Application Writing 2026-2027 Cycle

HPP Winter 2026

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The Primary Application

Writing Components

PRIMARY (aka Common App)

Work and Activities Section

Personal Statement/Essay

(+TMDSAS and VMCAS have some smaller essays)

AND, when relevant:

-Impact Statement- optional 1,325-character essay allowing applicants to provide context on significant life challenges, such as financial, family, or educational hardships.

-Institutional Action

SECONDARY APPS

Distinct to each school: ~2-8 Q's

Writing for Medical Schools (hint: focus on character counts last)

AMCAS (ALLOPATHIC)

5300 Character Personal Statement (spaces included)-Your Motivation for Medicine

15 Experiences (700-character description)

- 3 Most Meaningful (700 characters, PLUS an additional 1325 characters)

Formatting does not appear to the medical schools (bullets, indented paragraphs, bold/italic). Copy and paste as plain text.

MD/PhD (requires total hours of research experience)

- Additional MD/PhD Essay (3000 characters)
- Additional Significant Research Experience Essay (10,000 characters)

AMCAS APPLICATION GUIDE

AACOMAS (OSTEOPATHIC)

5300 Character Personal Statement (spaces included)

Unlimited experiences, 600-character description

- Don't go overboard on # of experiences!

Formatting does not appear to medical schools (bullets, indented paragraphs, bold/italic). Copy and paste as plain text.

AACOMAS APPLICATION GUIDE

https://help.liaisonedu.com/AACOMAS_Applicant_Help_Center/Filling_Out_Your_AACOMAS_Application

TEXAS TMDSAS differs from AMCAS

Experiences

- 300-characters (but also depends on the type of experience – check TMDSAS)
- Unlimited # of experiences

Essays

1. **Personal Statement: "Why Medicine": 5000 characters**
2. **Personal Characteristics Essay (Required of all applicants): 2500 characters**
   - ❑ Learning from others is enhanced in educational settings that include individuals from diverse backgrounds and experiences. Please describe your personal characteristics (background, talents, skills, etc.) or experiences that would add to the educational experience of others.
3. **Optional Essay: <u>Strongly</u> Recommend to complete: 2500 characters**
   - ❑ Briefly discuss any unique circumstances or life experiences that are relevant to your application, which have not previously been presented.

Writing for Dental/Veterinary Programs

DENTAL

4500 Character Personal Statement (spaces included)

Experiences (600 characters)

ADEA AADSAS Guide

VETERINARY: DIFFERS

Under Personal Information

- Your statement of purpose is a one-page essay (not to exceed 3,000 characters) that gives veterinary admissions committees a clear picture of who you are and, most importantly, why you want to pursue a career in veterinary medicine.
- Experiences (600 characters)

VMCAS Guide

AMCAS Work/Activities also asks:

- Experience Name
  - (use this space well to grab attention! 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
- Total Hours (for each set of dates)
- 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.

Now is the time to get Organized: What HAVE you been up to?

What experiences have you had?

What roles have you had?

What responsibilities did you take on?

Did you gain skills? Insights? Growth?

Common Questions:

- 1. Highschool experiences?
- 2. Non-Related medical experiences?
- 3. Hobbies?
- 4. What to do if you have MORE than 15 experiences?
- 5. Will AMCAS verify my hours?
- 6. Other?

Sample Template:

EXPERIENCE/ACTIVITY	CATEGORY-EXPERIENCE TYPE	START DATE	END DATE	HOURS	ORG NAME	CONTACT PERSON	CONTACT EMAIL	CONTACT PHONE	ROLES/RESPONSIBILITIES/	Impact on me, what did I learn? How did I grow? Etc.

THE PERSONAL STATEMENT/ESSAY

Your assignment: to cohesively and specifically convey your motivation and preparation for medical school and for medicine.

5300 characters
Don't write to the character count.

FIRST: Write to get to the heart of the matter

Then: "Cut" down to character count!

ESSAYS MUST BE WELL WRITTEN AND GENUINE

THE CONTENT SHOULD DEMONSTRATE AN APPLICANT'S MOTIVATION TO BECOME A DOCTOR

THEY WANT TO SEE STRONG WRITING AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS

EVIDENCE OF SKILLS/EXPERIENCES NOT FOUND ELSEWHERE IN APPLICATION CAN BE SHOWCASED

ENSURE IT IS GRAMMATICALLY CORRECT. PROOFREADING IS CRUCIAL—HAVE ANOTHER READER AT THE END TO HELP PROOFREAD.

The Personal Statement

AMCAS Other Essay Prompts:

Other Impactful Experiences:

Have you overcome challenges or obstacles in your life that you would like to describe in more detail? This could include lived experiences related to your family background, financial background, community setting, educational experiences, and/or other life circumstances.

Institutional Action:

Were you ever the recipient of any institutional action by any college or medical school for unacceptable academic performance or conduct violation, even though such action may not have interrupted your enrollment or required you to withdraw?

Approach to Application Writing

MINDSET

DON'T BE AFRAID OF "WHY MEDICINE?"

What is your why? Or what are your whys? They may have evolved over months or years.

There are often multiple why's

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, followed by steps to explore, affirm, prepare

Reframe the question if "why" is bogging you down: What are your motivations? What draws you to medicine? What appeals to you about medicine? Is it compelling-why?

Your motivation has been developing over time

What have been the seeds of your interest/passion?

Whether they've been there since childhood or two years ago, how have you explored, questioned, affirmed, confirmed, prepared?

Reflective Writing

It's not just about WHAT you did but also what your WHY.

There should be a balance between providing details of what you did or what happened with your ability to articulate what this experience/example meant to you. **Reflection is very important!**

For experiences/examples you share, consider writing:

- ❑What did you learn?
- ❑What are you taking away from this experience?
- ❑What impact has this had on you?
- ❑How has this continued to motivate/inspire you?
- ❑Why has this been meaningful to you
- ❑How did you feel about this?
- ❑How has it changed you/helped you grow?

*You must be purposeful with the details you show and be able to articulate WHY this aspiration is important to you

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.

Source: Guide to the Medical School Application Process, by Dr. Ryan Gray

ADDITIONAL TIPS

Show & Tell – "showing" can add a compelling factor to your writing but you also need to make the connection about why the experience was important to you– be explicit and specific in your reflections.

- *Don't get too caught up in anecdotes, specific examples can go a long way, are sometimes even better!

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 – *d*o 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.

Writing is a process

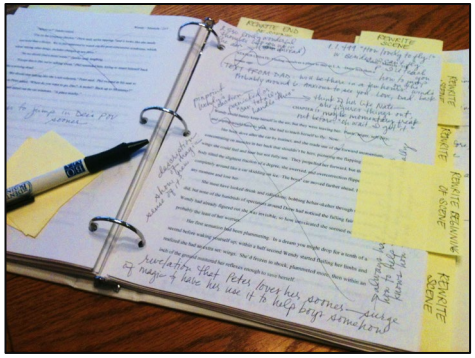
Freewrite (anytime in process)

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

Gather/Reflect

- Self-assessment gives you understanding of your own personal growth, life experiences, accomplishments and skills
- Recall events/things/people/courses/experiences that influenced you
- Contemplate and clarify your motivations, choices and clearly identify your own goals
- What has inspired you? Moved you? Shifted your perception? Challenged you?
- What has your journey been-when have you grown-what aspects do you want to focus on?

Pre-Write

Brainstorm and journal

Flesh out some critical reflective pieces

After free writing, do some MINOR editing of these stories and pieces

This could be an outline as well

Major themes or aspects of your application you want to stand out?

Draft

Bring your ideas together

Is there a pattern? Are they pointing to your why?

What seem to be the most significant pieces?

Transitions between sentences

"Thesis Statement"

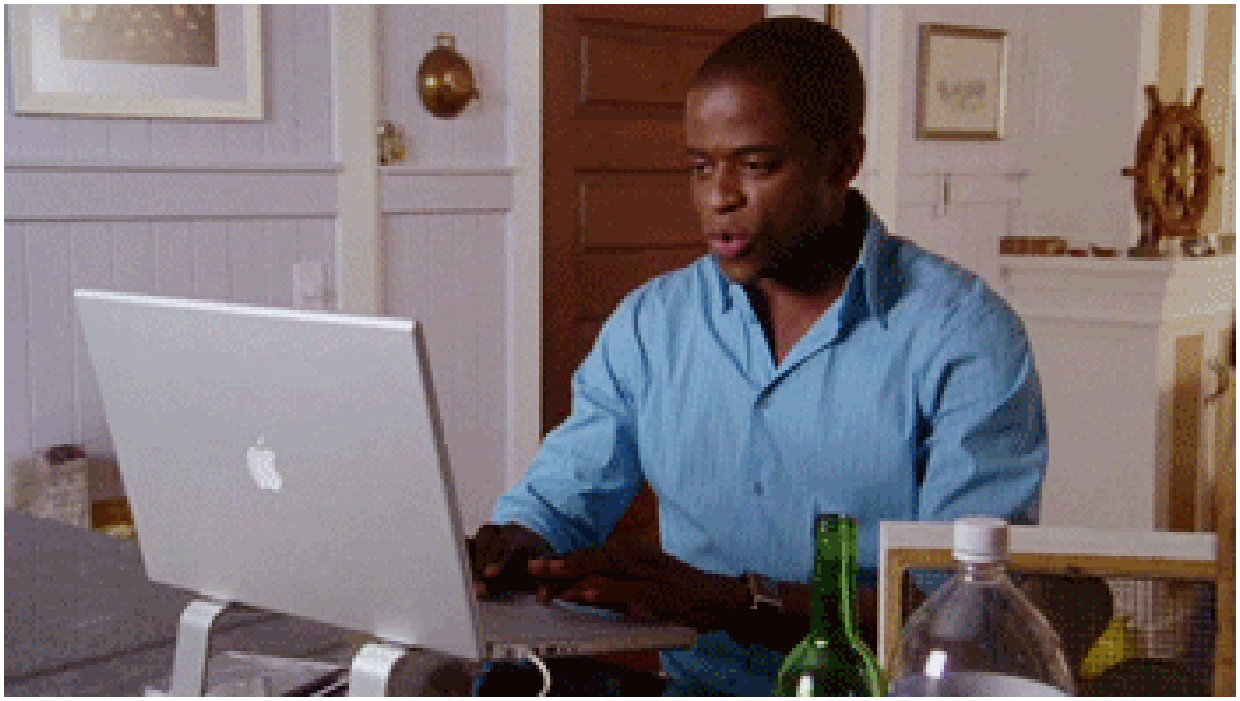
Basic Essay Components – Intro, body paragraphs, conclusion

Don't be afraid to discard a piece of writing! Even if you love the story, if it's not a major component of the "why" question, you might be able to use it down the road on secondaries.

Craft

You have a full draft. You've chosen what you want to say.

Now it's time to refine and craft the writing itself.



You just have to start somewhere

Work & Activities Descriptions

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…

What to include:

- Brief description of the activity or setting if needed
- Describe your role: What were your 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

AMCAS Work/Activities

DROP DOWN: 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

MOST MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCES

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**.

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.

LET'S LOOK AT EXAMPLE

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 - Research

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 ($TCID_{50}$ 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.

Source: NEAAHP

Why is this not an example of a great example?

- 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

Source: NEAAHP

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.

Source: NEAAHP

Why is this better?

Written in more of a ‘laypersons’ terminology - anyone can understand
Gives context and purpose
Provides insight into this project and values gained

Source: NEAAHP

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)

ANOTHER EXAMPLE W/MOST MEANINGFUL: PART 1

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).

Getting to 700 characters

What's the essence of your experience?

Can you be specific?

Can you convey what your role, responsibility, insights, contributions and/or growth may have been?

Be open to writing many more characters to get to 700

Cut after!

FINAL THOUGHTS AS YOU MOVE FORWARD

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!

That said, we have provided a document with work/activities examples for you to preview.

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!

After the Primary

SECONDARY APPs

- One Primary, many secondaries. Each has 2-8 prompts.
- THEY TAKE TIME. You can find prompts online and start writing while your primary is getting verified. PLAN to work on secondaries, especially in June, July, and early August.
- Complete in a timely fashion: myth and truth re: timing
- Treat them with the same respect/quality as the primary. Med schools tell us they MATTER.
- FYI: Applications are COMPLETE and ready to be reviewed when schools have MCAT /DAT/GRE score; SJT Score, Verified primary application; Composite Letter package; and Secondary application

***Wait until AFTER your primary App to work on Secondaries!

Secondary Applications

Common themes:

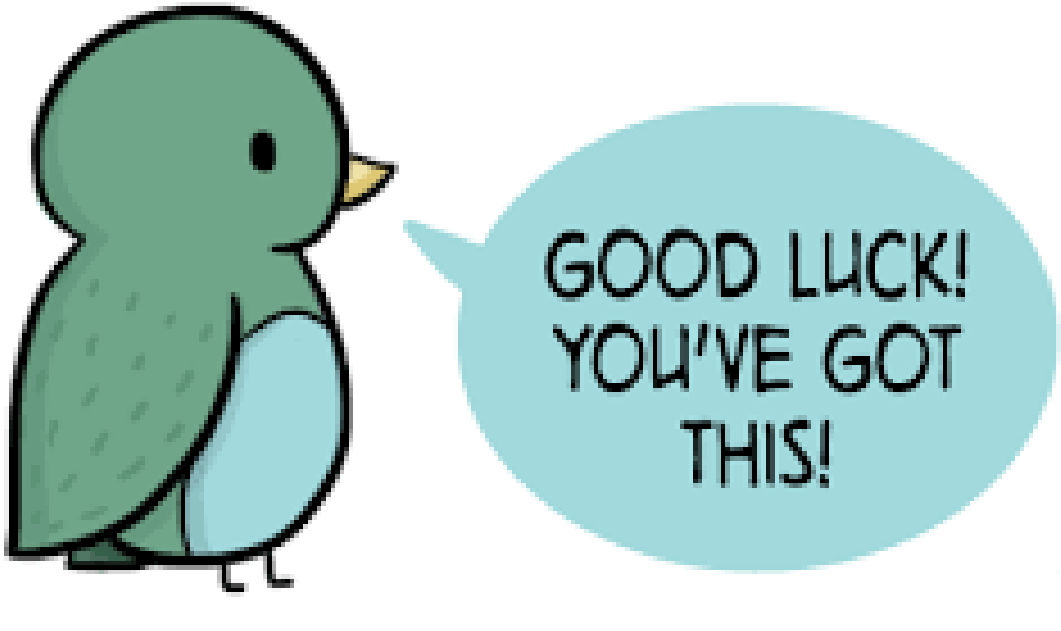
- Diversity/cultural competency
- Why [insert school]
- Plans for gap year
- Resiliency
- Goals/specialty interest
- How you navigated a (challenge, a conflict, a change…)
- Experience of Collaboration – your role
- Accomplishments/points of pride/elaboration of meaningful experience
- Deeper dive into altruism, scholarly interest, teamwork, and healthcare exposure
- Is there anything else you'd like us to know

All secondary questions in a current cycle get posted on SDN—still, double check on actual

Other Writing to Expect…

*Thank you letters post interview

*Update letters/letters of interest to most schools (if they accept them)

*Letter of intent – one school only.

Join us for our personal statement workshop in the spring!