



(/becausehamilton)

# Hamilton

## PERSONAL STATEMENT

Admission committees look for applicants who capture the compassion as well as the passion for the field to which they wish to apply. The personal statement is your primary opportunity to distinguish yourself from the thousands of other applicants. Make a lasting impression by showing the admission committee who you are as a person and making the case that you possess the personality traits and characteristics to become a successful health care provider.

The Veterinary Medical College Application Service (VMCAS) prompt is:

Discuss briefly the development of your interest in veterinary medicine. Discuss those activities and unique experiences that have contributed to your preparation for a professional program. Discuss your understanding of the veterinary medical profession, and discuss your career goals and objectives.

*Here are some tips specific to veterinary school personal statement:*

1. Do not regurgitate experiences and other data already existing on other parts of the application.
2. Write about your knowledge of the veterinary profession.
3. Include information about who you are as a person and what diversity you might bring to the institution.
4. Include information about why you'd be a good candidate.

### 1. BRAINSTORM

Questions to ask yourself before you write

Who are the most influential people in your life? What did they do for you?

What have been the pivotal moments in your life?

What accomplishments are you most proud of?

What obstacles have you overcome?

What makes you different?

How will your skills and personality traits add diversity to the class?

Do you feel a passion for medicine? What is the source of that passion?

What do you want medical schools to know about you that hasn't been disclosed in other sections of the application?

How would your family and friends describe you?

What are your goals and dreams?

## Take Notes

Compile an inventory of all the activities, experiences, and relationships/influences that have helped to define the person you are today. Looking back, what can you recall having changed you? How were you affected? What lessons did you learn? What personality traits do they reflect in you? These notes will help you identify the topics or themes on which to focus your statement. As you are brainstorming, you may identify experiences that stir strong emotions. These experiences are likely to be meaningful to you and therefore may be good material for your personal statement. Speak from your heart.

## 2. START WRITING

### Identify Your Word Limit

Word/character limits for personal statements vary across professions so it is important that you identify your word or character limit before you start writing. The limit for the veterinary school application (VMCAS) is 5000 characters. Generally speaking, this is roughly one page single-spaced.

*Character limits for common health professions' application services (all include spaces):*

Allopathic medicine (AMCAS): 5300 characters. For Texas schools (TMDSAS): 5000 characters

Osteopathic medicine (AACOMAS): 4500 characters

Dentistry (AADSAS): 4500 characters

Veterinary (VMCAS): 5000 characters

Physician Assistant (CASPA): 5000 characters

Accelerated Nursing programs: varies by school; for schools using NursingCAS, the limit is 5000 characters

Physical Therapy (PTCAS): 4500 characters Public Health (SOPHAS): 1500 words

### Get It on the Page

For your first draft, don't get hung up on your beginning or ending. Instead, just start writing. You may feel the urge to write a lot about your personal journey; if so, run with it. This may provide you with good material and you can edit it later.

### Focus In

Identify the most significant aspects from your notes that will enable you to address one or more of the following standard topics:

Your motivation for this career

Influence of your family and early experiences on your life

Influence of your extracurriculars, volunteer activities, and/or jobs on your life (what have you learned, how have you demonstrated leadership, and how have you matured?)

Your qualifications (unique attributes, personal qualities, and/or skills that set you apart)

Long term goals

Use your experiences to provide personal insight into your personal attributes. Weave a story that helps the reader understand who you are as a person rather than simply listing your achievements. Avoid repeating information that is included elsewhere on your application unless you are elaborating on how an experience has shaped you and your motivation for a career as a health professional.

### Address Academic Irregularities If Necessary

You may wish to use a section of your personal statement to address academic irregularities such as withdrawals, incompletes, repeated courses, or significant fluctuations in your academic record. If applicable, you may mention special hardships, challenges, or obstacles that may have influenced your academic performance. Instead of making excuses, acknowledge and explain the situation, and if applicable, what you are doing differently and what you have learned.

### Take Your Time and Take Breaks

Take breaks from writing instead of trying to write everything in one sitting. Picking up your draft later can test whether your writing flows.

Read your writing aloud and listen to what you hear to check for grammatical errors, flow, and clarity.

## 3. ORGANIZE YOUR WRITING

### Overall Shape of the Essay

There is no one correct format for a personal statement. Strong personal statements often begin with a brief background that will serve as the foundation for the message you wish to convey. The bulk of the essay will illustrate the impression you wish to make on the reader, and will flow into a succinct conclusion. Always keep in mind that your essay must be interesting enough to immediately grab the reader's attention and compelling enough to hold it whether your essay is the first or fiftieth one the reader has seen that day.

Though you are not limited to these examples, some people find it helpful to use one of the following approaches:

I've always wanted to be a doctor/dentist/veterinarian

My parents are health care providers

Being a patient/having a sick family member made me want to become a health care provider

My experiences in a clinical environment piqued/confirmed my interest in the health professions

Through my [non-health care] experiences, I have developed the skills and personal qualities to be an effective health care provider.

## Organizational Strategy

You may find it helpful to use one of the following types of organizational strategies with your outline:

**Standard structure:** This type of organization is one you are probably very familiar with from your academic writing. In your first paragraph, you introduce the main points of your essay. In the following paragraphs, you provide evidence to support each of your main points (usually defending one point per paragraph). In your final paragraph, you reiterate your main points in the context of the evidence you presented, possibly leaving the reader with some “big idea” that takes your message one step further.

**Comparison:** This organizational structure attempts to draw a comparison or analogy between two seemingly unrelated things. In the case of medical school applicants, these essays usually compare a non-medical life experience/talent/interest/famous quote with the field of medicine or the applicant’s desire to pursue medicine. It is common for applicants to begin with a story, personal anecdote, quote as a lead and then spend the rest of the essay describing how the lead relates to or sheds light on medicine or their goal of becoming a physician.

If you use this structure, make sure that you provide adequate reflection on how your two disparate ideas connect (or don’t connect) to each other. Make your arguments explicit; don’t leave it up to the audience to figure out your points. Also, don’t get too abstract or philosophical in your comparisons. You don’t need to say something profound; rather, just be yourself. Remember, your discussion should always lead back to you and your motivations to enter your health profession of choice.

**Chronology:** In this type of outline, the writer takes the reader through the various steps in his/her life that led him/her to medicine. The introduction is usually the initial event that started the writer on his/her journey toward becoming a doctor. The writer then generally recounts the subsequent events in which he/she further explored and/or was further drawn into the medical profession before concluding with how all these events brought him/her to where he/she is today.

The advantage of this approach is that it allows for a more personal approach and helps the admissions committee to know you by turning the focus of the essay to you throughout the various stages of your life. The drawback is that the points you are trying to make can get lost in the narration of your life. To avoid this potential danger, make sure you clearly state how each of these events shaped you and your decision to pursue a health profession as well as the important lessons you learned along the way.

## Opening Sentence

Your opening sentence can simultaneously set the theme of your essay and engage the reader. Here are some different types of leads you may wish to try out:

**Standard:** State what you will be talking about in the paper. This can take on the form of a “thesis” in many ways (i.e. “My interest in medicine began with my trip to Honduras”). This lead sets up the reader for a focused, well-structured essay and helps you to get the point quickly (infinitely useful in a short essay like the personal

statement).

**Creative:** Add interest by making the reader wonder what will come next (i.e. "I was awoken by the beating of African drums that filled the air").

**Action:** Take the reader into the middle of the action. This is useful if you're trying to conserve space or if your essay begins with a story (i.e. "Our car breaks screeched as the truck came hurtling toward us").

**Personal:** Reveal something about you (i.e. "My grandmother's words touched my soul like nothing else").

**Quotation:** Begin with a direct quotation or paraphrase whose meaning pertains to the main points you are trying to convey in your essay (i.e. "FDR once proclaimed that 'the only thing we have to fear is fear itself,' and I have frequently tried to follow his advice"). Avoid using clichés.

**Dialogue:** Put the reader into the middle of a conversation, whether it be an actual talk between two people or your own internal thoughts (i.e. "'I don't want to die,' cried the little girl").

**Informative:** State a fact that is relevant to the topic of your essay (i.e. "Every doctor remembers her first patient").

Ask yourself if your essay can stand without an introduction. It may be appropriate to simply begin with the action of the story (in media res as they say) and then move on to discussing how that story ties into the points you will be making throughout the rest of the essay.

## Conclusion

Tie together the most important points you've made in your essay to bring the reader full-circle. The final sentence or two of your essay can be enough for a conclusion, especially if you're running low on space. The important thing is to make sure you bring your thoughts to their logical end and create a positive, memorable image in the reader's mind. Endings are the last experience the admissions committee will have with your essay, so your goal should be to leave them thinking that it was a satisfying read and wishing that there was more.

## 4. GET FEEDBACK

Find someone to give you critical feedback who isn't afraid to hurt your feelings. Give your draft to multiple sources to get different perspectives. Ideally you should ask someone who is a good writer to help you with your writing, someone who knows you well enough to verify if your writing sounds like you, and someone who doesn't know you as well who can provide perspective on the impression you are making. Clarity in your writing will reflect good communication skills. By the end of the statement, the reader should be able to see the world through your eyes.

## 5. REFINE YOUR WRITING

The most important part of the personal statement is the impression of yourself that you are creating. After reading your personal statement, readers may ask themselves if you would be interesting to interview.

## Quality of Writing

It is expected that your personal statement be error-free. Grammatical errors may reflect carelessness.


## Further resources


For further advice on writing personal statements in general, visit the [Writing Center Resources \(/academics/centers/writing/writing-resources/personal-statement\)](/academics/centers/writing/writing-resources/personal-statement) page. Click here for a [revision guide \(https://my.hamilton.edu/documents/Personal%20Statement%20Revision%20Guide.pdf\)](https://my.hamilton.edu/documents/Personal%20Statement%20Revision%20Guide.pdf).

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