



ESSAY WRITING

FOR HEALTH PROFESSION SCHOOL APPLICATIONS

MIT Global Education and
Career Development Center
12-170
617-253-4733

<http://web.mit.edu/career/www/preprof/>



INTRODUCTION

- Group introduction
- Goals for attending the workshop
- Specific questions about essay writing



Purpose of Workshop

- Review role of essay in the application process
- Clarify content of the essay
- Review structure and style of the essay
- Discuss how to start writing
- Provide writing resources



What is a personal essay?

- A personal essay is a brief narrative that describes your past experiences and future goals. It provides the opportunity to:
 - Make a positive first impression
 - Highlight strong points and abilities
 - Present goals and values



What goes into the essay?

- The essay is an opportunity for you to describe your goals, aspirations, experiences, and motivations for wanting to pursue a career path in medicine.
- It is also an opportunity to present yourself as a person, with unique talents and potential.

*Adapted in part from the Harvard Premedical School Guide



What is the best way to convey your message?

A personal story is a powerful technique to convey a message.

- Stories:

- Capture the audience's attention.
- Reveal personal characteristics through metaphor, analogies, and symbolism.
- Allow the reader to make an intimate connection with the author.

- Actual experiences that illustrate your skills and abilities.

- Providing examples is a more powerful way of showing the reader your abilities and desire to pursue a career in medicine.



Possible Topics...

- Life events and changes
- Achievements
- Significant people in your life
- MIT experience
- Influential books
- Extracurricular activities
- Employment experiences
- Travel experience



Writing Tips

- **Keep it simple:**
 - Don't focus on too many experiences.
 - Don't write the same information about an experience you already provide in your resume or application
- **"Show" instead of "telling" the reader:**
 - Use action verbs and descriptive words.
 - Convey your thoughts and feelings about what you have learned from your experiences.
- **Explain weaknesses (grades, scores, lack of experience, etc.)**
 - Be brief. Don't make long-winded excuses.
(explanation of weakness can also be accomplished within the secondary application.)



Common Pitfalls

- Rewriting your resume or being overly biographical
- Using highly technical language
- Trying to be too creative (e.g., writing poetry)
- Discussing why you didn't think medicine was for you.
- Starting your essay with I want to be a doctor because...
- Overusing "I" to start sentences



Be cautious of...

- Providing more information about someone else than about yourself (ex. Sick family member, someone who inspired you in life, etc.)
 - Make sure your essay is balanced and that it helps the reader get to know you well, not someone else.
- Delicate/emotional experiences in your life. (ex. Death, personal illness or disabilities, etc.)
 - Whatever is in your essay has potential to be discussed in the interview.
- Religious convictions or motivation
 - Depending on how you frame the impact your faith has had on your decision to go to medical school, it may raise some concern for the reader.



Medical School Essays

- AMCAS Essay
 - 5300 characters or less (approx. 1 page)
 - Use text-only format and software if you plan to cut and paste
 - Grammar is important- correct capitalization and punctuation
 - Proofread carefully! Changes cannot be made once you have submitted your AMCAS
 - 2 additional essays required for MD-PhD
- Additional essays for secondary applications
 - Should be different than AMCAS essay
 - Should relate to the specific school

AMCAS Website

The screenshot shows the AMCAS website interface in a Windows Internet Explorer browser window. The address bar displays `https://services.aamc.org/AMCAS2_2009/`. The browser's menu bar includes File, Edit, View, Favorites, Tools, and Help. The toolbar shows various icons for navigation and utility. The website header features the AMCAS and AAMC logos, along with navigation buttons for MAIN MENU, Help, Contact Us, and Log Off. A progress bar for the 2009 Application is visible, with steps 1 through 9. Step 8, Essay(s), is highlighted in red. The user's name, Denise Great Doctor, and AAMC ID, 12298729, are displayed. The main content area is titled PERSONAL COMMENTS and contains instructions for writing a personal statement. A text input field contains the text 'dfgdfg'. Below the field is a character count of 6 out of 5300. Navigation buttons for Back and Continue are present. A sidebar on the right shows the ESSAY(S) section with a Complete status and a Section Summary link. The Windows taskbar at the bottom shows the Start button and several open applications, including Microsoft Office Word and Internet Explorer. The system clock indicates 1:11 PM on 1/11/09.

https://services.aamc.org/AMCAS2_2009/ - Windows Internet Explorer

https://services.aamc.org/AMCAS2_2009/

File Edit View Favorites Tools Help

Preprofession... (151 unread) ... Facebook | Ho... AAMC Advisor... Admin - Event Blogger: The ... IAP 2009 Acti... https://ser... X

American Medical College Application Service
AMCAS | **AAMC**

MAIN MENU Help Contact Us Log Off

2009 Application Denise Great Doctor | AAMC ID: 12298729

1. Identifying Information 2. Schools attended 3. Biographic Information 4. Course Work 5. Work/Activities 6. Letters of Evaluation 7. Medical Schools 8. Essay(s) 9. Standardized Tests

PERSONAL COMMENTS

Use the space provided to explain why you want to go to medical school. The available space for your response is 5300 characters, or approximately one full page. You will receive an error message if you exceed the available space. For additional assistance, click "help" on the tool bar at the top of the screen. *

[What information should I consider including in my personal comments?](#)

dfgdfg

Character Count: (maximum 5300 characters)

Back Continue

ESSAY(S) >

Personal Comments Complete

[Section Summary](#)

Done

start Internet 100% 1:11 PM



Tips from AMCAS website

- Consider and write your Personal Comments carefully; many admissions committees place significant weight on this section. To avoid formatting issues, we recommend typing your essay directly in the AMCAS application rather than cutting and pasting your essay from other software.
- Proofread carefully! **No changes (including grammatical or typographical errors) may be made after your application is submitted to AMCAS.**
- You cannot run a spell check in the AMCAS Application.
- Applicants who plan to cut & paste their essays into the application should draft their essays in a text-only format, preferably in text-only word processing software, such as Microsoft Notepad. Copying formatted text into the application may result in formatting issues that cannot be edited once your application is submitted.
- Applicants should enter all text responses in the application just as they would like the medical schools to see them, avoiding use of ALL CAPS or all lower case. Medical schools have indicated that they prefer to receive applications that evidence normal writing practices regarding case. For example, Medical schools prefer reading, "I attended Dr. Mitchell's summer workshop in Nevada" to reading either: "I ATTENDED DR. MITCHELL'S SUMMER WORKSHOP IN NEVADA" or "i attended dr. mitchell's summer workshop in nevada."
- This essay cannot be added or changed after your application is submitted to AMCAS.
- Plagiarism or misrepresentations will prompt an investigation.
- It is not necessary to repeat information reported elsewhere on your application.
- The available space for this essay is 5300 characters, or approximately 1 page. You will receive an error message if you exceed the available space.
- Some questions you may want to consider while drafting this essay are:
 - Why have you selected the field of medicine?
 - What motivates you to learn more about medicine?
 - What do you want medical schools to know about you that hasn't been disclosed in another section of the application?
- In addition, you may wish to include information such as:
 - Special hardships, challenges or obstacles that may have influenced your educational pursuits
 - Commentary on significant fluctuations in your academic record which are not explained elsewhere in your application



To get you started...

Questions to ask yourself:

- Why did you choose this career path?
- What were some turning points in your life?
- What were some of the biggest challenges in your life, and how did you handle them?
- What person or event influenced you the most, and how?
- What were the reasons for the major decisions in your life?
- What are your future goals, and why?



Essay Critique Activity

Review the following 2-3 essays from the admissions perspective

- What did you like about the essay?
- Are there areas in the essay that you think needed improvement or further clarification?
- Did the essay give you a clear understanding of the person's motivation for medical school, etc.?
- Did the essay pique your interest in the candidate enough to offer the person an interview?



Solicit Feedback

- Review your essay with the Preprofessional Advising staff and/or your advisor
- Ask for feedback from someone who knows you well
 - Does this essay sound like you?
- Ask for feedback from someone who does not know you well
 - What did the person learn about you through the essay? Does their image of you match what you were hoping to portray in the essay?



Essay Critiques offered by Preprofessional Advising

Option #1: Appointments

- Call 617-253-4733 to make an in-person or phone appointment with Erin Scott or Tamara Menghi. Front desk staff will assist you with making an appointment.
- Send your essay 24 hours prior to your scheduled appointment.

Option #2: Email Critiques

- Email Erin Scott (scotte@mit.edu) or Tamara Menghi (trmenghi@mit.edu) with a Word copy of your essay. (please no PDFs)

Essay Critique Policy

- Students may submit their AMCAS essay 2 times for critiques from Preprofessional Advising.
- Expect to receive your critique within 3-4 days of requesting an email critique, especially during peak busy times (June & July)



Writing Resources

- Preprofessional Advising Staff / MITCO
 - <http://web.mit.edu/career/www/aboutus/staff.html>
- Books: MIT Careers Office Library
- Advisors: Prehealth and Prelaw
- MIT Online Writing and Communication Center
 - <http://web.mit.edu/writing/>
- MIT Writing Center: The Writing Process
 - http://web.mit.edu/writing/Writing_Process/writingprocess.html
- Sample Essays with Critiques
 - MIT sample essays available at the Careers Office
 - <http://www.essaybank.co.uk>
 - <http://www.essayedge.com/>
 - <http://www.ivyessays.com/>
 - <http://www.admissionsessays.com/>