

## The Art of the AMCAS Personal Essay

There are no hard and fast rules for writing an effective personal essay. The process will be different for everyone, especially because the goal of the essay is to give admissions officers some insight into your individual goals and circumstances. Keep this in mind as you write. What aspect of yourself do you want to convey? Is it your compassion? Your diligence? Your prior experience in health care? Most of all, start working on the essay early in the application process. Time will allow you to develop and revise your ideas.

Remember: the personal statement should make you stand apart from other candidates, so it is best to avoid formulaic essay topics and themes.

### STAY AWAY FROM THESE TYPES OF ESSAYS:

- 1. Manifest Destiny:** Any essay that claims, “I was born to be a doctor,” or “Friends always tell me I should be a doctor,” or “At age ten I knew I wanted to be a doctor.” These are common ploys that tell your reader little more than the fact that you really want to get in to med school. They know that already. Spotlight your specific personality, not a destiny that seems larger than you.
- 2. My Contribution to the World:** It sounds naïve to have your whole life mapped out already, and even more so if it takes on some angelic quality. The “When I grow up, I want to be a... and save the rainforest” tells your reader nothing significant about you.
- 3. The Interpretive Guide:** This is a fairly common essay, because some people might have blemishes on their academic record that they feel uncomfortable about. Refrain from asking admissions officers to “count this as significant” and from stating that something “shouldn’t count.” It is the readers’ job to make these decisions: they have requested a copy of your transcript, along with lists of your extra-curricular activities, for precisely this reason. Devoting too much of the personal statement to excuses or interpretations of your transcript is repetitive and virtually worthless. State a problem briefly and then move on to statements about what you can do.
- 4. The Travelling Resume:** This essay rehashes your various activities and usually sounds like an itinerary: “And so I did this for three years and it taught me this, and then I did that and it showed me that.” Your readers usually know what your activities mean, and a catalog can become blurry in the readers’ mind. It’s better to focus most of the essay around a single activity that offers sincere and deep insight into you.
- 5. The Cute Essay:** Videotapes may have been cool for college applications, but medical school is a lot different and a lot more serious. No pictures, art, photos, or interpretive dance are necessary, or appreciated.
- 7. Name-Dropping:** If you’ve worked with an important person in your field, ask him or her to write a recommendation for you. Crafting an essay around who you know doesn’t leave enough room to discuss who you are.
- 8. “I’m Special”:** Any essay that claims, “You probably don’t get people like me very often...” is almost inevitably wrong. Don’t tell your readers that you’re unique—*show* them. Instead of a catalog of adjectives, offer them a clear snapshot of yourself and your interests.
- 9. “My father, my role model”:** While it’s often useful to discuss the influence upon your life that someone has had, don’t devote your whole statement to a celebration of that person’s achievements in the face of difficulty. Your MCAS essay should be about you.

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