

How to Write the Best Personal Statement for Your Residency Application

From a Presentation by Stephen Peterson, MD, August 27, 2022

- Program Directors are looking for someone who wants to become a **lifelong learner in medicine**.
- **DO NOT** just add a paragraph to the statement you wrote to get into medical school.
- **DO NOT** be overly emotional (Ex. *I watched a relative die...*) or overly dramatic (Ex. *It was a dark and stormy night in the ICU*).
- Show your professional development from the day you started medical school to the day you finished.
- The personal statement is the ultimate self-assessment.
 - Self-assessment is the most important thing in a residency program
 - Establish yourself as a lifelong learner by showing your ability to self-assess (including deficiencies) in every learning situation
 - You want to continue to become a better human being and a better healer
- Personal statement is four paragraphs, one page.
- Paragraph One:
 - Who you are and your evolution (Ex. *I went into medicine for my love of math and science, but when I hit the clinical floors, I understood for the first time that my love was for internal medicine, for the ability to make diagnoses and help people.*)
 - State the program and the start date you're looking for
- Paragraph Two:
 - An experience that influenced you in medical school (Ex. *Even though patient was medically stable, I saw nothing in her eyes but fear. I watched the attending, [name], walk in, sit at the bedside and hold her hand. I watched her fear dissipate.*)
 - How has this shaped you? How has medical school changed you? How has it made you desire to become a lifelong learner?
- Paragraph Three is another medical story.
- You will be evaluated again and again on
 - Your medical knowledge
 - Your clinical skills
 - Your professional attitudes, and
 - Your compassionate behaviors

- The most important thing is the **last paragraph**. It has to be able to stand alone and it has to be a “killer.” Even someone who knows you better than anyone should learn something about you.
 - It is a summary of all of the above, telling why you should be picked, why you are special **because of what you want to become**.
 - Ex. *I’m looking for a program that will continue to advance my medical knowledge, my clinical skills, and my professional attitudes and compassionate behaviors. Above all, I’m looking for a program that will enhance my ability to contribute to the medical literature, learning more about biostatistics, learning more about clinical trials, learning more about clinical research and how to write papers. I’m looking for a program that will enhance my ability to become one of the attendees that I admired in my personal statement.*
 - Ex. *I’m looking for a program that will continue to enhance my skills, that will continue me on my journey as a lifelong learner. It is my hope that one day I will be a fraction of the attendees that I have admired for you in this personal statement.*
 - **Program Directors read the last paragraph first.** If the last paragraph doesn’t grab them, there are six hundred more PS’s right behind.
- Finally, read your statement out loud to yourself.
 - Would you select you as the candidate based on that last paragraph?
 - Is it the best paragraph you have ever written?
 - If not, write it again and again and again!