer your point in such a cliched, prepackaged way as to make your reader cringe. For example, you shouldn't start your essay, "I have always wanted to be a doctor" or "I've always known that medicine was my calling." Better to describe early experiences and then let the point about your early interest unfold naturally.

2) Don't rely solely on this reason and forget to justify your choice with more recent experiences.

Tell us not only why you want to be a doctor but what you have done to test your decision. Have you had some experience? Have you observed doctors? -- University of Michigan Medical School

If It Runs in the Family...

Some applicants will cite their parents as reasons for their choice. Here again you have to be careful not to sound juvenile or overly simplistic. The mere fact that one or both of your parents were doctors does not explain why you would want to follow in their footsteps.

Some readers might even conclude that you haven't been able to make up your own mind. One applicant's essay includes the following disclaimer: "I idolize my father and admire his commitment and contributions, but this alone would not be enough to make me want to become a doctor myself."

The Patient's Perspective

This is also a standard theme, but potentially a very powerful one. Describing the direct impact a doctor had on your life or the life of someone close to you can be a very effective way to demonstrate what draws you to medicine.

Perhaps someone close to the applicant was very ill once or died, and the experience with that person or with his or her doctors became very significant. After having read many statements, I believe these are the sorts of experiences that make people aware of what they themselves could do in medicine. These experiences can be very powerful material for the statement. -- School of Medicine, University of Washington

The same caveats apply, however. First, the fact that admissions officers have seen this approach many times means you have to find a unique, personal story to tell. Second, the story you recount should serve only as the original inspiration, and you still need to use recent experiences to show how you've confirmed that first recognition.

One applicant recalls the impression that doctors who treated his mother left on him. He provides useful details such as the illness that afflicted her and the specific qualities that impressed him most. Although there is enough substance in his first paragraph to make a strong point, you may want to use even more details in your own essay. For example, you could describe a specific episode and the actions that your doctor took in treating your illness or easing your concerns.

When Medicine Fails...

A twist on the "patient's perspective" approach is to describe a time when medicine failed to save or heal someone close to you. The purpose of this tactic would not be to rail against the medical profession, of course, but rather to show how a disappointing loss inspired you to join the struggle against disease and sickness.

One applicant describes the limits of the field he plans to pursue: "However, in time physical therapy became the logical focus of my attention for a number of reasons. For one, I have memories from a very young age of my grandfather in Czechoslovakia, disabled by a stroke, his problems unmitigated by any attempts at physical therapy. I will never forget the devastating consequences of this." He goes on to describe ways in which both he and his grandmother benefited from physical therapy, but by mentioning a failed recovery, he shows that he understands the scope of medicine at a mature level.

Another applicant describes problems with the health care system that did not affect him directly, but that he observed while working in a hospital. The important point is that he plans to be part of the solution: "As a doctor, I hope to participate in these changes in order to benefit more people than are currently being served."

Helping Others

If there's one thing that all medical school applicants can agree on, it's that they all want to help others. So as always, you need to show rather than tell the school about your commitment.

Community service is very important in our process, because this is a profession devoted to serving others. -- Stanford University School of Medicine

[This applicant](#) describes his experience caring closely for his mother and concludes: "After it was all over and I was back on my feet, I decided I wanted to put myself back in a situation in which I could help others who were ill."

Similarly, [this applicant](#) recognizes that the act of caring for his alcoholic and abused mother heightened his "sensitivity to other people and the difficulties with which they sometimes must cope."

Both applicants give detailed accounts of prior roles helping others and then make strong connections to their current goals. Although both of these essays deal with caring for relatives, there are many other angles you could take. The point is to show yourself in the active position of improving someone's life and realizing that you wanted to devote your career to that purpose. If you want to use service unrelated to medicine as a reason, then you have to make a clear transition that explains why you've chosen that field as your outlet for helping others.

A Passion for Science

A passion for science is usually not the main force behind someone's decision to pursue medicine, but rather something that complements his or her desire to help others. If science were your sole calling, then you would most likely pursue a PhD. That said, showing a strong commitment to science can enhance your candidacy, especially if you have demonstrated an interest in research. The challenge is how to show passion rather than simply tell the reader about it. [This applicant](#) devotes an entire paragraph to his enthusiasm for biology and the premed curriculum. He does a good job of emphasizing the qualities that appeal to him--problem solving, competition, the broad scope of issues--but still is essentially telling and not showing us anything.

A point that has come up before and will come up in the next section is the importance of action: the most effective way to demonstrate qualities is to show yourself in an active role. Saying that you found material fascinating is presenting your passive response to it. On the other hand, you could describe a time when you did outside reading on a topic that intrigued you, or an opportunity you earned to become a professor's research assistant based on the enthusiasm you showed. Active details are, of course, helpful for every point you make, but they come more naturally when describing a volunteer or work experience. Here you have to make a special point to ensure that you demonstrate a passion for science through your active engagement with it.

The other alternative, though less effective, is to convey enthusiasm through spirited language. Here, your ability to write matters more than the content you choose. You might, for example, ask insightful, probing questions about your chosen area, or you could simply describe an issue or discovery in vivid detail. Again, you should attempt this approach only if you know you are a strong writer.

Why Are You Qualified?

The way to prove your qualification is not to list attributes you believe you possess but to discuss concrete experiences that show your abilities and qualities. Details about the process are paramount. What we mean by the "process" is the path to achievement. The rest of your application has already summarized your accomplishments and your activities. Show the reader what you did in concrete terms, and again, highlight your active roles.

The experiences that demonstrate your qualification are not necessarily distinct from those that explain your motivation. You shouldn't plan on dividing the essay into two separate sections for each, but rather organize the structure by topic and extrapolate insights as they develop. We will cover structure in greater depth in its own section, but it's important that you begin thinking in terms of an integrated essay.

Hospital Experience

Some degree of hospital experience is usually expected, though it's more essential to the "testing your interest" aspect we discussed in the last section of the course than to your qualifications. The main point you're trying to convey here is that you will work well with patients and in a clinical setting.

[This applicant](#) showcases strengths in sensitivity and communication skills by describing a specific encounter. You may feel reluctant to devote an entire paragraph to one anecdote, but a concrete, detailed story can tell your reader more about your abilities than a paragraph that lists common qualities and generic lessons. Another mistake that people tend to make is to name a specific patient but then resort back to clichéd, vague lines, such as "I was able to ease his pain by providing emotional support." In contrast, this applicant offers vivid images of his patient and actually shows us what he did to provide comfort.

If you have had opportunities to engage in more hands-on work, then you should by all means include it, particularly if you are pursuing dentistry or are interested in surgery as a specialty. [This applicant](#) describes her work as a research technician and some of the specific procedures in which she has been involved.

Shadowing Experience

Your shadowing experience might overlap with the previous section's material, but the emphasis here is on what you learned through observation. There is less potential here for forceful points because observation is a passive activity, but it can be useful for proving your in-depth understanding of the profession.

[This applicant](#) makes precisely that point: "Working with the surgeon has been an exceptional experience for me because he has allowed me to observe him in every phase of his activities, from his initial consultations with patients to the various surgeries themselves." He goes on to give details about the range of surgeries he has observed. It's important to note, however, that even here a specific episode could have been useful. Instead of trying to cram details about everything to which you were exposed, you might focus on one memorable incident that epitomizes the field as you view it.

Research

A strong research background helps your case, because the laboratory is such an integral part of the medical school experience. It's not possible to prove your intellectual capability through a short description of your projects, so that's not the real goal here. Instead, you should try to convey such intangible qualities as creativity, initiative, and original thinking. Note: You should limit technical details to only what is necessary to establish context.

[This applicant](#) describes his work in language that the average reader can understand, but with enough detail for us to appreciate the depth of his responsibilities. He demonstrates a strong understanding of the work that research requires and an ability to execute a project independently. The essay does not, however, provide evidence of the skills we mentioned above.

The way to convey such qualities as creativity and original thinking is to focus on your contribution rather than your research topic. For example, you could describe a situation where you recognized a flaw in a procedure and had the initiative to show your supervisor how efficiency could be improved. No matter how minor your contribution seems, it's better to focus on some tangible input that you had than to describe the project as a whole. As always, the key is to delineate your active role.

Of course, we recognize that many undergraduates simply do not have the level of responsibility that would put them in position to make significant contributions. Nevertheless, you should examine your experiences carefully to search for any tangible impact you might have had beyond carrying out the instructions of your superiors.

Working With Others

It's very possible to demonstrate the relevant qualities you possess for medicine in non-medical experiences. In most cases your goal will be to demonstrate an ability to work and interact effectively with people.

[This applicant](#) spends substantial time discussing his position as a camp counselor. He showcases an ability to lead others as well as an inner strength that enabled him to overcome personal challenges. Thus, he does an effective job of describing both the external situation and his personal response. He then makes a strong transition to medicine by pinpointing similarities between his previous experiences and the challenges he expects to face.

Why Are You Unique?

The purpose of this lesson is to show you examples of how other people capitalized on their unique qualities. When it comes to your own essay, only you can identify the optimal strategy for making yourself stand out. One way to start is to look over your answers to the brainstorming questions and try to find aspects of your background that separate you from your peers. Ultimately, however, what will make the difference is your ability to assess yourself honestly and thoughtfully.

The examples that follow are not meant to be exhaustive. Rather, they represent the efforts of particular individuals to recognize the unique elements of their background and use it to their advantage. You should notice that these unique elements often have nothing to do with medicine, but can still be tied effectively to the applicants' goals or integrated with their character and background.

1. [This applicant](#) is a woman from a military background. Notice that her first paragraph grabs the reader's attention by emphasizing extreme experiences to which the average person has never been exposed. Don't dilute the power of your description with premature, forced connections to medicine. Your first task is to convince the reader that what you're describing is indeed unique on its own terms. In fact, this applicant never forces an explicit connection on the situation, but rather simply notes that she can finally apply to medical

school because her term of military service is ending. The reader can easily deduce for himself how the rigor and intensity of her military background have prepared her for the challenge of medicine.

2. [This applicant](#) describes his experiences performing in a Las Vegas show. Again, he does not try to argue that his work as a performer will directly help him in handling dental operations, but instead makes the following point about his character: "Working each night, for a total of 42 hours a week, has forced me to structure for myself an educational schedule that has required more time in college than most spend. However, as a result, I will be emerging from my university experience with greater maturity, self-knowledge, and certainty about the professional direction I am choosing to follow than many of my peers." The one mistake this applicant makes is his continual emphasis on how he's different from his peers. In general you should try to let uniqueness speak for itself; if it's noteworthy, the reader should pick up on it without having to be told.

3. [This applicant](#) describes the unfortunate circumstances of his childhood. He does so without seeking pity, instead focusing on how these circumstances shaped his character. Here a connection to medicine is natural: "I spent a great deal of time trying to care for my mother, a fact of my young life that I think later on may have subliminally drawn me toward a career in medicine. Besides instilling within me a desire to help others who are ill, my experience with my mother also heightened my sensitivity to other people and the difficulties with which they sometimes must cope." The writer goes on to back up his heightened sensitivity by describing his work assisting a doctor in rural Mexico--itself also a noteworthy experience.

4. The uniqueness of [this applicant](#) is multidimensional. He comes from an international background, he experienced discrimination, and he immigrated to the United States only to face numerous new obstacles. The strength of this essay lies not in these unique barriers but in the active manner in which he overcame them. The writer does not take a self-pitying tone, nor does he make his disadvantaged background a primary focus. He goes on to describe many of the same types of volunteer and work experiences as other applicants, which we view as all the more remarkable because of the early challenges through which he persevered.

5. [This applicant](#) details her commitment to martial arts. In this case, the activity itself is far from unique, even among the specific population of medical school applicants. Nevertheless, the qualities she has cultivated in her experience and the way she ties them to medicine provide a new dimension to her candidacy. This essay is an effective example of how you can turn even a standard extracurricular activity into a unique strength by using illustrative personal details and an insightful perspective.

Again, these examples are only a few of the possible routes you could take. There are even more obvious routes for which we did not include examples, such as extraordinary talents in athletics or the arts, or extensive work experience in another career. One particularly delicate issue is how to approach diversity. If you are, for example, a minority, foreign, or older applicant, you should not hesitate to use this to your advantage. To do this effectively, however, you need to show how your background has shaped your life in some tangible way and possibly tie that in to how you plan to contribute to the school's community. You should not mention it for its own sake and suggest--even implicitly--that you expect some kind of special attention, because you risk offending the reader or coming across as manipulative.

Handling Blemishes

Certain aspects of your application may call for an explanation. For instance:

undergraduate grades

MCAT scores

deficiency in the number of letters of recommendation submitted

lack of work experience

lack of extracurricular activities

previous rejection of your application

gaps in the chronological account of your education or employment

disciplinary action by an institution of higher education

criminal record

Under what circumstances should you use your personal statement to explain a particular deficiency, weakness, or other blemish? First of all, the application might explicitly invite you to explain deficiencies, weaknesses, aberrations, or any other aspect of the application that might not accurately reflect your abilities or potential and fitness for graduate study. Schools almost without exception ask specifically about the last two items above. For the other items, where applications do not explicitly provide for such explanations, the schools nevertheless permit and generally encourage applicants to provide brief explanations. Most schools suggest that you attach an addendum to your personal statement for this purpose, reserving the personal statement itself for positive information about yourself. If you are in doubt about the policy and preferred procedure of a particular school, contact the school directly.

Another point you should keep in mind is whether you have a valid reason. Staying up late the night before the MCAT is not a legitimate reason for a bad performance, while documented sickness could be. A particularly bad semester could be explained by a death or illness in the family. If you lack volunteer hospital experience, you might point out the number of hours you had to work to make college more affordable for your family.

There are many more gray areas. For example, is it worth noting that you simply have a bad history of standardized testing? Doing so tactfully (in other words, don't rail against the arbitrariness of tests or demand the right to be considered for your grades alone) can help the schools understand your exact situation, but it most likely won't have a substantial effect on their perspective, since they know to take into account the imprecision of standardized tests. What about the class for which you simply did not grasp the material or a poor GPA during your freshman year? Again, what you have to say won't constitute an extenuating circumstance, since everyone has weaknesses and faces the same challenge of adjusting to college. Your best approach might be to try to transform such blemishes into something positive by pointing out particular courses in which you performed well, especially those that were more advanced, more relevant to your intended career path, or more recent.

Finally, make sure that you do not take a contentious tone. Don't accuse your teachers of unfair grading standards or complain about lack of extracurricular opportunities at your school. Be clear that you're not trying to excuse yourself of responsibility, emphasizing that you simply want the schools to have the complete picture.

TOP 10 MEDICAL SCHOOL PERSONAL STATEMENT WRITING TIPS

1. Don't Resort to Cliches.

Every year, medical school admissions officers read thousands of variations of this sentence: "I want to be a doctor so I can help people." It's undoubtedly true in most instances, yet it inevitably fails because it reveals nothing unique about the individual applicant. If you demonstrate a penchant for helping others by describing specific activities--community service, for example--it will become unnecessary to declare that desire, as it will already be clear. Every doctor helps people, so focus on the specific actions you have taken.

2. Don't Bore the Reader. Do Be Interesting.

Admissions officers have to read hundreds of essays, and they must often skim. Abstract rumination has no place in an application essay. Admissions officers aren't looking for a new way to view the world; they're looking for a new way to view you, the applicant. The best way to grip your reader is to begin the essay with a captivating snapshot. Notice how the blunt, jarring "after" sentence creates intrigue and keeps the reader's interest.

Before: I am a compilation of many years of experiences gained from overcoming the relentless struggles of life.

After: I was six years old, the eldest of six children in the Bronx, when my father was murdered.

3. Do Use Personal Detail. Show, Don't Tell!

Good essays are concrete and grounded in personal detail. They do not merely assert "I learned my lesson" or that "these lessons are useful both on and off the field." They show it through personal detail. "Show, don't tell" means that if you want to relate a personal quality, do so through your experiences without merely asserting it.

Before: If it were not for a strong support system which instilled into me strong family values and morals, I would not be where I am today.

After: Although my grandmother and I didn't have a car or running water, we still lived far more comfortably than did the other families I knew. I learned an important lesson: My grandmother made the most of what little she had, and she was known and respected for her generosity. Even at that age, I recognized the value she placed on maximizing her resources and helping those around her.

The first example is vague and could have been written by anybody. But the second sentence evokes a vivid image of something that actually happened, placing the reader in the experience of the applicant.

4. Do Be Concise. Don't Be Wordy.

Wordiness not only takes up valuable space, but also confuses the important ideas you're trying to convey. Short sentences are more forceful because they are direct and to the point. Certain phrases, such as "the fact that," are usually unnecessary. Notice how the revised version focuses on active verbs rather than forms of "to be" and adverbs and adjectives.

Before: My recognition of the fact that we had finally completed the research project was a deeply satisfying moment that will forever linger in my memory.

After: Completing the research project at last gave me an enduring sense of fulfillment.

5. Do Address Your Weaknesses. Don't Dwell on Them.

At some point on your application, you will have an opportunity to explain deficiencies in your record, and you should take advantage of it. Be sure to explain them adequately: Staying up late the night before the MCAT is not a legitimate reason for a bad performance, while documented sickness could be. If you lack volunteer hospital experience, you might point out the number of hours you had to work to make college more affordable for your family. The best tactic is to spin the negatives into positives by stressing your attempts to improve; for example, mention your poor first-quarter grades briefly, then describe what you did to bring them up.

6. Do Vary Your Sentences and Use Transitions.

The best essays contain a variety of sentence lengths mixed within any given paragraph. Also, remember that transition is not limited to words like nevertheless, furthermore or consequently. Good transition flows from the natural thought progression of your argument.

Before: I started playing piano when I was eight years old. I worked hard to learn difficult pieces. I began to love music.

After: I started playing the piano at the age of eight. As I learned to play more difficult pieces, my appreciation for music deepened.

7. Do Use Active Voice Verbs.

Passive-voice expressions are verb phrases in which the subject receives the action expressed in the verb. Passive voice employs a form of the word to be, such as was or were. Overuse of the passive voice makes prose seem flat and uninteresting.

Before: The lessons that have prepared me for my career as a doctor were taught to me by my mother.

After: My mother taught me lessons that will prove invaluable in my career as a doctor.

8. Do Seek Multiple Opinions.

Ask your friends and family to keep these questions in mind:

Does my essay have one central theme?

Does my introduction engage the reader? Does my conclusion provide closure?

Do my introduction and conclusion avoid summary?

Do I use concrete experiences as supporting details?

Have I used active-voice verbs wherever possible?

Is my sentence structure varied, or do I use all long or short sentences?

Are there any cliches, such as "cutting-edge" or "learned my lesson"?

Do I use transitions appropriately?

What about the essay is memorable?

What's the worst part of the essay?

What parts of the essay need elaboration or are unclear?

What parts of the essay do not support my main argument?

Is every single sentence crucial to the essay? This must be the case.

What does the essay reveal about my personality?

9. Don't Wander. Do Stay Focused.

Many applicants try to turn the personal statement into a complete autobiography. Not surprisingly, they find it difficult to pack so much information into such a short essay, and their essays end up sounding more like a list of experiences than a coherent, well-organized thought. Make sure that every sentence in your essay exists solely to support one central theme.

10. Do Revise, Revise, Revise.

The first step in improving any essay is to cut, cut, and cut some more. Not sure where to begin? Visit the Career Center or University Learning Center for help.