

## *What is a Personal Statement?*

A part of every application process is the preparation of a personal or autobiographical statement. Generally speaking, the application forms for residency positions will request a personal statement. In other instances in which you are preparing your credentials for a job or another type of position, you will want to include the substance of a personal statement in the form of a cover letter to your CV.

For those individuals who will not participate in ERAS and will need to complete a paper application, the personal statement serves to complement and supplement your CV with a description of your qualifications and strengths in narrative form. Like a CV, it is written for a specific purpose or position. You want to convey to your reader how and why you are qualified for the position to which you are applying. In the case of a residency position, you want to make clear the basis of your interest in that specialty and in that particular program.

Feel free to highlight items in your CV if they help to remind your reader of the experiences you've had that make you well prepared for the position. This is your opportunity to expand upon activities that are just listed in the CV but deserve to be described in order for your reader to appreciate the breadth and depth of your involvement in them.

You may choose to relate significant personal experiences, but do so only if they are relevant to your candidacy for the position.

Lastly, the personal statement is the appropriate place to specify your professional goals. It offers the opportunity to put down on paper some clear, realistic, and carefully considered goals that will leave your reader with a strong impression of your maturity, self-awareness and character.

Related to this last point, the importance of good writing skills cannot be overemphasized. The quality of your writing in the preparation of a personal statement is at least as important as the content. Unfortunately, not only are good writing skills allowed to deteriorate during medical school, in some sense, they are deliberately undermined in the interest of learning to write concise histories and physicals. For the moment, forget everything you know about writing histories and physicals. While preparing your personal statement, try to:

- Write in full sentences.
- Avoid abbreviations don't assume your reader knows all the acronyms you do. As a courtesy, spell it out.
- Avoid repetitive sentence structure.
- Avoid using jargon. If there is a shorter, simpler, less pretentious way of putting it, do so.
- Use a dictionary and spell check. Misspelled words look bad.
- Use a Thesaurus. Variety in the written language can add interest but don't get carried away.
- Get help if you think you need it. For a crash course in good writing skills try *The Elements of Style*, William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White, Allyn and Bacon, 4th edition, 1999. If you have a friend or relative with writing or editing skills, try to enlist their help. In any case, give yourself enough time to prepare a well-written statement. Remember, in the early part of the residency selection process, it is the closest thing your reviewers have to knowing you personally.

Personal Statement samples:

#1: [http://www.uic.edu/depts/mcam/osa/careers/cv\\_ps/PS.htm](http://www.uic.edu/depts/mcam/osa/careers/cv_ps/PS.htm)

#2: <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/about-ama/our-people/member-groups-sections/minority-affairs-consortium/transitioning-residency/writing-your-personal-statement.shtml>

#3: <http://home.att.net/~ppmd/cv-ps/cv-ps.htm>

#4: [http://www.usmleweb.com/sample\\_personal\\_statements.html](http://www.usmleweb.com/sample_personal_statements.html)

## **ERAS**

ERAS lets applicants create one or more personal statements which can be earmarked for specific programs. Some programs ask applicants to address specific questions in their personal statements. ERAS includes a simple text editor for typing your personal statements; however, you may complete your personal statement using word processing software so that you can make changes more easily and take advantage of the available editing features, such as spell check. Once you've finalized the text, save your document as an ASCII text file. Then, use the "cut and paste" feature to add your information to the personal statement section of your ERAS application. Before you assign the personal statement to a program, print out a copy for review to ensure that there are no hidden page breaks or special characters embedded from the word processor. Your personal statement(s) must be assigned individually to each program. There is a link on the MyERAS Web site that details how to complete the document and assign personal statements to individual programs using MyERAS.