Writing Essays for Admissions Applications

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Agenda

- Why must you write?
- What will you write?
- How will you write?
Why Must You Write?: The Holistic Review

- Academic credentials
  - Cornell GPA (overall and BCMP)
  - Standardized test scores (MCAT or DAT)
- Non-academic experiences
  - Service to others
  - Exposure/experience in the world of clinical healthcare
  - Ability to communicate well interpersonally
  - Interactions with others different from yourself
- Passion for this career path
Purpose of Your Essays

• Communicate to your audiences
  – Non-academic experiences
  – Your personal dedication to and interest in a career in medicine
What Will You Write?: Types of Essays

• Application Service statements
  – AMCAS
  – AACOMAS
  – AADSAS
  – OPTOMCAS
  – TMDSAS
  – Etc.

• “Secondaries”
Application Service Statements

- Medical Personal Statement/Personal Comments Essay
- Optional Essay(s)
- Dual Degree Program Essay
  - AMCAS: MD-PhD Essay and Significant Research Experience Essay
Application Service Statements

- Answer such questions as:
  - What is your motivation for a healthcare career?
  - What are your personal strengths relative to the medical field?
  - What are your competencies?

- Must be personal
- Must be well written
- Sent to all of your designated schools
- Adhere to length and topical constraints
“Secondaries”

• Essays to provide additional information to schools that express interest in you
• Topical questions, again with length constraints
• Address your motivation for attending *that specific school*
What Is the Process?

• Self reflection
  – Consider your Core Competencies
  – Review your 20Qs

• Write and re-write

• Review
  – Ask for feedback
Core Competencies for Entering Medical Students

aamc.org/initiatives/admissionsinitiative/competencies
Core Competencies

• Interpersonal
  – Service Orientation
  – Social Skills
  – Cultural Competence
  – Teamwork
  – Oral Communication

• Intraperisonal
  – Ethical Responsibility to Self and Others
  – Reliability and Dependability
  – Resilience and Adaptability
  – Capacity for Improvement
Core Competencies

• Thinking and Reasoning
  – Critical Thinking
  – Quantitative Reasoning
  – Scientific Inquiry
  – Written Communication

• Science
  – Living Systems
  – Human Behavior
Required Elements of Your Essays

- Demonstration of your motivation for a healthcare career
- Demonstration that you comprehend and can articulate relevant personal strengths
- Emphasis on your core competencies
Approaches to Start Writing

• Focus on a central theme that crosses different experiences and demonstrates your contribution to your community and world

• Develop a few of your responses in the 20Q exercise into a narrative that presents information about you as a unique candidate

• Pick a single response in your 20Q exercise and develop it into a narrative essay, deepening the focus and expanding the breadth of your response
Some Ideas

- A life-changing personal experience with medicine that led to your interest
- A relationship that has inspired your passion for medicine
- A challenging personal experience that has changed your life
- A story about your educational journey that will help the admissions committee know you better
What to Avoid

- Mistaking perfection for authenticity
- Picking a “tired theme”
- Developing your theme insufficiently
- Emphasizing quotes from others’ writing
- Writing “what they want to hear”
Resources for Writing Personal Essays

- CCS Library: [career.cornell.edu/career/resources/](career.cornell.edu/career/resources/)
  - “Personal essay” key-word search returns 16 resources (books, websites, etc.) across Career Services offices, mostly in 103 Barnes or G55 Goldwin Smith

- Health Careers Advisors

- Walk-in Service of the Writing Workshop

- Writing tutor hired by Cornell Career Services (late spring into summer)

- Forthcoming Human Health Professions Admissions Guidance booklet
Tips for Success

• Write your personal story, not what you think a committee wants to hear
• Get familiar and comfortable with application sites
• Pay attention to significant dates
• Remember, quality matters
• Understand and explain yourself
• Set yourself apart
• Allow plenty of time: write and re-write
• Write succinctly to meet character limits
Your Questions?