

THE PLAN:



HOW TO GET STARTED

HOW TO GET STARTED WRITING TIPS

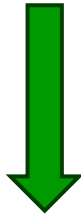
MINDSET

1. Let “why medicine” be a guide, not a barrier
2. Get free from the fear of “being cliché”
3. Who knew “bad” drafts could be so good!?

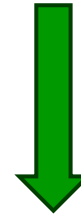
MINDSET

GETTING FREE FROM THE FEAR OF BEING CLICHÉ

(can also free up exploring your “whys”)



A writing style/reflection process, that stays on the surface



Natural, given the goal! Med schools hope you “like helping people” and/or science, etc. But no one else is you, having your version of an experience.

Is it Cliché?

“ I want to help people.”

The sentiment is NOT cliché. Leaving it hanging can be cliché/vague

Provide examples illustrating helping or being motivated or being impacted by helping)

THIS is cliché

“Her eyes welled with tears showing me how grateful she was to me”

(we don't always really know what someone is feeling when they tear up, what did YOU learn, how were you impacted?)

Is Not Cliché

Brainstorm examples?

“No one who bothers about originality will ever be original; whereas if you simply try to tell the truth (without caring how often it has been told before) you will, nine times out of ten, become original without ever having noticed it.”

-C.S. Lewis

MINDSET

DON'T BE AFRAID OF "WHY MEDICINE?"

Understanding your own why(s)

- The actual prompt is more open than "Why medicine?" it's a chance to talk about what seeds were planted through what experiences? How have things evolved for you to add up to "medicine?" what have you done that has helped affirm or prepare you...? Etc)
- What is your why? Or what are your whys? They may have evolved over months or years. There are often multiple why's that coalesce.
- Your motivation has been developing over time
- Reframe the question if "why" is bogging you down: What are your motivations? What draws you to medicine? What appeals to you/what's compelling about medicine?
- You do not need to have had one catalytic experience that answers "why medicine?" Even if you do-those experiences are usually the spark that ignite the interest. Then what happened to explore, prepare...
- Whether the spark started in childhood or two years ago, how have you explored, questioned, affirmed, confirmed, prepared?

YOU ARE YOUR OWN RESEARCH PROJECT

Use Curiosity to
Reflect, Brainstorm, Recollect

DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO
GATHERING

PROMPTS, LISTS, JOURNAL,
WORD/GOOGLE DOC

MORE PHYSICAL: STICKY
NOTES; WHITEBOARDS—GET
UP, MOVE THINGS AROUND

MORE VISUAL: MAPPING;
DRAWING ETC.

PERSONAL STATEMENT

WHAT DO YOU NOTICE?

You have memories and ideas. Now what? Examine what's there:

What has mattered to you? What choices did you make? Which have influenced your interest in medicine in some way? What experiences helped you confirm your interest, helped you prepare? Are there links between things?

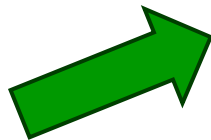
What are specific examples, moments, insights that might illustrate what you hope to convey.

Starting to Put it Together...

You will have your work and activities descriptions.

In the Personal Statement, you will choose how a handful of those experiences/insights/ etc, link together to convey how you've come to know you want to go into medicine and, are prepared to.

THINK ABOUT:



TIMELINE/CHRONOLOGY

THEMES/"Golden Threads"

EVOLUTION

Some Conventions Apply

- Intro paragraph—what's it for? Thesis/Topic statement
- Transition sentences between paragraphs
- A last paragraph that makes sense
- This is ultimately about you: not philosophizing; not argumentative(you're debating healthcare issues); not telling the readers what medicine is about but rather YOUR insights
- Don't rely on a childhood experience to explain your entire motivation: keep childhood experiences a short jumping off part of the essay. Then what?
- Don't exaggerate

MIXED MESSAGES

"It should be a story!"/"It should be anecdotal."

"Show don't tell."

"There has to be a hook"

SHOW AND TELL: EXAMPLES ARE DIFFERENT FROM ANECDOTES

Anecdote

Miss Lena walked slowly to her bed. I held her hand and told her that she was doing great. She turned to me and said “honey, can you get me a glass of water.” I tucked her in and then went to get her water and brought it to her. She drank it and then told me about her daughter Violet. We talked about Violet and her grandchildren. I sat holding her hands and we talked about some her favorite memories.

Showing and Telling

As Miss Lena got used to seeing me each day, she began to share her life stories, often as we held hands. When she spoke about her family, smiling, her pain was lighter for awhile. Since those days, with Miss Lena and other patients since, I’ve become keenly aware of how powerful it is to make a space for someone to tell their stories, and that they know someone is listening. Now, I know that listening to my patients as I treat them will be an important part of providing care that heals.

WORK & ACTIVITIES DESCRIPTIONS

Work and Activities

- You will be writing a brief description of your extracurriculars in the application.
- For EAP you will have space for up to 10 experiences to write about – you can select 3 to be “most meaningful”
- Descriptions for all activities are 700 characters (check your specific application)
- You will have an additional 1325 characters for each of the 3 most meaningful (700+1325)
- The writing in this section **is just as important** as the personal statement!

**Brainstorm a list of ALL your possible Work/Activity Experiences
(even ones you didn't think were relevant: retail? waiter? Dj?) !**

Create a word doc? Spread Sheet? You'll need to know:

Info you'll need for each activity:

- ❑ Experience Type: See next Slide. Each one gets categorized.
- ❑ Experience Name : Use the characters allotted in this space to share information to both grab attention—and, perhaps free up space in the activity description. For example, instead of just “Tutoring,” put down “Tutored General Chemistry; or instead of only “Patient Support Corps” write “Patient Support Corps: Shared Decision- Making Volunteer
- ❑ Dates: Up to 4 start and end dates; including the option for an anticipated activity (ie: if you started an activity freshman winter but didn’t return to it until soph winter—but don’t need separate dates if the “gap” was due to ordinary breaks in our calendar.)
- ❑ Total Hours (for each set of dates). Take some time. Go back through your calendar. Don’t just estimate. You’ll either over or underestimate.
- ❑ Organization Name
- ❑ Contact info
- ❑ Experience Description (700 Characters)
- ❑ Most Meaningful Experience? Yes/No (choose 3) If YES, more space will open up to allow up to +1325 more characters to expand on.

EXPERIENCE TYPES

You need to categorize each experience with one of these EXPERIENCE TYPES

- Artistic Endeavors
- Community Service/Volunteer - Medical/Clinical
- Community Service/Volunteer - Not Medical/Clinical
- Conferences Attended
- Extracurricular Activities
- Hobbies
- Honors/Awards/Recognitions
- Intercollegiate Athletics
- Leadership - Not Listed Elsewhere
- Military Service
- Other
- Paid Employment - Medical/Clinical
- Paid Employment - Not Medical/Clinical
- Physician Shadowing/Clinical Observation
- Presentations/Posters
- Publications
- Research/Lab
- Social Justice/Advocacy
- Teaching/Tutoring/Teaching Assistant

Word doc? Exel? Here's a Sample Template:

[illegible]

WRITING THE DESCRIPTIONS

How to Get Started:

- Choose and organize the experiences you want to include (recall accurate hours, gather contact info, etc.)
- Review your resume/CV and write out the most important aspects of your role
- **Reflect** on what each experience meant to you – did you keep journals? Invite memories
- Think of these as “mini-essays” - recommended to write in paragraph format (NOT like a resume)
- Students often find it helpful to start writing the work & activities before the personal statement...or alongside

What to include:

- Brief description of the activity or setting if needed
- Convey your role and primary responsibilities: How did you contribute? Any achievements you would like to highlight?
- **Reflection:** Every description should include reflection!

Can Include:

- A brief anecdote to support your reflection, not to be the focus of your writing, ex: A patient example or an obstacle you had to overcome
- A short explanation of why you chose this experience

- **IT IS POSSIBLE IN THAT AMOUNT OF CHARACTERS**

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY REFLECTION?

- What was the impact on you?
- What did you learn?
- How did you feel?
- How did you grow?
- Did you have any change in perspective?
- What did you take away from the experience?
- How was this experience significant to you?
- What skills/ competencies did you learn, strengthen, or demonstrate?

You can expand on this reflective writing more in “most meaningful” essays.

It's not just about what, it's
about the so what."

The " what" is the basic job
description, and the "so
what" is the impact you
realize through reflection.

**Where is
the "So
what"?**

MOST MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCES

You will be asked which three of your activities were/are most meaningful. For those you will have 700 characters + an additional 1325 characters

AAMC: “When writing your response, you might want to consider the ***transformative nature*** of the experience, the ***impact*** you made while engaging in the activity, and the ***personal growth*** you experienced as a result of your participation.”

Choose three experiences that were truly most meaningful to **you** not just what you think they want to see. That said, it would be usual, given the goal, if some of them relate to the goal (IE medical school/medicine)

Take this opportunity to **expand more on your reflection**. Often students will share a specific example or anecdote about a particularly meaningful experience in this section.

REMINDERS-TIPS

- **Show & Tell** – reminder, while “showing” can add a compelling factor to your writing you also need to “tell” to make the connection about why the experience was important to you– being specific and giving an example(s) in your reflections is what’s. Anecdotes are just one of the ways to do that. Anecdotes shouldn’t dominate.
- **More reflective writing than descriptive** – the most common mistake we see is students spending most of their characters describing the event and not enough time reflecting on what they learned and how they grew from this experience.
- **Focus on your growth, not theirs** – do not assume the impact you have on others, focus on what you were able to take away from the experience
- **You do not have to connect every experience to medicine** - only do this if it’s a natural connection. Avoid comparing roles to the role of physicians.

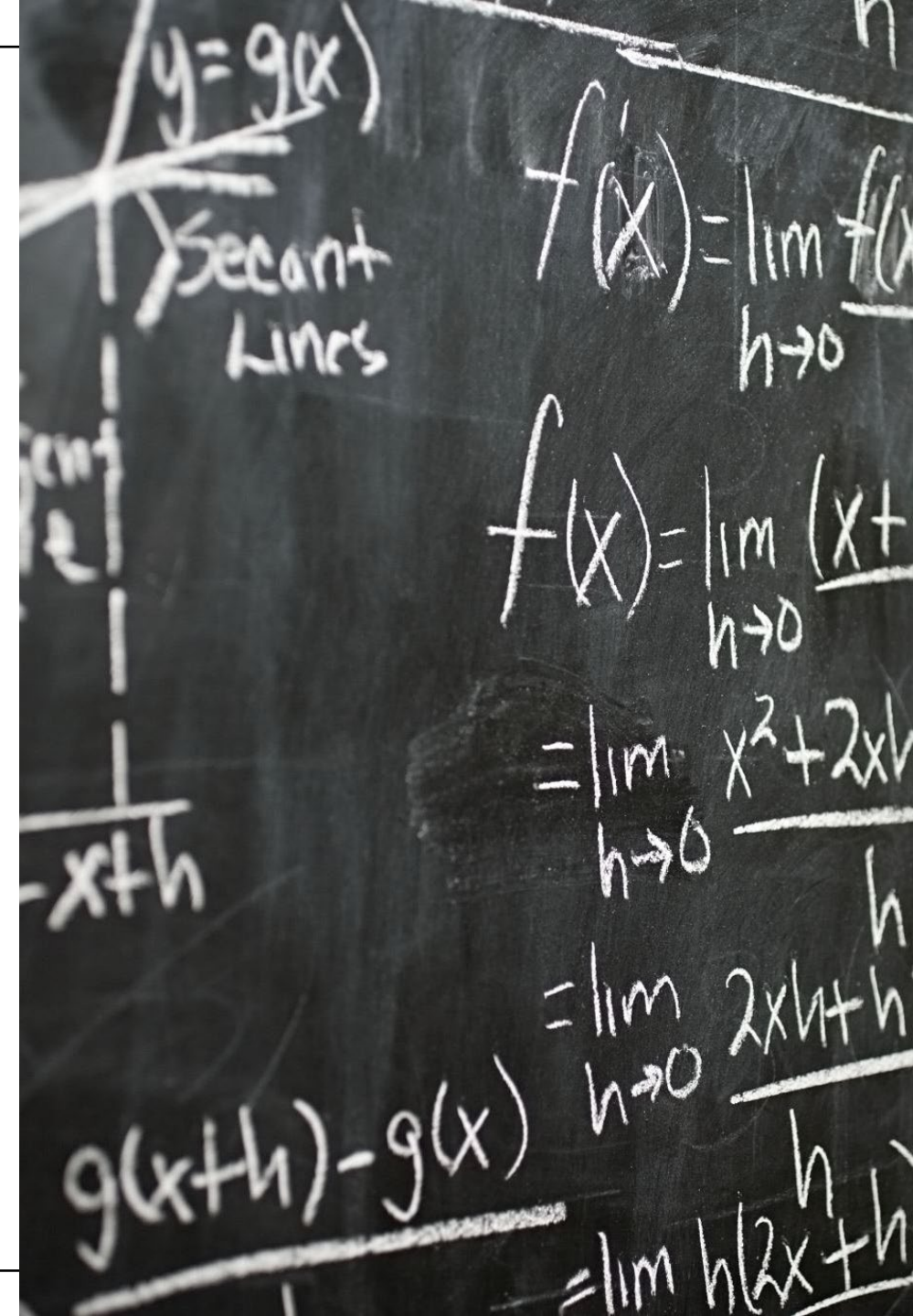
EXAMPLES

Perfectly fine activity – Research (it can be better!)

In this role, I contributed to a project investigating host-pathogen interactions in RNA viral infections. Using reverse genetics systems and high-containment (BSL-3) protocols, I assisted in generating recombinant viral constructs with targeted mutations in nonstructural proteins to delineate their roles in viral replication and immune evasion. I conducted viral titration assays (TCID₅₀ and plaque assays), quantitative RT-PCR, and flow cytometric analysis of infected primary human monocyte-derived dendritic cells to assess viral replication kinetics and innate immune responses. I also participated in optimizing CRISPR-Cas9 knockout cell lines to study host dependency factors critical for viral life cycles. My work culminated in data analysis for a manuscript submission and provided foundational experience in translational virology research aimed at informing antiviral therapeutic development.

Perfectly fine –Research

- Language use is too technical, cannot be understood by the average reader
- Is written in a language that is intended for those who are scientists
- Maybe ok for MD-PhD
- Work is descriptive but lacks passion or purpose
- No context to the writing
- Hours listed is not defined enough, helpful to have breakdown of hours



Better activity - Research

During my undergraduate studies (mostly summers) and during my gap year after graduation, I worked on a virology research project focused on understanding how respiratory viruses interact with human cells. Specifically, our team studied a virus that causes respiratory infections, aiming to find out how it enters cells and evades the immune system. I helped grow virus samples in the lab, performed experiments to track how the virus moves inside cells, and analyzed how different proteins affected infection. The goal was to find weak points in the virus's life cycle that could be targeted by new treatments. Through this project, I developed a deeper appreciation for how research connects to real-world advances in medicine, especially in infectious disease prevention and therapy. I hope to use the skill sets and knowledge gained in my research to better serve communities who are most vulnerable to respiratory viral infections.

Better Activity- Research

- Breakdown of hours is helpful
- Written in more of a 'laypersons' terminology - anyone can understand
- Gives context and purpose
- Provides insight into this project and values gained



ANOTHER GOOD EXAMPLE OF “BETTER THAN FINE”

R2R is dedicated to providing training and support to healing wounded warriors at Walter Reed by promoting rehabilitation through a progressive cycling program. As a volunteer and ride leader, my roles include leading outdoor rides, setting up trainers during winter, welcoming and encouraging new members, and providing an empathetic outlet for the veterans' unique stories and challenges. I've connected with veterans who exhibit extraordinary courage and even optimism for the future and I am repeatedly astounded by their resiliency and commitment. Each day with R2R reaffirms my desire to serve patients like these veterans, who must redefine their injury-altered future and identity. (689).

LET'S BREAK IT DOWN:

- **Do we understand what the experience is?**
 - R2R is dedicated to providing training and support to healing wounded warriors at Walter Reed by promoting rehabilitation through a progressive cycling program.
- **Do we understand what the student's role and contribution was to this experience?**
 - my roles include leading outdoor rides, setting up trainers during winter, welcoming and encouraging new members, and providing an empathetic outlet for the veterans' unique stories and challenges.
- **What did the student learn/takeaway from this experience? (Reflection)**
 - I am repeatedly astounded by their resiliency and commitment. Each day with R2R reaffirms my desire to serve patients like these veterans, who must redefine their injury-altered future and identity.

Perfectly fine activity - Sports

As a varsity soccer player at University of Grasspitch, I competed at the highest level of collegiate athletics while managing a demanding pre-medical course load — a balance very challenging to sustain. As a starting midfielder, I not only honed elite physical conditioning and strategic thinking but also developed leadership skills that distinguished me both on and off the field. My discipline and competitive drive, sharpened through years of high-pressure matches, mirror the persistence and excellence I will bring to my medical career. I consistently performed at a championship level academically and athletically, setting a standard I expect to continue in the rigors of medical training.

Perfectly fine activity - Sports

- Hour description is limited
- Comes across as being arrogant
- Subtly demeaning to others
- Doesn't come across as someone who would be a good team player or leader
- No real context to school mission



Better activity - Sports

As a member of my university's varsity soccer team, I developed perseverance, teamwork, and time management skills while balancing a rigorous academic schedule. I participated in daily practices, strength and conditioning sessions, and weekend competitions throughout the season. Although I was not a starting player for every match, I remained committed to improving both on and off the field. Supporting my teammates and learning to handle both victories and setbacks taught me resilience and humility. This experience reinforced the importance of discipline and collaboration, lessons that I look forward to carrying with me into my future medical training.

SPORTS EXAMPLE # 2:

As a competitive soccer player since youth, I eagerly joined my university's intramural soccer team, competing in the top tier. In 2015, we won the league championship with our cohesive team dynamics and strategic play, and I was honored as the top Defender. This experience was a journey in building a unit from a group of individuals. We learned to display dedication, resilience, and mutual support, on and off the pitch. We celebrated each other's successes and lifted one another up during challenges. Soccer served as my outlet for stress relief and balance. The discipline, teamwork, and time management I developed on the soccer field enabled me to remain focused and effective in my studies.

MOST MEANINGFUL: PART I

- UVA is a pre-hospital service focused on providing quality emergency care and efficient transportation services on a local and regional basis. Working full-time during my junior summer, part-time with 1-2 night shifts/week for my senior year, and volunteering as a “third- rider” with the on call medics to gain more experience, I was exposed to a wide range of emergency situations including cardiac cases, car accidents, traumatic injuries, and drug overdoses. In addition to 911 calls, I worked non-emergency transfers, transporting patients between hospitals and nursing homes, rehab facilities, and palliative care. During my tenure, I became certified in Pre-Hospital Trauma and Life Support. (698).

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ANOTHER EXAMPLE W/MOST MEANINGFUL: PART 2

Working as an EMT was a rewarding combination of exhilaration, education, and awe, with moments of heart-wrenching sadness. From high-intensity medical calls, like the 5-mile trek with firefighters up Mount Cube to help an unconscious hiker, to more emotion-driven ambulance rides, such as comforting a 20-year-old suicidal woman, I learned to think quickly under pressure and work on a diverse team to treat or stabilize patients in various emergency situations. Numerous calls to rundown areas revealed a population living in hard conditions with little support. It became clear to me how being a caring, attentive, kind EMT was sometimes just as important as being knowledgeable; many people called 911 because they were scared or lonely, or simply needed someone to listen. Conversations with transfer patients provided a unique perspective on health issues in rural New England. My medical skills were challenged through difficult emergency calls, but I equally embraced calls that allowed me to connect with patients during treatment – a little boy who had run headfirst into a metal beam told me about his friends while I iced his forehead, and a diabetic patient detailed her love of dogs to me as I monitored her blood glucose levels. My EMT work has strongly reaffirmed my desire to pursue a medical career.

(1317)

3 MORE GEISEL EAP QUESTIONS

- 1. Why Geisel?
- 2. When have you ever felt like “the other?”
- 3. Is there anything else you’d like us to know?

Also: The Impact Statement

Holistic Review.

Is there something that would help them understand some aspect of your experience: barriers, challenges you've faced.

Keep In Mind:

- Develop your own voice in the essay
- Well placed anecdote
- Examples/Specificity***
- Be honest & genuine
- Themes? “Golden Threads?”
- Good transitions between paragraphs/ cohesion
- Speak from your heart
- Effective conclusion
- Active language
- Get feedback, have readers, check all grammar and punctuation in final drafts

Avoid

- Gimmicks
- Generalities/vagueness
- Unsubstantiated statements
- Lists
- Passive structures
- Overusing words “big” words and words such as: however, thus, nevertheless
- Repeating what’s already in your experiences
- Saying what you think they want to hear
- Grammatical errors or typos
- Superficiality
- Hyperbole
- Philosophizing

Reflection

WHAT IS REFLECTIVE WRITING?



Reflective writing is

- Personal thoughts/opinions
- A way explore your learning
- Response to new information
- Opportunity to gain knowledge
- Achieve clarity and understanding



Reflective writing is not

- Instructions, or an argument
- Simple problem-solving
- A description of an event
- Judgement about right or wrong
- A research paper

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- Reflection = “serious thought or consideration.”
- *“The only way to find the answer to why medicine is through reflection. You have to understand what your goals are, and you have to reflect about how your journey is leading you there” – Dr. Ryan Gray MD.*
- Example: Non-Reflective vs. Reflective

Writing is a process and isn't always linear

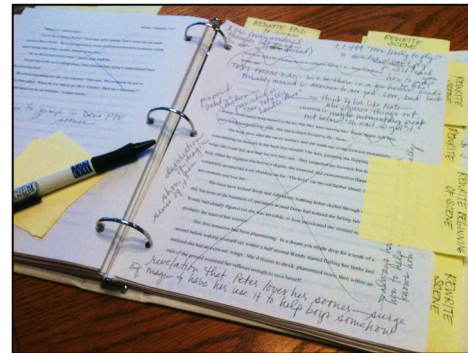
Freewrite (anytime in process)

Gather/Reflect

Pre-write

Draft

Craft



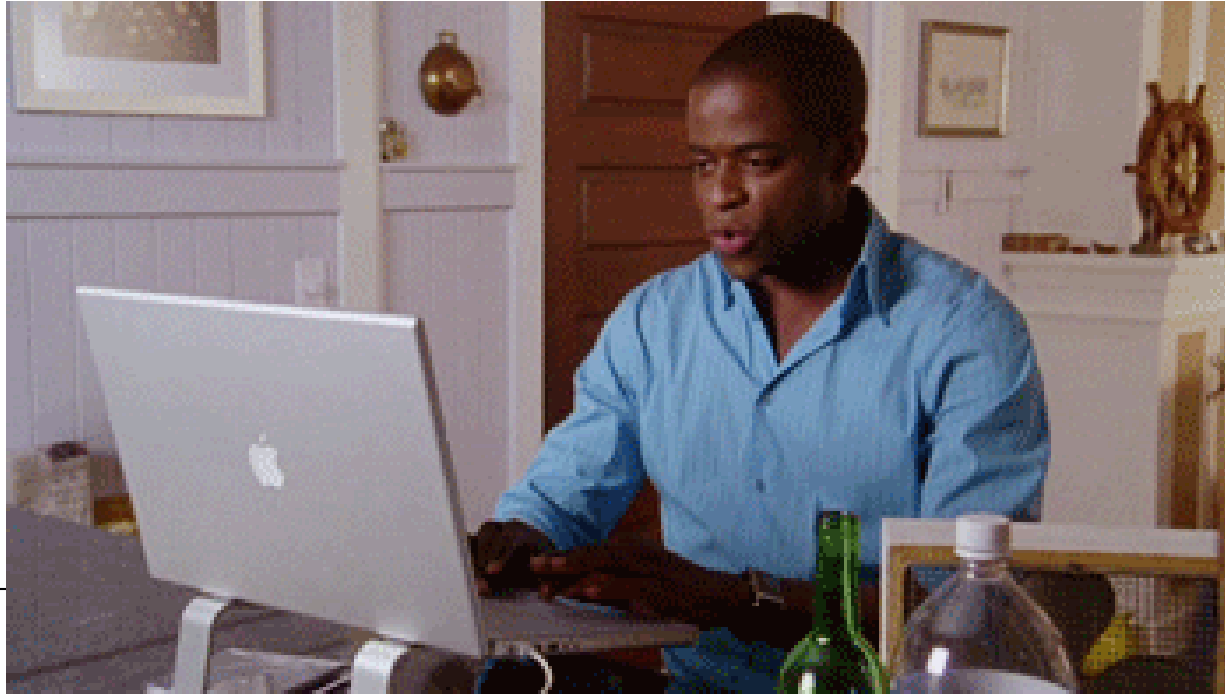
Free-write Exercise Rules

- Keep your hand moving
- Don't cross out or erase
- Don't worry about spelling, punctuation or grammar
- Lose control-no judging
- Truth



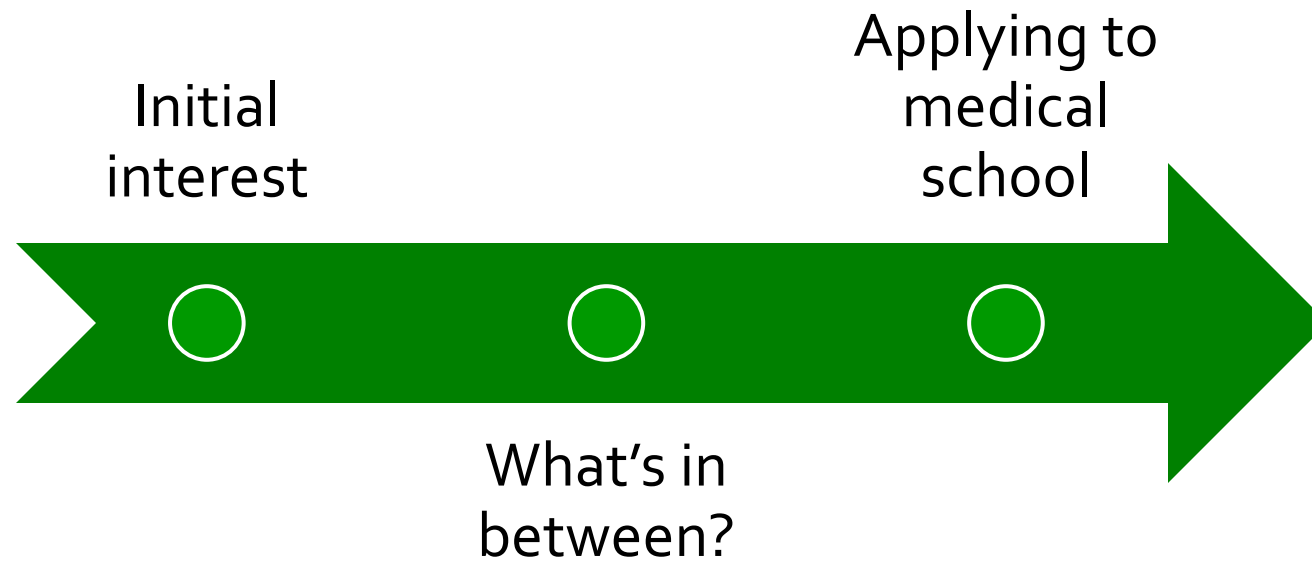
GIVE YOURSELF ENOUGH TIME

1. Meet up with the blank page and don't wait until you get "the perfect, fully formed, idea."
2. Just get started, and you will find that your ideas will emerge and develop by having given yourself the time.
3. Don't write to the character limit. Find out what you want to say. Early drafts help you clarify what you want to say.
4. Early drafts can be "bad" but important for forming your ideas and moving you forward. So therefore, they are GOOD.
5. Notice what ideas/content generate a spark of emotion
6. It's okay to look at examples, but do not cling too tightly to them. There are MANY versions of good writing. Your voice is important!

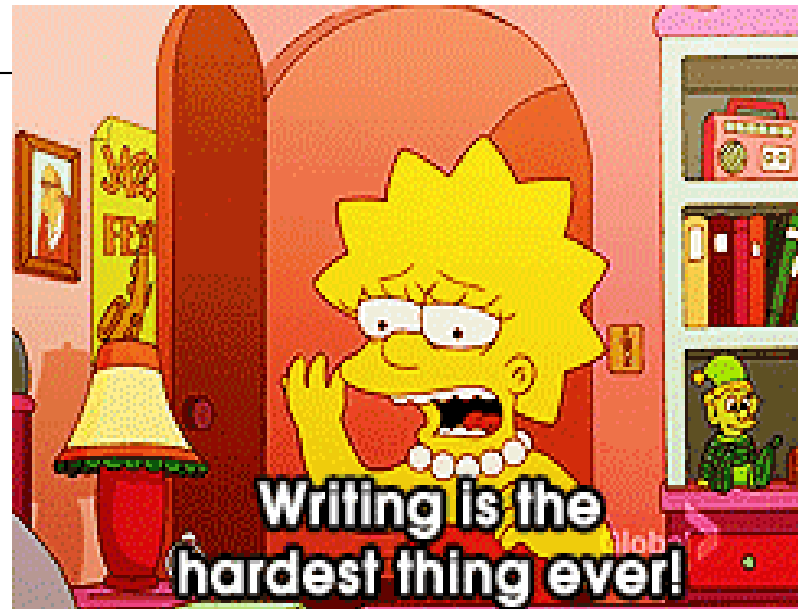


**YOU JUST HAVE TO START
SOMEWHERE**

Don't Panic: You already have ideas



YOU'LL HAVE MOMENTS LIKE THIS



**AND, YOU'LL HAVE
MOMENTS LIKE THIS**



FINAL THOUGHTS AS YOU MOVE FORWARD

Do not write to the character count. First find out what you want to say. THEN, for both experiences and your statement, we recommend cutting down to the character count at the **end**.

Remember, your experiences **are original** – no one else has your same experiences even if the activities themselves are the same. Your reflective writing is what makes these experiences unique and not cliché.

It's okay to look at examples, but do not cling too tightly to them. There are MANY versions of good writing. Your voice is important!

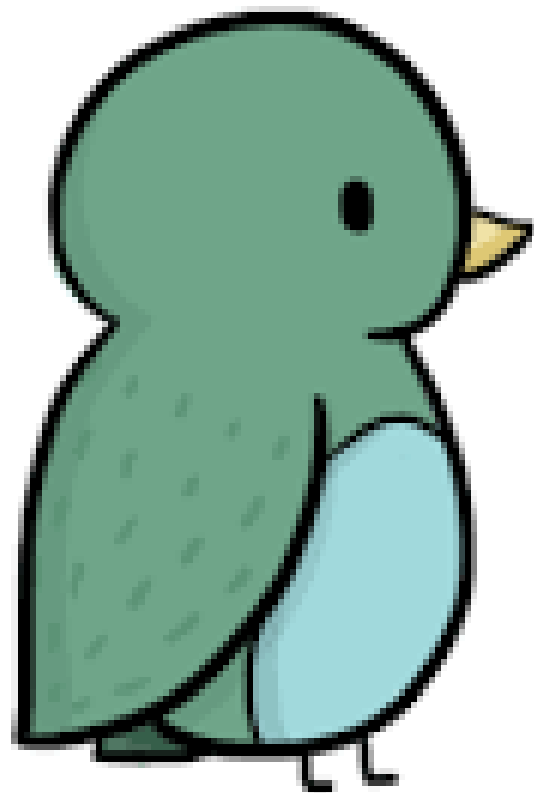
FINAL THOUGHTS AS YOU MOVE FORWARD

Ask for feedback – from people you trust. Be careful about “too many cooks in the kitchen”

- Consider asking:
- -Was anything not clear?
- -What themes are you noticing?
- -Do you understand why I want to work in medicine?
- -What do you remember about me after reading my statement?

HPP can also help provide feedback on your completed drafts!





GOOD LUCK!
YOU'VE GOT
THIS!

EMMA
ROY