A personal statement that accompanies an application to graduate or professional school is typically included as an opportunity for applicants to express their interest in or desire to attend the graduate or professional school to which the student is applying.

Graduate and professional schools may look for some or all of the following items in a personal statement.

1. Writing ability. Is the statement well articulated, clear and concise?
2. Did the applicant explain any problems or issues with his/her academic record?
3. Did the applicant provide examples of why he or she wants to attend graduate or professional school?
4. Did the applicant describe any unique characteristics or experiences that would enhance the application?

Length
Since most applications are submitted online, length of the personal statement is important. The AMCAS application limits responses to 1325 words (about one page). In an online application, it is impossible to go over the word count. Be very concise in your writing.

Review
Medical and professional schools across the country review thousands of applications each academic year. Evaluators may be looking for a few key pieces of information. Remember that spelling and grammar are important. Most people who review personal statements are part of an admissions committee or team, so they will review many statements...be unique, but not necessarily creative.

Tips on Content
• It is difficult to express how much you really want something in an essay. An applicant might say, “I’ve always wanted to be a doctor since I was in the second grade.” While having a lifelong dream is great, it doesn’t necessarily set you apart from other applicants or provide compelling evidence as to why you should be admitted.
• Begin by outlining your thoughts. Start very early and get feedback from faculty, advisors, PIs, and the writing center.
• Consider using concrete examples that have reinforced your desire to attend graduate or professional school. Lab and research experiences, volunteering, patient contact, campus involvement, and work experience can be much more compelling. Statements like, “I earned an A in my first anatomy course at Ohio State. Since then, I have volunteered as an anatomy teaching assistant (TA) for five quarters. Teaching anatomy, along with my volunteer experience in pediatric oncology, has reinforced my desire to combine science and patient care as a medical student.”
• If there is a major issue with your academic record or standardized test results, the personal statement may be an opportunity to address these issues. This is not the time to make excuses for why you may have performed poorly in a course. Do not make statements like “my advisor made me take this course, which is why I failed” or “the professor in my physics course was horrible and it was too late for me to drop the course so I didn’t do well.” Consider how you can take personal responsibility for these issues. Students sometimes have a difficult transition from high school to college, experience a significant illness, or spend the quarter focusing on other things (job, research, volunteering, or campus involvement). Describe what you learned from the experience.

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