

Crafting a Personal Statement

A personal statement presents the admissions committee with an interesting and comprehensive picture of the applicant. Specifically, it allows the committee to learn about the applicant beyond what the resume/CV/transcript conveys and determine if the applicant is a good match for the residency program. Often, the personal statement is the only writing sample submitted during the application process and thus the only chance for applicants to both demonstrate their writing skills and humanize themselves.

Organization

Many schools or programs will provide a prompt or ask specific questions; applicants should first check for any prompts or length restrictions before writing. These guidelines often define the scope and determine the organization of information committees want.

The outline below assumes a general personal statement prompt:

Write a personal statement discussing your interest in the field, your career goals, and why you want to be in this program.

Introduction

Your introduction should grab the readers' interest, develop a theme, and present the organization of the essay in the form of a forecast statement.

1. Lead-in/Hook:

Don't necessarily begin with The Beginning; instead, hook your readers with an attention-grabbing and/or unexpected first sentence that hints at an eventual theme. Avoid starting with something cliché that many others will write (e.g., "I want to be a doctor in order to help people.").

If the committee/prompt requests a personal statement focusing on research activities, this statement should be less of an attention-grabbing hook and more functional.

2. Develop a theme:

Ideally, you should develop a thematic idea you can return to throughout the essay that brings otherwise separate or unrelated ideas together in a cohesive way.

3. Thesis Statement:

Conclude the introduction by providing a thesis statement. Remember that readers are busy and may not read the entire essay. A thesis statement or a sentence forecasts the rest of the personal statement and argues for you as a good candidate. For example, you might say, "The lessons I learned about teamwork, empathy, compassion, and communication will serve me well in a ***specialty*** residency at ***chosen program.***" Whatever you bring up in that sentence should be discussed in more detail in the body of your personal statement.

Body Paragraphs

Develop TsarC. This is an acronym that works to provide specific examples to demonstrate your qualifications/skills, and also to connect you to your chosen field: 2-3 body paragraphs should serve to showcase whatever skills you brought up in your intro. Rather than turning your resume/CV/transcript into paragraph form or listing all your qualifications, pick 2-3 specific examples that demonstrate the skills/qualifications you brought up. Consider the following model: TsarC for each body paragraph.

- **Trait or topic sentence:** You are focusing your paragraph around a particular trait or qualification you have. You can also use this sentence to connect to a specific program or aspect of your chosen specialty that excites you (e.g. “St. Joe’s focus on preventative medicine appeals to me because it is one of the aspects of family med I’m so passionate about.”)
 - **situation:** This is a situation where you demonstrated the trait or experienced the quality you’re focused on.
 - **action:** The specific action you took or witnessed in the situation.
 - **result:** This is the immediate payoff of your action.
- **Connection:** This is the larger takeaway, or what you'll bring to the residency, or your future as a doctor. Make connections here to what inspires you about ***specialty***, the values a residency might be looking for, or—for your top choice programs—the specifics that you find attractive or how you might fit in with their mission/values.

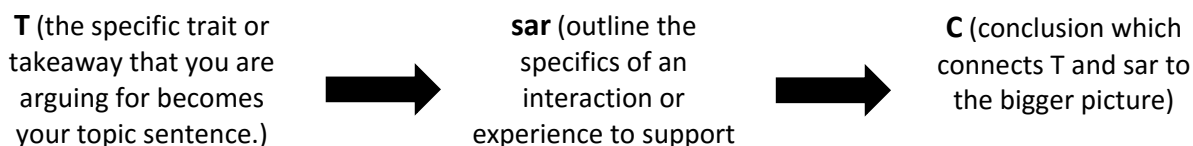
In this model, **T** and **C** sit in what we will call *power positions*, which means they are the scaffolding for your argument and advocacy as to why you are a strong candidate. With this in mind, it is important not to let **sar** control the paragraph. Rather, **sar** should serve as evidence and support for **T** and **C**.

The **TsarC** model is an excellent way to ensure that your body paragraphs are organized, thoughtful, and complete. It will be useful for crafting your personal statement(s) and noteworthy characteristics. Using the chart below, you can begin to shape an organized and cohesive argument for yourself.

Experiences	Trait/takeaway	Future/big picture
This column should include meaningful interactions or accomplishments.	What does this experience or interaction say about you? How does it connect to your future goals as a physician or the big picture of your career?	This column might include a specific residency program or specialty you wish to pursue. What are your specific career goals? What sort of physician do you want to be?
sar	T	C

In this model, the experiences column comes to represent the **sar** in the **TsarC** model. You will use this to explain the specific situation you were faced with, the action(s) you did or did not take in that situation, and the end result. This should be a few sentences. The middle column, which represents your trait or takeaway, will ultimately become your **Topic sentence**. Lastly, the final column, which outlines your future goals, can become your **Conclusion**. The conclusion will also connect each of your body

paragraphs to the overall big picture or **theme**. It can be more than one sentence. By rearranging the above columns in this way, your paragraphs should conform to the following structure:



Conclusion

End your statement by connecting back to any themes you developed in the beginning, making a final appeal as to your potential for success and concluding with a statement that indicates your desire to be a part of that particular program. Think of your conclusion as bookending your introduction.

Length Considerations

While the generally accepted rule is one page, length often varies by specialty and their emphasis on personal statement

- Family med, primary care pediatrics, psych may be a bit longer (700-850 words)
- Surgical specialties, emergency med, academic programs: stick to one page

ERAS applications

- Text field where you type or copy/paste essay
- ~650-700 words fit on one ERAS page

Military applications

- Upload a one-page essay including name and rank
- Font size, margins can be manipulated

Tone

There are no hard-and-fast rules regarding exactly what each committee is looking for. Each person on the committee probably has particular qualities, pet peeves, and desires in mind. It is nearly impossible to ensure that you are going to please everyone with your personal statement. Instead, do your best to communicate effectively and concisely while maintaining a personable but professional tone:

- Never make excuses. While you may feel the need to explain a bad grade or test score, you should only do it in a way that shows your ability to overcome adversity and/or proves that it was a situation that happened in the past that will never happen again.
- Be confident but not over-confident. You don't want to brag, but you do need to give yourself credit for your accomplishments.

Final Tips

Remember that ultimately the personal statement is an argument. To that end, committee members are looking to be convinced of a few things:

- You have a passion for the specialty and program
- You have the ability to be successful in the program
- You will be an asset to their program, not a liability