Tips and Tricks for the Personal Statement

Lauren Fisher DO
Career and Professional Advisor
Clinical Assistant Professor of Anesthesiology
Why Do I Need a Personal Statement?

- Exercise in self reflection
  - Opportunity to clarify thoughts/choose between specialties
- Away Rotations (Letter of Intent)
- Letter of recommendation writers
- ERAS Application
Where Do I Begin?

- Brain Dump Technique

- “Start writing, no matter what. The water does not flow until the faucet is turned on.”
  — Louis L'Amour

- “The first draft of anything is s@#t.”
  — Ernest Hemingway
Self Reflection

- Pivotal Experiences
  - Life experiences or Medical School experiences
- Accomplishments
- Goals
- Values
Tell YOUR Story:

• How are you unique?
• Why did you choose this specialty?
• How are you well suited for this specialty?
• What are your future goals?
Show, Not Tell:

- Give examples
- Experience that shaped your decision
- What about you makes your journey special?
Anatomy of a Personal Statement: Beginning

- Engaging opening
- Start with describing yourself and your background
- BUT do not simply recite your CV
- Give examples to give the reader insight into your personality
Anatomy of a Personal Statement: Middle

• Clearly state your career choice
• Why did you select this specialty [or prelim year]?
• Why do you think you will excel in this specialty?
• Show – Don’t tell
  • Cite examples: personal, family, professional
Anatomy of a Personal Statement: End

- Goals and expectations for your career
  - What you expect to achieve in your career/long term goals?
  - What you are looking for in a program?
  - Why this specific program may help you reach your goals?
Anatomy of a Personal Statement:

- If you are interested in a specific area of the country, this is a good place to discuss your ties to that region.
- Some specialties require a customized Personal Statement for each program.
- Even if customized PS not required, it may help to personalize your application to a competitive program.
- May need multiple versions if applying to two separate specialties, or prelim plus advanced position scenario.
Do’s and Don’t’s:

• Don’t just update your Med School Application PS
• Don’t focus too much on the past, make sure to address your future goals
• Use active, rather than passive voice
• Minimize clichés, dictionary definitions, quotes
• Personal Statement, NOT a creative writing assignment
Do’s and Don'ts:

• Clear and succinct
• One page max
• Get a few different opinions
  • *Advisors are great at this
• MUST be error free
  • Typos and grammar can ruin your chances!
  • Have at least 2-3 people edit your work
  • Assign the correct customized PS to correct program
The Art of the Spin:

- Can use the PS to control the narrative:
  - red flags, non traditional course or deferred graduation.
- Make sure to own your experiences and show how you have grown.
- Advisors can help to craft your approach to your specific scenario
Difference between LOI and PS?

- Letter of Intent for Away Rotations
- Short and Sweet
- Paragraph 1: Who you are
- Paragraph 2: Why are you choosing to rotate in this specialty
- Paragraph 3: Why do you want to do a rotation at this specific program?
In Conclusion

• Just start where you are
• Brain Dump
  • Who are you? Where are you coming from?
  • Where do you want to go?
  • Why?
• *Career and Professional Advisors
“I want to go into Ortho”

• Why?
• Because I like to operate
• Why?
• Because I like to work with my hands
• Why?
• Because bones remind me of support structure, like beams of a house.
Resources and Examples

- https://www.llusmaa.org/page/examples-of-personal-statements
- https://www.uwmedicine.org/education/md-program/current-students/student-affairs/career-advising/year-4-get-residency/personal-statement
- AAMC Careers in Medicine Site
- Advising database – ask your advisor for examples