

APPLYING TO MEDICAL SCHOOL

Writing for the
Application

APPLICATION TIMELINE

March

- Meet with professors who will be recommending you
- Polish your resume because they will want to see it
- Start working on your personal statement
- Study for MCAT

June

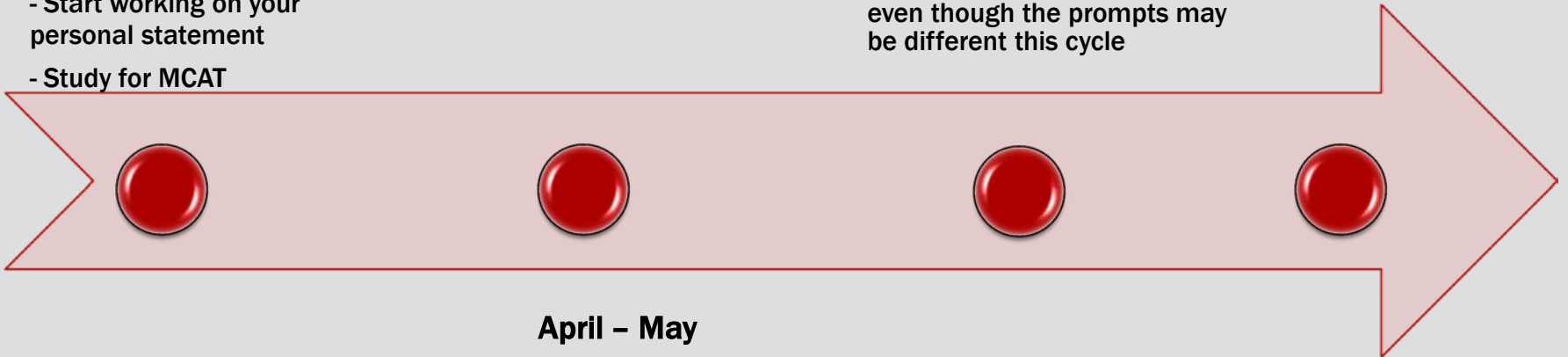
- Submit application on the day it opens for submission (it takes 6 weeks to verify)
- Take MCAT if haven't already
- Prepare for secondary application essays by reviewing past year prompts, even though the prompts may be different this cycle

April – May

- Study for and take MCAT
- AMCAS application opens in May for you to start working on it
- Work on personal statement and activities list (contact info, hours, descriptions) in a word document and meet regularly for feedback

July – August

- Work on secondary application essays (turn these around quickly)
- Prepare for interviews (August – February)



HOW MUCH WRITING WILL YOU DO FOR THE MED SCHOOL APPLICATION?

- **AMCAS personal statement** – An intellectual biography, presented in the context of you as a future doctor. You have 5300 characters (including spaces) in which to write. This is roughly a page and a half. Choose your words carefully.
- **AMCAS 15** – meaningful activities in which you have been involved.
 - 700 characters (including spaces) to describe each experience
 - An additional 1325 characters (including spaces) to elaborate on three of these
 - More about the AMCAS 15 later in the presentation
- **Secondary application essays** – School-specific, varying topics
 - Share information not addressed elsewhere
 - Are you a good fit for this particular program?
 - Don't recycle secondary essays too greatly – each should be tailored to the specific school
 - Expand some aspect of your experience – leadership, longstanding commitment to community service, relevant medical experience
 - Some schools have 5 or more different essay questions, others only 2 or 3 – you will be doing lots of writing for these
 - Look at prior year prompts to get an idea of the kinds of questions that are typically asked in a secondary – they may change year to year

WHAT ARE MED SCHOOLS LOOKING FOR

- Grades and MCAT are important
- So are other qualities – leadership, compassion, initiative, ethics, resilience, critical thinking.....
- Holistic Review
- Competencies
- Your personal statement and application writing should reveal these competencies

PART ONE – DRAFTING

(GETTING STARTED CAN BE DIFFICULT)

- Where to begin?
 - List key qualities and character traits
 - List ideals, goals, and issues that you value
 - For each, list examples or experiences to illustrate how you have gained/developed qualities and traits and how you have actively worked toward goals or to address issues of importance
 - Some may be related to health/medicine and some may not
- Look for a unifying thread – this will become your thematic framework
- The first paragraph is important
 - Gives reader a clear context
 - Encapsulates what's most important
 - Reveals topic / motivation / meaning
 - Hints at future

QUESTIONS TO ASK IN EARLY DRAFTS – BIG PICTURE

- Why is it important for me to talk about this topic?
- Are all of my key ideas here?
- Am I writing about the same experiences that I write about as my “most meaningful” activities in the AMCAS activities list? There shouldn’t be a great deal of overlap there.
- Am I writing about my experiences in a logical way, connecting them to my thematic idea, instead of in chronological order?
- Does my statement tell the reader why I want to go into medicine (as opposed to any other field)?
- Does my statement tell the reader what is important to me/what I value?
- Does my statement tell the reader what kind of contribution/impact I want to make?

PART TWO – REVISING AND FINE-TUNING

AM I USING PRECISE LANGUAGE? AM I INCLUDING ENOUGH DETAIL?

- Be very specific about what you have done, how it has impacted you, and what you plan to do
- Precise language is key when describing your experiences. Your reader shouldn't have to fill in the blanks or have lingering questions about what you have done or why it is important to you
- Eliminate empty introductory sentences that are general and vague. In each paragraph, get right to the point and use meaningful transition sentences between paragraphs
- Below is an example of an empty introductory sentence – the passage to the right can stand on its own with out the useless intro.

The experience didn't actually provide the insight. The writer GAINED insight through his or her experiences.

Tell the reader what you actually did, what you actually saw, and how it influenced you.

What issues are important to you?

Passive construction. Vague and leaves reader hanging. What are your career goals?

■ My shadowing experience provided me with valuable insight into major healthcare issues facing our nation today. My career goals were solidified by this experience.

- When observing patients at Dr. Johnson's free clinic, I witnessed firsthand the collateral effects of poverty on patients' well-being. Adults and children living in food deserts, under extreme stress, without safe places to play and stay active, and with poor access to reliable transportation or preventive medicine would enter the clinic with issues ranging from advanced heart conditions to diabetes to serious infections. At times, there was nothing Dr. Johnson could do but refer the patient to the emergency room. Without adequate health insurance coverage, would they even go? I became determined to understand all I can about public health policy and medicine. With a dual MD/MPH, I plan to shape public health policy and address the inequities facing our nation's poor, engaging in educational outreach and operating clinics in impoverished communities.

OTHER QUESTIONS TO ASK: WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR ME TO TALK ABOUT THIS TOPIC? IS EVERY SENTENCE IMPORTANT?

Various is vague. What service opportunities did you participate in?

- Through various service opportunities I have become exposed to the rewards of giving back to others.

What are the rewards?
Also, avoid being "exposed to" anything.

What is your research about?

- My research and coursework have exposed me to various methods which will be useful in the lab.

There's that word "various" again. What methods did you actually learn and carry out? "Exposed to" is also passive. What did you actually do?

Which classes interest you? Why do you look forward to this? What do you hope to gain from this experience?

- I look forward to taking classes through Stanford's scholarly concentration.

- Working with at-risk students at the Thomas Lay After School Program has taught me the value of service. In providing educational support, coaching, and mentoring twice weekly for the past two years, I have seen the impact of individualized attention in the overall well-being of a child. My mentees have experienced increasing success in school and on the playground. This is how I view the role of a physician as well – mentor, coach, and support.

- For two years I studied seizures by performing electrophysiological recordings of Zebrafish, and now I am devising and constructing an apparatus which we will use to test optokinetic reflex pathways of these fish. I am passionate about this research because I apply my knowledge of physics and engineering to biologically meaningful experiments.

- I am passionate about the application of engineering to neurology. Currently I am taking a class about the physics of an MRI machine and its biomedical applications. Through Stanford's scholarly concentration I plan to continue studying bioengineering and apply what I learn to studying neuroscience, behavior, and cognition.

FINAL REVISIONS

- **REREAD THE FIRST AND LAST PARAGRAPHS**
 - Does it have a strong lead in?
 - Is the theme clear? The theme should be easily discernable and should run through the entire piece
 - Do you establish a frame of reference and specific points in the first paragraph to direct the reader? The first paragraph can be a more broad introduction to the things you will be talking about later, but the ideas must be clear and specific
 - Does the last paragraph leave the reader looking forward with a clear sense of where you are going/your future, or does it circle back around and “bookend” the statement, leaving the reader back at the beginning?
- **QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF – about each paragraph, each sentence, each word**
 - Why is it important for me to say this?
 - What is this telling the reader about me?
 - Is this connected to my theme?
- **CHECK FOR SPECIFICS**
 - Are your sentences specific and precise, or are they full of generalities such as “I have had various experiences which have allowed me to grow as a leader.”
- **PROOFREAD!!!!**
 - Grammatical mistakes are unacceptable.

GENERAL TIPS

- Make a strong, coherent statement
- Share the arc of your journey
- Get to the point quickly
- Thematic/logical not chronological organization
- Don't describe yourself with adjectives
- Share experiences AND reveal the insights you gained
- Use one space between sentences (saves space)
- Experiences and opportunities don't "develop skills" – YOU develop skills THROUGH experiences
- Don't open your statement with an anecdote from an experience abroad (medical mission trip is very common)
- If you DO discuss experiences abroad, cultural sensitivity is critical, and quickly connect back to main idea

AVOID THE FOLLOWING

- **Not only...but also; Both...and**
- **DO NOT BORROW** lines from other people's personal statements!
 - This is dishonest. A personal statement is supposed to reflect your own UNIQUE motivations to medicine
- **Amazing, really, truly, extremely, incredible, always, never, constantly, oftentimes**
 - Intensifiers, absolutes, empty qualifiers
- **Little did I know....**
 - The writer wasn't thinking about the potential of the situation – sounds naïve, immature
- **Fact, in fact, in my opinion, I think, I believe, I feel**
 - You are writing it, so the reader knows that you think so
- **"Since I was little," "I've always wanted to," and other childhood reminiscences (e.g. the "trick-or-treating as a doctor" story, dressing up and doctoring dolls or pets)**
 - Makes the writer seem young/motivations less mature
- **Mentioning the white coat**
 - Medicine is more than the trappings of a doctor
- **Discussing THE MOMENT you knew you wanted to be a doctor (coming to this realization involves a process of inquiry, action, and reflection, not one moment)**
 - Also avoid "Medicine is my destiny" or "I have always known this was for me" – you haven't and you are expected to have tested this motivation or even to have questioned this career
- **Become, try, start, decide, begin, enable me to, allow me to, opportunity, chance**
 - These words are tentative, incomplete, passive – skip right to the action
- **Too much process (e.g. I thought this, then I realized that, then I wondered about the other thing, before I finally decided on the final thing...)**

MORE DOs

- VARY your sentence structure
- BOLD and meaningful transitions
- DETAILS take us into your experiences
- SOLID mechanics and sentence construction are important
- Use ACTION verbs, and avoid passive language
- Use PRECISE and direct language. Choose each word with great attention. Say exactly what you mean
- Be SPECIFIC. Give examples to illustrate your points, and be explicit
- Be consistent in your comma and punctuation use
- Figure out what your HOOK is. It may be an anecdote, but it shouldn't be sentimental
- PROOFREAD!!

AND DON'Ts

- Do not overuse “I” and “my”
- Avoid idioms, colloquialisms, and clichés
- Do not use extra nouns and adjectives
- Do not overwork your essay until you lose your voice!
- Do not intensify or over-dramatize. Direct and understated makes the strongest statement
- Do not begin a sentence with “however,” “for example,” “for instance,” “moreover,” “further,” “furthermore,” or other fillers
- DO NOT QUOTE famous people (or non-famous people). Do not even use the word “quote” in the essay
- You might include dialogue from a personal experience (sparingly!), but NOT at the start of the essay

MORE GREAT EXAMPLES

HAVE AN OPINION

- Even more troubling was the absence of practicing physicians at these meetings, which inevitably led to the making of business decisions, rather than patient-oriented solutions. I vividly recall one CEO arguing to maintain a portfolio of technology services over a set of community prevention programs for the immigrant population in Queens. His presentation included dozens of sophisticated statistics but no data that focused on long-term healthcare outcomes or the special needs of his international patient demographic. Limited personal experience and a narrow worldview prevented him from approaching the problems from a caretaker's point of view.

TELL WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO YOU

- I came alive as a vulnerable patient in Nicaragua, as an inquiring student in Tanzania, as a passionate scientist in the laboratory, and as an attentive interpreter in Homerville. Each successive lived experience shapes my persona and invigorates my drive to integrate global medicine, public health, and infectious diseases. In these moments I learned to advocate for ending healthcare disparities by starting with the people most affected, to emphasize the practicality of focusing on prevention, and to cherish the gift of human interaction.

TELL WHAT YOU ARE DOING TO PURSUE THAT PASSION

- Compelled by the stories of people like Eduardo and Carlo, I returned to the United States to work toward improving the causes and consequences of poor health. I founded UGA Without Borders, an organization that joins students from diverse backgrounds to develop and advocate for comprehensive solutions to the issues impeding better health and wellbeing within the global community. The group supports projects ranging from sending bed nets to Haiti to digging drinking wells in sub-Saharan Africa and works with communities to overcome the challenges of development. In the summer of 2009, fifty students traveled to Costa Rica, Tanzania, and the Dominican Republic to perform needs assessments, evaluate public health practices, and work in field clinics to provide much-needed medical care.

THE AMCAS 15

ACTIVITIES LIST

- Keep records of all of your activities, including contact info and hours. Keep a journal of experiences and reflections. Think critically about which are important and meaningful to you
- Don't include high school (unless relevant or still involved in, such as musical pursuits or the arts) or casual hobbies; don't include future activities unless starting before you submit or attached to an activity you are already doing (ex: extension of research or new internship with the same organization)
- Don't repeat information in the "description" section already noted in "experience type", "title", "organization", etc.
- Don't inflate with duplicate entries or double-dip multiple leadership roles within one organization
- Be precise and accurate about current/pending publications
- If listing a research experience that extends through the coming academic year as well as summer, use the description area to note time invested
- If the organization or honor isn't nationally recognized, include a brief description so the committee will know why it is important to mention
- When selecting the three most meaningful, and in the entire list for that matter, show a range (ex: leadership, research, shadowing) that at the same time paints a cohesive picture of what is important to you
- Include pursuits that are not health related if they are meaningful to you
- Quality over quantity – you don't have to have 15 activities

EXAMPLE

- **Experience Type:Community Service/Volunteer – Medical/Clinical**
Experience Name:Service Learning in Tanzania
Start Date:May 2006
End Date:June 2006
Avg. Hours/Week:45 hours
**Organization Name:MS Training Centre for Development Co-
operation (MS-TCDC)**

As one of two annual Darl Snyder Fellows in the African Studies Institute at the University of Georgia, I inaugurated a service learning initiative in Arusha, Tanzania. We volunteered at three NGOs, each with a different developmental focus. We primarily worked with Tanzanians at WAMATA AIDS clinic, delivering HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention talks to students at local secondary schools. We also traveled to isolated villages and provided home-based care, visiting 13 homes in two days to counsel infected individuals and their families. Our second project organized an after-school program involving tutoring and ESL for about 30 boys living at the Tupendane Street Children Center. We also assisted students at Jiwe La Msingi Rehabilitation Center in tailoring, shoemaking, carpentry, and jewelry making.

PARTING ADVICE:

- Don't be afraid to write a bad first draft – everyone does! And then show it to someone for feedback – get eyes on your statement!
- Ask friends, family, other pre-meds, current med students, professors, advisors, etc. to read your statement. Every question asked or comment made is an opportunity for reflection and, possibly, revision. At the same time, remember that in the end, it's your statement, so take in all the advice you receive and then decide how to direct your statement.
 - Example: If your family tells you it “doesn't sound like you” then that's advice worth heeding. If someone tells you to start your statement with a catchy quote or sensationalized story, definitely disregard!
- Make an appointment with me, as well. I will be happy to offer feedback on your personal statement and activities list in person or via email (whatever works best for you) before you submit.
- [UGA Premedical Studies resources](#)
- Contact Info:
 - Elizabeth Hughes Sears
 - 001 Moore College (basement level)
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