

Writing Your Personal Statement

Your personal statement is the first chance to communicate your true self.

Below are some suggestions on how to approach this task and what kinds of topics to address in your statements.

Begin by sitting down in a comfortable place and writing; don't worry about fitting it on just one page, just write.

Write about who you are, your family, where you grew up, your education. Write about what motivated you to desire a career in dentistry and what you have done to prepare to succeed in dental school. What activities have you been involved in, why, what did they mean to you.

Write about where you see yourself in the future as a dentist. What special skills and insights do you have that will make you a good dentist. Think and write about your experiences, relationships and perspectives that make you unique and distinct from other applicants.

Be descriptive; use images and examples to show your qualities. Don't just state, "I want to help people", describe how you felt in specific situations when you were able to do this.

Once you have done the writing, find someone you trust (advisor, English teacher, mentor, dental student, etc.) to help you revise, put your thoughts into an order that flows. Make sure your essay is organized, with a single, overarching theme tying it together. Remember, it needs to fit on one page.

Once you are nearly finished, you might want to go through your essay and make sure every single word contributes something – eliminate unnecessary, extraneous words.

Remember the personal statement is your chance to let those reading it get to know you. Let your personality and feelings shine through your essay.

This is your chance to make a good first impression so that schools will want to eventually interview you.

It may seem like a daunting task now; just start early and leave plenty of time to step away from your essay for a few days and for plenty of revisions. You end up with an essay that is organized and shows how extraordinary you are.

Here are some exercises that are more focused on finding the specific points and details that you will need to incorporate into your statement.

The Chronological Method Start from childhood and record any and all special or pivotal experiences that you remember. Go from grade to grade, and job to job, noting any significant lessons learned, achievements reached, painful moments endured, or obstacles overcome.

Also, include your feelings about those occurrences as you remember them. If you are a visual person, it might help to draw a timeline. Do not leave out any significant event.

The goal of this exercise is to help you uncover long-forgotten material from your youth. The material can be used to demonstrate a long-standing dedication to the medical field, or to illustrate the kind of person you are by painting an image of yourself as a child. Be cautioned in advance, though, that relying too heavily on accomplishments or awards won too far in your past can diminish the strength of your points. Medical schools are more interested in what you have been doing since college than in what you accomplished, no matter how impressive, in high school.

Assess Your Accomplishments Write down anything you are proud of doing, no matter how small or insignificant it might seem. Do not limit your achievements to your career. If you have overcome a difficult personal obstacle, be sure to list this too. If something is important to you, it speaks volumes about who you are and what makes you tick. Some accomplishments will be obvious, such as any achievement that received public accolade or acknowledgment. Others are less so, and many times that defining moments of our lives, are those we are inclined to dismiss.

List Your Skills Do an assessment of your skills that is similar to the one you did for your research abilities. Cast your net broadly. Being able to draw connections between your unique skills and how they will make you a good doctor is what will make you memorable. Begin by looking back at the last exercise and listing the skills that are highlighted by your accomplishments. When you have a list of words, start brainstorming on other ways you have demonstrated these skills in the last few years. Pretend that you are defending these skills in front of a panel of judges. Stop only when you have proven each point to the best of your ability.

Analyze Personality Traits. There is a fine and fuzzy line between skills and personality traits that can be used to your advantage. Almost any quality can be positioned as a skill or ability if the right examples are used to demonstrate them. If you had trouble listing and defending your skills in the last exercise, then shift the focus to your qualities and characteristics instead. Make a few columns on a sheet of paper. In the first one, list some adjectives you would use to describe yourself. In the next one, list the words your best friend would use, or your boss, your co-worker or a family member. When you have finished, see which words come up most often. Look for such words as maturity, responsibility, sense of purpose, academic ability, intellectual curiosity, creativity, thoughtfulness, trustworthiness, sense of humor, perseverance, commitment, integrity, enthusiasm, confidence, conscientiousness, candor, leadership, goal-orientation, independence, and tact, to name a few. Group them together and list the different situations in which you have exhibited these characteristics. How effectively can you illustrate or prove that you possess these qualities? How do these qualities reflect on your ability to succeed in the dental world?

Note Major Influences Was there a particular person who shaped your values and views? Did a particular book or quote make you rethink your life? Relationships can be good material for an essay, particularly a relationship that challenged you to look at people in a different way.

Perhaps you had a wise and generous mentor from whom you learned a great deal. Have you had an experience that changed how you see the world, or defines who you are? What details of your life, special achievements, and pivotal events helped shape you and influenced your goals?

Identify Your Goals. The first step of this exercise is to let loose and write down anything that comes to mind regarding your goals; What are your dreams? What did you want to be when you were younger? If you could do or be anything right now, regardless of skill, money or other restrictions, what would it be? Think as broadly as you wish, and do not limit yourself to professional goals. Will you have kids? What kind of house will you live in? What kinds of friends will you have?

The second step is to begin honing in on some more specific or realistic goals. Given your current skills, education, and experience, where could you expect to be in twenty years? Where would you be ideally? Think in terms of five-year increments, listing actual positions and places, if possible. Be detailed and thorough in your assessment, and when you think you are finished, dig a little deeper.

Your goal of becoming a dentist is obvious, of course, but when you can show the admissions committee that you have thought more specifically, about your goals, it reemphasizes the sincerity of your motivation. It also reassures the committee that you understand what becoming a doctor means specifically, that it is more than being a hero and getting to write D.D.S. after your name.