

Personal Statement and Reference Guidance

Personal Statement

Your personal statement should be approached in the same way as a job application. You should use it to provide evidence that you possess the qualities required by a trainee doctor. Instead of telling us what you think you're good at; give us examples of things you've done that demonstrate what you're good at. Please note that we assess applications on the principle that observation does not constitute experience. You should therefore avoid giving us a great deal of detail about time spent shadowing doctors. We are interested in what you have done and what qualities you have demonstrated. Your personal statement should explain what you have learned from your work experience or how you have reflected upon your work experience rather than the detail of what you saw during your work experience. Your personal statement should contain specifics that enable us to determine whether it was a relevant or useful experience. As space is limited it is advisable not to include anything in your personal statement that does not address these points unless it is required by another university to which you are applying.

Your personal statement should cover the following:

1. Your reasons for applying to study MBBS

Tell us why you want to study medicine, especially if this is a new direction for you.

2. Understanding of the role of a doctor

A well-defined understanding of the role of a doctor is an important part of your personal statement. In your personal statement you should explain what you comprehend the role of a doctor to be and why you wish to train for a career in medicine. You must clearly describe what you have done to come to this decision, examples could include shadowing a doctor, talking to doctors or learning from personal or other experiences of being a patient. In your personal statement utilise your experience to explain why you want to be a doctor. The remainder of your statement should provide evidence that you possess the qualities (characteristics, skills and values) to make you a successful doctor.

3. Your health-related and/or caring work/work shadowing or volunteering; roles you have had; depth of experience in a role involving personal interaction; reflection on what was learnt from these experiences

Practical experience in a caring role is extremely valuable to understanding what a career in medicine entails. Gaining experience in this area, either through work and/or volunteering can occur in many different ways, for example, assisting with community based care projects or becoming involved in a more clinical setting. Applicants who have taken paid employment may use examples from their interactions with people at work. Active involvement in helping underprivileged, unwell, disabled or distressed people is supremely valuable in gaining experience for a future career in caring. Other valuable experiences can include contending with demanding situations or going above and beyond your basic duties to help someone in a work based situation. It is essential for you to provide examples from these experiences that demonstrate the characteristics, skills and values required by a doctor. Claiming to possess these attributes without providing evidence will not be sufficient. In your personal statement it is important that you tell us how long and how regularly you have been

involved in the activity described, why you chose to undertake it, what exactly your responsibilities were/are and, crucially, what you have gained from it. For example, "During the last six months I spent one morning a week in a care home, where I took responsibility for feeding three elderly residents. I learned that it takes a long time: one of the residents would not co-operate without a lot of coaxing and another had difficulty swallowing following a stroke, so I learned to feed very slowly. I can now share experiences with the families and other carers in order to improve the feeding experience of the residents." This is only an example. In other examples you might be able to demonstrate the benefits of your intervention to the recipient, such as progress made by a child with reading difficulties as a result of work you have done with him/her. There is no value in writing something such as "Working in an elderly care home for 6 months showed me the importance of respecting each resident as an individual." You must clearly explain how it taught you this and how you then put this lesson into practice (in this example, how you demonstrated respect for residents as individuals). You should be aware that we might request confirmation from the host organisation of any work experience detailed in your application.

4. Work/life balance

A career in medicine can be enormously rewarding, however, it can also be challenging, frustrating and distressing at times. During their career a doctor is expected to keep up to date with innovation, cope with uncertainty and respond rapidly to change. In addition being able to demonstrate a healthy work-life balance in your personal statement provides evidence of your ability to cope with various and perhaps contradictory time demands. Therefore your personal statement should provide evidence of your ability to interact with the wider world and to be able to make your own choices and decisions. This may include examples of leadership, responsibility, enterprise or ingenuity. These examples may come from activities in the community, workplace or an academic environment. Extracurricular activities within community organisations, churches, sports clubs, bands, etc., are all equally valuable but there should be some demonstration of how you relax and find time to do things you enjoy, rather than a long list of worthy causes and achievements. We are aware that different kinds of opportunities are open to different individuals and will look at all kinds of activities.

5. Initiative/enterprise

In your personal statement you can gain recognition by demonstrating how using your own initiative made a contribution to something over and above academic achievement. Examples of contributions in this category are establishing clubs/societies, organising fund-raising, community activities, awards/prizes, evidence of achievement in a previous career, etc. If your endeavour was successful, remember to provide evidence for this as well. For example, "While in my final year I found a number of other students were interested in photography, so I set up a club that meets twice a term. I organised outside speakers and competitions to be judged by the school governors. There is now a thriving club with about 20 regular attendees." Recognition can only be given to students who write clearly about their own contribution. We also give recognition to applicants who have been able to demonstrate commitment outside of the academic environment in any area of interest to them. This might relate to charitable work as well as sport, music or hobbies. Your commitment may be demonstrated by passing exams or tests (e.g. music grades), completing significant challenges (e.g. Duke of Edinburgh or an equivalent national award), undertaking significant roles or participating in important events. Use such examples to tell us how much time and effort has gone into this, otherwise we cannot give extra credit for activities that required an exceptional level of commitment. No credit will be given for simply listing interests.

6. Teamworking and communication

A career in medicine involves team work. Therefore it is essential that your personal statement demonstrates your understanding of the role of a doctor within a healthcare team and how you would contribute to effective teamworking. Examples of teamworking can be taken from many different experiences both in and out of the academic environment. In your personal statement you must demonstrate how you have contributed to a team, either as a leader or as a member. It is important that your personal statement provides a credible account of the outcome of your contribution to the team. For example, applicants will not gain credit for stating that they passed a Duke of Edinburgh award; however, they are likely to gain credit if they can give an example of how they worked as part of a team during a Duke of Edinburgh event.

Effective communication is an essential skill for a career in medicine. It is important that your personal statement explains any experience you have acquired in communicating with different groups. Your personal statement should provide an example of a task where you have been able to exhibit good communication skills. Examples in this regard are not limited to public speaking but would preferably be from contact with people beyond your usual peer group. Most credit will be given to applicants who can provide an example of effective communication, for example from received feedback or from the conclusion of the communication example described in your personal statement.

7. Quality of written application

Applications will be assessed for the quality of the writing. Careless errors of spelling, grammar and punctuation will affect your overall score, so please consider carefully how you have presented your personal statement. Including unnecessary abbreviations or technical details (e.g. listing the names of the operations you observed in a hospital shadowing period) is unlikely to help your score.

8. Exceptional circumstances

Please make sure you tell us if you have made any exceptional achievements or had to overcome exceptional difficulties. It is helpful if these statements are backed up by your referee.

Reference

In your reference we want to know what the writer of the reference thinks about you as a whole person, not simply about your academic achievements and potential. Your reference is likely to be written by your head teacher, college principal, head of year or form tutor. Applicants who are not currently in school or college should approach an academic supervisor whenever possible: a "character reference" is not sufficient. Please ensure that whoever is writing the reference sees a copy of these guidelines.

The areas in which we require information are:

1. Commitment to medicine

This can be demonstrated in many ways. The length of time that you have been committed to a career in medicine is an aspect of this however, it is important that your reference explain any roles you have taken on

that confirm your commitment to medicine (e.g. work or volunteering experience in a caring role). An understanding of your awareness of the realities, advantages and disadvantages of a medical career would also be useful. Work or volunteering experience in other areas which has convinced you that those areas are not the right careers for you could be documented here.

2. Staying power/perseverance

Your reference should provide an understanding of your interest and enthusiasm for a career in medicine. Applicants whose interest in a career in medicine has begun later should not be discouraged by this. A reference can support those applicants whose interest and commitment to medicine has flourished relatively late in their school career or as a graduate or other later applicant.

3. Communication skills

Effective communication is essential to the practice of medicine. Good communication begins with listening. Therefore whilst we are interested in contributions to class discussions and extracurricular activities, we would be very pleased to hear in your reference about how you relate to others, in particular the less gifted students or younger students, and how well you accept criticism.

4. Humanity, humility and responsibility

We would like to have information from your referee about your ability to be empathetic and about your suitability to work in a caring profession. Information about how you view yourself in the school and wider community or in the case of later applicants in the workplace or in higher education is also important. We would be pleased to see your referee provide examples of your readiness to take on responsibility and of your ability to deal with responsibility.

5. Intellectual potential

This is not only evidenced by your actual or predicted grades. It is important for your referee to tell us about late academic developers, e.g. the student who achieves a less than perfect score but is likely to blossom during upcoming examinations. Other evidence of intellectual potential beyond the ability to pass exams is welcome.

6. Teamwork

Teamworking skills may be exhibited in many different environments. We acknowledge that participating in sport is not the only way in which students can excel in this area. In your reference social and charity involvement would be relevant here as would membership of choirs, orchestras etc. The ability to work effectively as a member of a team in field trips, expeditions, treks etc. will also be important. Examples that involve leadership skills are of particularly value, although part of successful teamworking is the recognition that everyone can't be the leader.

7. Mitigating circumstances

We strongly recommend that in addition to all the above sections, any mitigating circumstances which may affect not only your academic performance but any aspect of the information contained within your application should be included in your reference. If you experienced any extenuating circumstances at the time of your examinations, your school or college should report this immediately to the relevant examination boards so that any allowances can be made. If we consider that extenuating circumstances brought up in the reference should be taken into account formally in the assessment of your application, we shall write to your referee to request further details.