

Writing an Outstanding Pathology Residency Personal Statement

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An important part of the residency application is your personal statement. Although there is no single way to write an ideal personal statement, I have tried to summarize how a personal statement can be made more effective in communicating your goals, ambitions, and past accomplishments, as well as reflect your values and morals.

1. Length

Crisp and concise personal statements are the most effective and readable. The program leadership reading personal statements looks at hundreds of applications during the Match season. Personal statements are not the only part of the applications that are reviewed. Scores, transcripts, letters of recommendation, and CVs all matter and are important components of the application. Hence, lengthy personal statements may even detract from key messages you seek to convey. Sticking to a limit of one page in Microsoft Word might be a good metric.

2. Realistic or Embellished?

Everyone would like their personal statement to stand out and showcase their greatest achievements. These goals and ambitions are certainly good, but sometimes, we might add too many floral adjectives or clichéd anecdotes to catch the reader's eye. Although this may be beneficial to some extent, you should make sure to retain a personal and realistic feel to your statement. Every life has a story to tell, and everyone's medical career has its phases of difficulties and successes. It is important to be able to convey your actions, perspectives, and philosophy rather than suggesting that your journey has been without challenging situations. If you can effectively convey the difficulties that you faced to reach your level of achievement today and the actions you took to surpass them, that conveys a lot about you and your personality to the reader. Ask yourself a question after reading your own personal statement: would I be interested to talk to this person? And if the answer is yes, you are good to go!

3. Showcasing Your Talent

Every one of us brings unique value to patient care and management. In medical school and sometimes even in our undergraduate studies, we get involved, collaborate, and try to make meaningful contributions to the field through research, volunteering, and shadowing. However, sometimes scientific manuscripts and your CV do not fully communicate the experience you had working on a particular project. Is the personal statement an appropriate place to talk about these experiences? Certainly, yes! What people are looking forward to reading in your personal statement is your vision, thoughts about the field, and your interests looking forward. Hence, you could briefly discuss one or two most significant scientific projects you worked on, especially if these projects had an impact on your interests or career goals. Additionally, projects that led to impactful conclusions or involved collaboration with other specialties or multi-institutional

collaborations can reflect scientific temperament and an interest in teamwork. Medicine is by nature a collaborative science and art, so highlighting an interest in teamwork is helpful.

4. Career Goals

Defining and stating our career goals is a crucial part of the personal statement. It is entirely normal to not know what fellowship you might be interested in, or know if you want to practice in academic or community medicine or in private practice at the time of writing your personal statement. Most readers are looking for some clarity about whether the applicant does have differentiated interests in particular areas or not. Stating this can help your application; if the program knows about a particular interest, they sometimes can tailor your interview experience according to your interests. For instance, if someone is interested in academic medicine, they can discuss research initiatives and opportunities to collaborate. On the other hand, if you are not yet sure about career goal specifics, the programs can provide more general information. Some faculty can give their perspectives about the subspecialty in which they work.

5. “Personalizing” Personal Statements

Many applicants wonder if a unique personal statement for some programs. It depends. A personal statement is a way to convey your perspectives, vision, and career goals, as well as your willingness to learn and your work ethic. It’s likely that these qualities would stay the same, regardless of what program you are applying to. In general, it is important to study the programs you are applying to so that you can be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of each program. It’s important to not only assess if you would “fit well” with a program, but also if the program fulfills aspects you consider to be important. We might worry about whether it would be helpful to include certain parts of our personal statement for a particular program. Examples of this include: applying to a program that doesn’t offer a fellowship that we are interested in pursuing, having a strong interest in research and applying to a program which doesn’t offer many research opportunities, or applying to an academic program if we are interested in community practice after training. However, clarity and being straightforward about what we wish to pursue and achieve is what is appreciated. There are many passionate mentors who are always happy to guide applicants and residents on the path that they choose, even if that might be new to them too. Programs also like to have a team of residents with diverse goals and objectives. At the most, the programs would want to talk to the applicant during the interviews about the opportunities that they can and that they cannot provide during training.

6. A Suggested Format

Lastly, is there an ideal format for a personal statement? Certainly not! Every one of us has a unique story to tell. We each have unique goals, ambitions, and expectations of our training. Our personal statement should reflect these individual intentions. However, here are some broad suggestions that you might find helpful during the personal statement writing process, in addition to those I have discussed above:

- A. Divide the personal statement into shorter paragraphs.
- B. The introductory paragraph often discusses your background and what brought you into medicine.
- C. The next paragraph often describes your undergraduate and medical school journey and the successes and failures and challenges that you faced.
- D. The third paragraph may focus on how you got interested in a particular specialty, what is your previous exposure in that specialty, and how you feel you could contribute to this

- specialty and to medicine. You could use this paragraph to highlight any subspecialty interests or research interests if you have them. If you have specific interests in a particular program, you could also mention them here. If that is the case, it is often effective to demonstrate how a program could aid you in meeting your training goals.
- E. The fourth paragraph might focus on your long-term career goals: have you thought about them or are yet unsure? Do you plan to pursue academic medicine or private practice? What aspect of a specialty are you passionate about exploring further?
 - F. Finally, the concluding paragraph can include note of thanks for the consideration of the application. You could also use this space to re-emphasize how much you are looking forward to the opportunity to train in the field.

Please note that these are not strict recommendations and aren't endorsed by any organization. These are only suggestions that I have found useful in creating successful personal statements. I hope you found this helpful!