

Tips on Writing the Medical School or Dental School Application Essay

(Also true for applications to veterinary school and physician's assistant programs.)

1. First, create a polished curriculum vita (professional resume) as it will help you organize what you want to say in the essay. Make sure you have a professor review it.
Go to 'Undergradadvising.com' > Undergraduate Advice if you need help directions.
2. Then organize yourself with an outline of what you want to say. It does not have to be I, II, etc. It can be phrases or whatever works.
Go to 'Undergradadvising.com' > Prehealth Advice for a recommended outline.

Basic components –

Great introduction that makes the admissions committee want to keep reading. Often times about what got you interested in science or medicine. Or a great medical/dental experience.

Maybe name drop where you went to college. Example: In preparation I completed a Bachelor of Science degree in _____ at the University of _____.

Research experiences – No research is not required, but it is valued. Research teaches analytical thinking and analytical thinking is the basis of diagnosis. But if you include your research, write like a scientist.

What you did
What you found
Why it is important

Not 'I presented a poster, entitled "____xyz_____" and went to a meeting in San Antonio.'

Medical/dental/health/community setting experiences – This where you convince the admissions committee you truly understand what this profession entails.

Possibly an extracurricular activity

Great concluding paragraph – Not just "I want to be admitted." Actually you want to be through. What do you see yourself doing five years after graduation?

The essay –

Do not try to write the last draft first. It will just drive you insane. Plan on multiple drafts.

If you're having trouble getting started, write whatever is easiest first. If it is the research paragraph, go for it. Or clinical experience, go for it. Get the content right first. Worry about transition and the word count later.

Do not take literally the directive that the essay is not to repeat the activities. If everything interesting is in the activities, the essay is boring. Write about great experiences, but write about them in a different way. What did you take to an experience? What did you take away? What did you learn?

3. The first paragraph may be like ‘a story’ in that you might describe how you became interested in science or medicine. But the remainder is not ‘a story’. It is a highly polished report.
4. You want the first sentence (the topic sentence) in the first paragraph to catch the Admissions Committee's interest. Give it some punch! Make them want to keep reading.
5. Then look at the first sentence of each paragraph and determine whether it is memorable or generic. Go for memorable.
6. Read each sentence and see if 4500+ other applicants could have said the same thing. Be unique. What is there specifically about you that differentiates you from the rest of the applicants?
6. Show *motion* in the essay you are writing. Tell us about the process, not just the endpoint.
7. The tone of your sentences should go up. Lead the reader up to an important point. I call this ‘writing uphill’.
8. Then when you get to the peak, **STOP**. Don’t dilute the impact by following with a generic sentence. Example: “We cured cancer. And we did it using Western blots.”
9. When you can be specific, be specific. Not "I worked in a few labs." Rather "I worked with Drs. X and Y doing Z to determine Q."
10. Avoid starting sentences with long phrases, such as "Because I have always been interested in science since I was very young" . Rearrange the sentence to avoid these phrases. “ As a child I was always interested in”
11. Do not tell the Admissions Committee that you'll be a good doctor. Tell them about yourself and let them draw that conclusion.
12. Do not start several sentences in a row with "I". Vary them.
13. If you can't remember your most memorable events volunteering, etc., ask a parent, a sibling or a friend which experiences struck them the most. Which were the funniest? Which were startling? Which were the most painful?
14. Avoid the use of soft words/phrases. Use hard words/phrases instead. Soft: I think . . . Hard: I know . . . Soft: I would like to help people . . . Hard: I will then be in a position to apply my knowledge Assert!
15. Avoid being apologetic. Explain, but do not apologize. Everything is a success story in progress.
16. It is fine to use humor.
17. It is fine to take an informal, but avoid slang.
18. It is fine to show your personality and your human side. **Being human is good!**
19. Do not say anything negative. Ever. Do not say things such as ‘I did not like research, so I did xyz instead.’ You conducted research and then moved on to xyz.
20. Do not preach to the admissions committee. Do not tell the admissions committee what medicine is or what the characteristics of a good physician are. They know. Not “Physicians need to be patient”, but “Working with children in the Burn Unit, I learned the need for patience.”
21. If you are going to use an acronym, you define it the first time you use it. Example: American Cancer Society (ACS). If you don’t plan to use it again, don’t include the acronym at all.

22. Avoid parentheses. If you write well, you incorporate what you want to say into the sentence.
23. Avoid contractions. I will, not I'll. Cannot, not can't.
24. Don't string things your thoughts together with 'and'. State clearly in one sentence.
25. If you're interested in Family Medicine, Pediatric, or Obstetrics, by all means tell the Admissions Committee. The entire nation is oriented to health maintenance and illness prevention and these are the health maintenance/disease prevention specialties. (P.S. Pregnancy is not a disease.)
26. If you plan (or are considering) to work in an underserved or rural area, let the Admissions Committee know. This is also highly valued.
27. If you plan to teach or mentor others, say so. This is one of multiple ways to 'give back'.
28. After you have finished the essay, read it out loud to yourself to check the tone. This is a highly polished report, not a 'chat'.
29. After you have finished the essay, read through each sentence and see if there are any words you do not need. You only have a limited amount of space to write and need every character to convince the admissions committee about something important.
30. After you have finished the essay, read through it and underline every reason you believe you gave the admissions committee to admit. Then read through it again and **highlight** every reason you believe you gave the admissions committee to pick you over someone else. Are you convincing or are you just hoping they 'pick' you?
31. Toes When you have written your entire essay, go back over it and see if you have stepped on anyone's toes. For example, you do not want to say "No one but a physician can truly experience the ultimate satisfaction in giving". Number 1: This is not true. Number two: Both MDs and PhDs will be serving on the admissions committee. Do not offend anyone.