



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA HEALTH SCIENCES

**Diversity & Inclusion**

# Personal Statements & the Application Process

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Please register: <http://tinyurl.com/ODI-app>



## **Roadmap:**

- Review strategies for developing a winning personal statement
- Analyze and critique sample personal statements
- Outline one's own personal statement
- Explore the application process

# Personal Statement

I am striving to become a well-regarded Chartered Occupational Practitioner and I believe that studying at City University on the MSc in Occupational Psychology is critical to achieving that goal. I will set out below why I have the right motivation, knowledge and skill-set to make the most of this opportunity and how my previous experience and details are outlined in my CV).

# What is the personal statement?

A written description of one's achievements, interests, etc., included as part of an application for a job or to an educational program.

Source: Oxford Dictionary, 2017.



# Types of Personal Statements

## **The general, comprehensive personal statement**

- Allows maximum freedom
- Often prepared for medical or law school application forms
- Don't be tempted to use the same statement for all applications

## **Response to very specific questions**

- Often business and graduate school applications
  - Statement should respond specifically to the question asked
  - Some business school applications favor multiple essays, typically asking for responses to three or more questions.

# Anatomy of a personal statement

Introduction

Motivation

Evidence

Engagement  
and intellectual  
curiosity

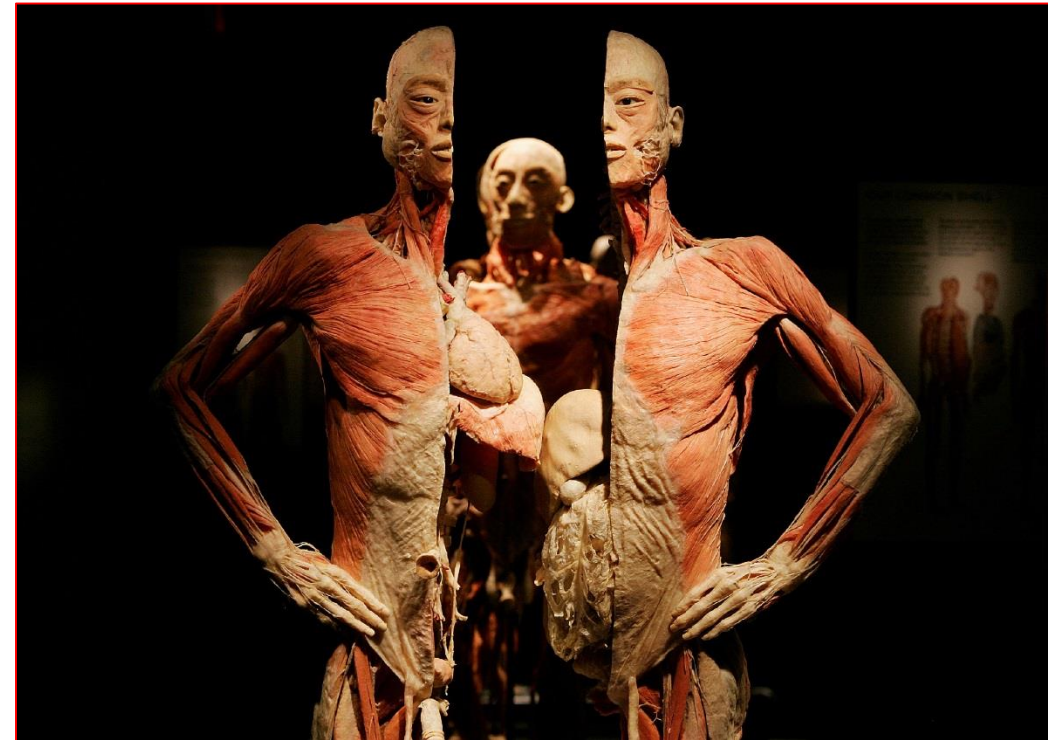
Analytical  
skills

Work with  
others

Well  
informed  
about  
realities of  
health care

Empathy

Capacity for  
sustained and  
intense work



# General Tips

- Answer the questions that are asked.
- Tell a story – think in terms of demonstrating through concrete experience. You will make yourself memorable with a statement that is fresh, lively and different.
- Be specific – don't say you would make an excellent doctor unless you back it up with specific reasons. Your desire to become a nurse, doctor, pharmacist, public health official should be logical – the result of specific experience that is described in your statement.
- Find an angle – a hook that connects your story to the reader.
- Concentrate on the opening paragraph – it is the most important; grabs the readers attention or loses it. It is the framework for the rest of the statement.



# General Tips (Continued)

- Tell what you know – the middle section might detail your interest, knowledge of and experience in a particular field.
- Don't include some subjects (for example, religion or politics). Also references to experiences or accomplishments in high school or earlier.
- Do some research! Why is this school different and why are you applying to it? Consider culture and/or geographic change for you.
- Write well and correctly. Be meticulous. Type and proofread your essay very carefully. Express self clearly and concisely. Adhere to the stated word limits.
- Avoid clichés – if you say you are good at science and want to help others that is not exactly an original thought.



# Get Your Juices Flowing: Write!



Write about:

- Leadership
- Future
- Community

# Introduction: All About the Hook

## Do

- Be ENGAGING!
  - Pull your reader in right away.
  - Make them want to read more.
- Think about the *theme* of your essay.

## Do Not

- Sounds like a robot
- List
- Ramble



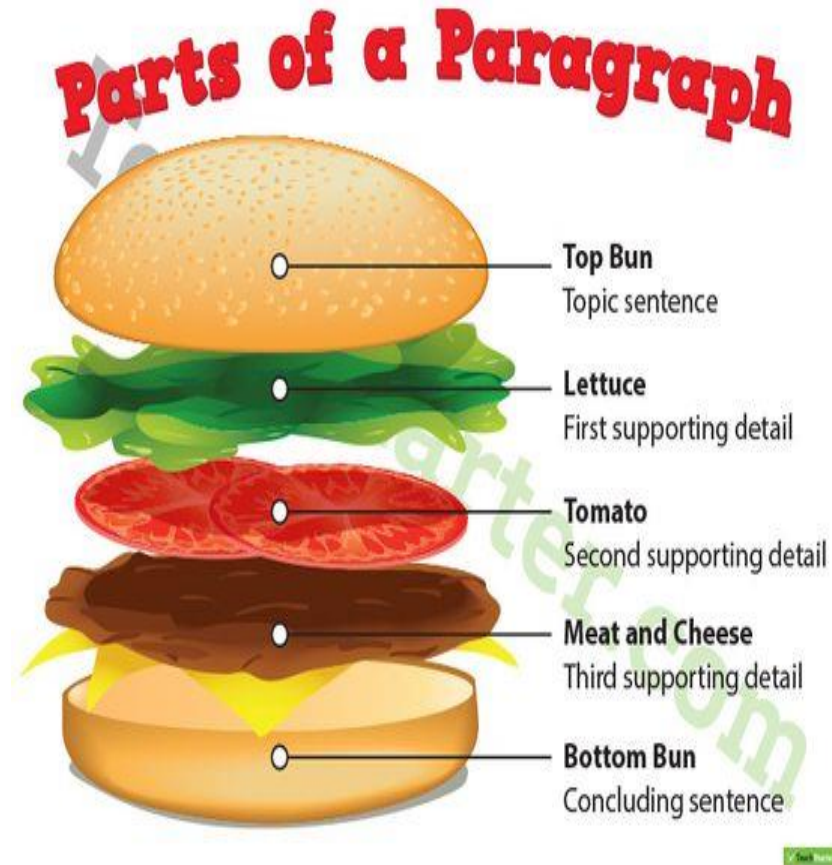
# Back to the Basics: Body- Elaborate & Inform

Do

- Begin with a topic sentence
  - What is your point, what examples support your point, why is this significant “so what?”
- Highlight a quality and tell a story about it

Do Not

- List
  - You do not want to regurgitate what is on your resume.
  - List your experiences and not engage your reader



# Back to the Basics: Conclusion

## Do

- Reiterate your theme
- Highlight your previous points
- Emphasize your strengths and goals

## Do Not

- Avoid clichés and over generalizations
- Listing
- Cutting it short

Specific



General

Restatement of the main premise

Summary of key points in essay

Broad statement (evaluate, forecast future,  
make recommendations)

Figure 1: A pattern for conclusion paragraphs

# What to Include



# What Should a Personal Statement Include?

## 2017 AMCAS Application Manual:

**“Some questions you may want to consider while writing this essay are:**

- Why have you selected the field of medicine?
- What motivates you to learn more about medicine?
- What do you want medical schools to know about you that hasn't been disclosed in other sections of the application?

**Motivation and  
Career Goals**

**Qualifications**

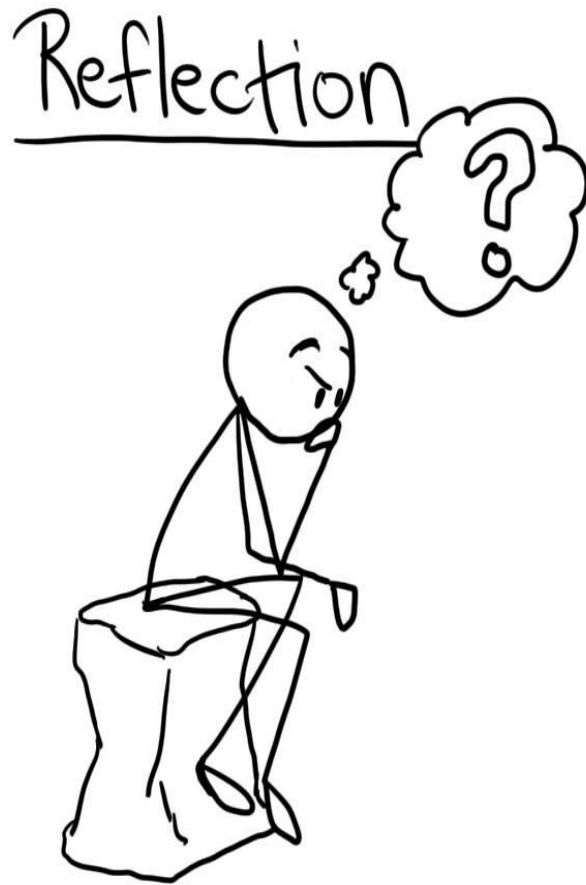
**Details or  
Experiences  
Beyond Listed  
Work and  
Activities**

**In addition, you may wish to include information such as:**

- Unique hardships, challenges, or obstacles that may have influenced your educational pursuits.
- Commentary on significant fluctuations in your academic record that are not explained elsewhere in your application.”

**Circumstances  
that should give  
you special  
consideration or  
explain anything  
unexpected in  
your application**

# Personal Statement: Reflection & Storytelling



What's your story?



**Typical Length:** 1 – 3 pages

**AMCAS Personal Comments Essay:** 5300 characters (~1.5 single spaced page)

## **Introduction**

- One to two paragraphs
- A **unique** personal anecdote that typically explains why you became interested in your career goal in medicine
- Vital for showcasing your personality and values

**Practice!**

## **Qualifications**

- The bulk of the personal statement – two to four paragraphs
- Medical and non-medical experiences and skills
- **Narrative** format detailing what you learned or gained
- Explain any extenuating circumstances

**Practice!**

## **Career Goals and Conclusion**

- Any specialized interests in practice (medical subfield, underserved population)
- Interests in research / community involvement, if applicable
- Link back to your introduction

**Practice!**



# Introducing You...Specifically!

**Everyone (hopefully!) who wants to be a doctor...**

- Wants to help people
- Wants to make the world a better and healthier place
- Is hardworking and driven
- Is interested in medicine/science
- Has been interested in being a doctor for a period of time (often since youth or at least early in college)

Use your personal experiences to **show (not tell!)** the admissions committee your values, personality traits, and goals.



# Anatomy of a Compelling Introduction

- 1) Describe a specific experience or set of experiences that **fit one of the following:**
  - a) Shaped your medical interests/goals
  - b) Developed more general character traits or skills that will be useful in medicine
  - c) Demonstrate your capacity to overcome hardship or challenges
- 2) Outline the **lessons and/or skills learned** from this experience, such as:
  - a) Motivation to pursue medicine (preferably emotional/philosophical/charitable)
  - b) Development of specific interests (medical subfield, research, etc.)
  - c) Capacity to meet the challenges of medical education and practice (hard work, etc.)
- 3) Link these lessons / skills to your **specific medical or career goals**

**Use your creative writing skills – a compelling narrative is key!**




# Example #1: The Personal Impact of Medicine

From Carnegie Mellon University: <http://www.cmu.edu/hpp/apply-to-schools/personal-statements/samples.html>

"My home has been a place of healing for many broken hearts, both literally and figuratively. My younger sister had two open heart operations before the age of two. I was three years old, and I tried to be the best big sister in the world. I thought that if I loved her enough, her heart would heal itself. My brother was three and thirteen when he had his heart surgeries. This time, I was older and much more fearful, but my brother is the proud new owner of Vinny the Pulmonary Valve. Thus, two hearts have healed quite literally in my home. ← **Narrative of experience**

The figurative healing in my home sets it apart from many others. I have learned the importance of love and support in the face of trouble by watching my mother, the backbone of a local parent support group. Families need to know they are not alone, that I, too, was scared to see my brother gasp for breath after running up a flight of stairs. ← **Lessons learned (emotional importance)**

I have seen more aspects of the personal side of medicine than many people my age. I understand first hand the comforting effect a friendly smile and reassuring confidence from a doctor has on both patients and families. My family history is what sparked my interest in medicine, but my own experience has held my attention in recent years." ← **Link to medicine and career goals**



# Example #2: An Intellectual Medical Experience

From Vanderbilt University: <https://medschool.vanderbilt.edu/cim/personal-statement>

"We sat in pained silence, together in the ICU conference room with the patient's family. Our team had finished answering all their questions, from the trivial to the life and death decisions at hand. Our attending was visibly crying, and I was struggling as well. The patient's children looked stunned, still unable to believe what we had been telling them for weeks. We still had no idea what was killing their mother, causing lesions in her brainstem to rapidly expand despite our best efforts. ← **Narrative of experience**

I had never met this woman before her precipitous decline, and thus I could not possibly feel the same pain as her family. Yet I found myself increasingly upset, and simultaneously fascinated. How is it that we could not even put a name to her disease, let alone treat it effectively? Was it a cancer? An autoimmune process? Some yet undiscovered infection? At a basic scientific level, we were missing a fundamental understanding of her disease. This is what pulls me towards pathology. ← **Lessons learned (development of specific interests)**

This specialty demands an expertise in basic science, for the compassionate purpose of diagnosing disease and improving health. I was driven to medical school by a desire to understand basic science, and it is exactly this understanding that will refine our treatments and may ultimately help patients such as this one. I therefore feel a strong responsibility to participate in bench research for this purpose. I am also excited by the high stakes nature of diagnostic medicine. Our successes and failures lead to spectacular victories and unthinkable losses of life. The involvement of human life and suffering makes this field about more than scientific curiosity for me. In addition to a thrilling expertise in basic science, I have found that pathology training will demand pain-staking accuracy and confidence. I know I will relish this responsibility." ← **Link to medicine and career goals**

# Qualifications: Specific and Meaningful

This is **not** just a restatement of the work and experiences listed on your AMCAS application or resume/CV

- Focus on your **most important** experiences (in terms of skill development, time investment, relevance to your career goals)
- Provide a narrative of **what you learned** to show **why this experience makes you a better applicant**
- **Provide details that highlight why the experience was important, such as:**
  - Extensive time investment (weekly shadowing, regular labwork)
  - High level of independence (research, leadership roles)
  - Important medical and non-medical skills developed
- For **non-medical** experiences, be sure to relate the skills or lessons learned to your career goals



# What Counts as a Qualification?

## **Research Experiences**

- Internships
- Lab work/volunteering
- Publications/presentations
- Attendance at professional conferences

## **Educational Experiences**

- Special coursework beyond usual pre-med requirements
- Extensive class projects
- Non-medical majors/minors with relevance to medical skills or practice

## **Medical Work Experiences**

- Shadowing medical professionals
- Health-related jobs
- Volunteering in health-related settings

## **Non-Medical Experiences**

- Leadership and involvement in student or community organizations
- Non-medical work experiences
- Volunteering and charity work

**Dedicate more space and development to the most relevant experiences!**



# Career Goals and Conclusion

Personal statements for **graduate school** often contain conclusions that comment on the school's specific program (advisors, professional organizations, research)

- **Important:** Do **not** do this for a personal statement you are sending through a common application

## Your conclusion should:

- State your career goals in general terms
- Reiterate the themes of your previously expressed interests, such as:
  - Interest in a medical subfield
  - Research and clinical trials
  - Service for diverse or underserved populations
- Link back to your introductory narrative



# MD Timeline

## Following Graduation

- **Freshmen/Sophomore Year**
  - Pre-Health course requirements
  - Working on MD personal statement drafts
  - Building shadowing and clinical hours
- **Summer before Junior Year**
  - Creating MCAT Prep plan
  - Investing in the MSAR
- **Junior Year**
  - Completing Pre-Health course requirements
  - Working on MD application
  - MCAT Studying
  - Spring/Early Summer MCAT Exam
- **Summer before Senior Year**
  - June: Submit MD application

## Gap Year

- **Junior Year**
  - Pre-Health course requirements
  - Building shadowing and clinical hours
  - Saving for MCAT prep materials
- **Senior Year**
  - Completing Pre-Health Course requirements
  - Investing in the MSAR
  - Working on MD personal statement
- **Gap Year**
  - Working on MD application
  - MCAT Prep/Studying
  - Spring/Early Summer MCAT Exam
  - June: Submit MD application

# MD Application: Expenses

- [MSAR](#) (Medical School Admission Requirements) \$35
- [MCAT](#):
  - \$310
  - Register at least 4 months in advance (Gold Zone)
- [AMCAS](#) (American Medical College Application Service)  
Primary application fee:
  - \$160 for application and one school--\$38 for each additional school
- Secondary Application fee:
  - \$0-150 (Depends on school)
- Plan ahead for travel expenses as well

# Fee Assistance Program - Benefits

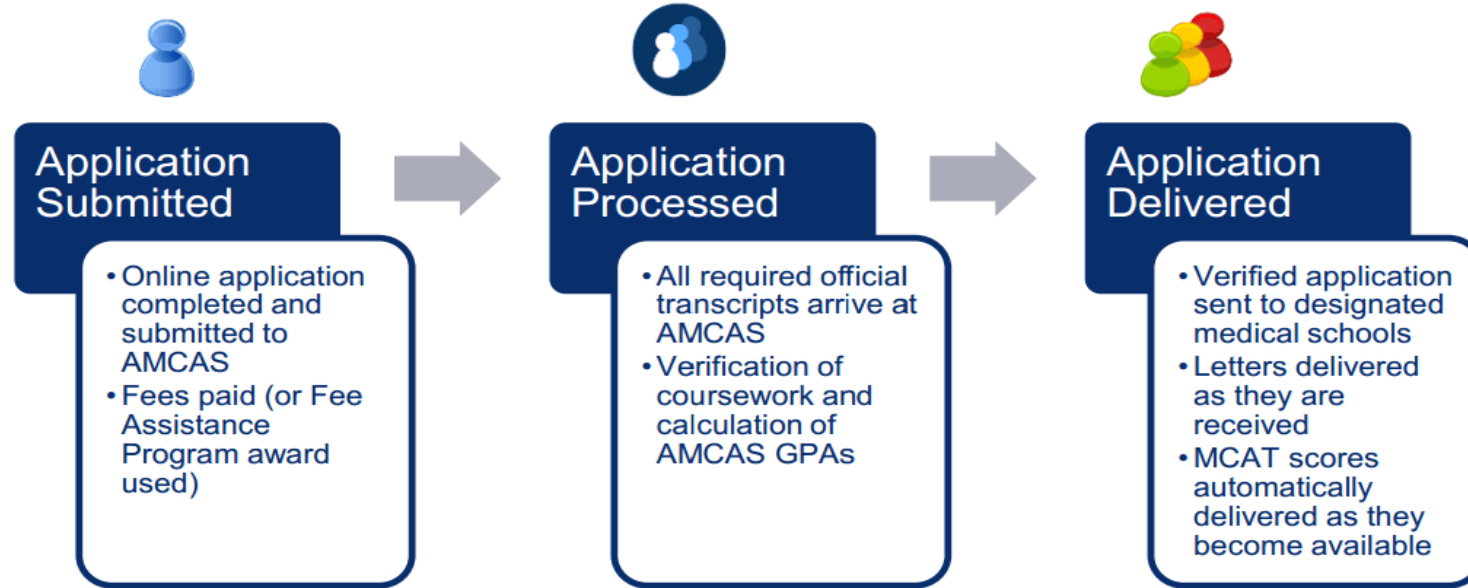
- Reduced MCAT registration fees
- MCAT prep materials
- Medical School Admissions Requirements website access
- AMCAS fee waiver
- Discounted access to Pivio®

Fee Assistance Link:

<https://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/applying-medical-school-process/fee-assistance-program/>



# The AMCAS Application



- Identifying Information
- Schools Attended
- Biographic Information
- Course Work
- Work/Activities
- Letters of Evaluation
- Medical Schools
- Essay(s)
- Standardized Tests

# Work/Activities

**WORK/ ACTIVITIES**

Experience Type: \* Research/Lab

Experience Name: \* Lab Rat

Start Date: \* March 2006

End Date: \* Select One Select One

Average Hours/Week: 10

Organization Name: My School

Country: ☒ United States ☐ Canada ☐ Other... ☐ Decline to Answer

State: Alabama

City: Bama

Contact's First Name: \* Professor

Contact's Last Name: \* Smarty

Contact's Title: Principal  
(ex. Project Director) \*

- Maximum of 15 entries  
Applicants can enter 3 additional date ranges for repeated activities
- Maximum of 3 "Most Meaningful"

☒ This is one of my most meaningful experiences. ?

This is your opportunity to summarize why you have selected this experience as one of your most meaningful. In your remarks, you might consider the transformative nature of the experience: the impact you made while engaging in the experience and the personal growth you experienced as a result of your participation.

Experience Summary:

Character Count: 0 (maximum 1325 characters)

[Back](#) [Add Another Work Activity](#) [Continue](#)

# Letters of Evaluation

## ADD A LETTER OF EVALUATION

Many medical schools determine whether or not an applicant has met their letter of evaluation/recommendation requirements by the type of letters they receive in support of an application. For example, a medical school may require a committee letter OR three individual letters in support of your application.

For medical schools' requirements regarding letters of evaluation/recommendation, click Help.

Please identify the type of letter you wish to enter. If you are uncertain as to the type of letters provided by your school/institution, please ask your pre-health advisor or career center prior to answering this question.

- ☐ Committee Letter: A committee is a letter authored by a pre-health committee or pre-health advisor and intended to represent your institution's evaluation of you. A committee letter may or may not include additional letters written in support of your application. A Committee Letter is sometimes called a composite letter.
- ☐ Letter Packet: A packet or set of letters assembled and distributed by your institution, often by the institution's career center.
- ☐ Individual Letter: An individual letter refers only to a letter authored by, and representing, a single letter writer. **If you have already included an individual letter within either a committee letter or letter packet, you do not need to add a separate entry for the individual letter.**

Back

Continue

You can submit your application before your letters are received by AMCAS.



Association of  
American Medical Colleges  
2450 N Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037-1127  
T 202 828 0400 F 202 828 1125  
www.aamc.org

March 24, 2010

AMCAS, attn: AMCAS Letters  
AAMC Medical School Application Services  
P.O. Box 18958  
Washington, DC 20036

To Whom It May Concern:

Alex was a fantastic student and will make a great doctor. Alex was a fantastic student and will make a great doctor. Alex was a fantastic student and will make a great doctor. Alex was a fantastic student and will make a great doctor.

Alex was a fantastic student and will make a great doctor. Alex was a fantastic student and will make a great doctor. Alex was a fantastic student and will make a great doctor. Alex was a fantastic student and will make a great doctor. Alex was a fantastic student and will make a great doctor. Alex was a fantastic student and will make a great doctor. Alex was a fantastic student and will make a great doctor. Alex was a fantastic student and will make a great doctor.

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Alex was a fantastic student and will make a great doctor. Alex was a fantastic student and will make a great doctor. Alex was a fantastic student and will make a great doctor. Alex was a fantastic student and will make a great doctor. Alex was a fantastic student and will make a great doctor.

Sincerely,

Dr. Amy Smith  
Association of American Medical Colleges

Many medical schools require that letters of evaluation are on official letterhead and bear the signature of the author

# Post-Submission Changes

- Only these items can be updated or changed in your application after it has been submitted:
  - ID Numbers
  - Name
  - Contact Information
  - Date of birth, birth address, and sex
  - Letters of Evaluation
    - Notification that a letter will no longer be sent
  - Next MCAT testing date
  - Addition of Medical Schools or changes to existing program types
    - Deadlines, fees, and restrictions apply
  - Release application information to school-designated pre-health advisor



# Fee Assistance Program - Eligibility

- You are eligible if you are a
  - U.S. citizen or U.S. national
  - Lawful permanent resident of the U.S.
  - Refugee/asylum or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status
- Award approval is tied directly to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' poverty level guidelines.
  - 300% or less than the national poverty level for each family size



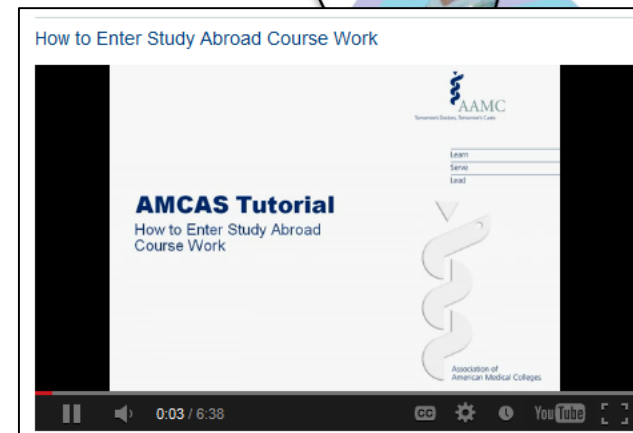
# AMCAS Tools

- Instruction Manual and Guides
- Application and Acceptance Protocols

<https://www.aamc.org/amcas>

## Video Tutorials

<https://www.youtube.com/AMCASinfo>



MPH Application



FIND A SOPHAS PROGRAM

MY SOPHAS

EVENTS

FAQS

APPLY

Apply to schools and  
programs of public  
health using the  
centralized application

*SOPHAS allows students to apply to multiple  
institutions using one application.*

APPLY

SOPHAS Application filing OR an individual school application.

- <https://sophas.org>
  - Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH) Accreditation
    - Multiple benefits including eligibility to be certified (CPH) at the end of program

# General Tips

## Common Requirements for the MPH/MS

- Official Transcripts showing completion (or near completion) of a Bachelor's Degree and GPA of 3.0 or greater
- 2-3 Letters of Recommendation\*
- Curriculum Vitae or Resume
- Personal Statement or Letter of Interest
- Graduate Record Examination (GRE)\*
- Work experience in Public Health

## SOPHAS FAQs

- Cost:
  - Application: \$135 (for the 1<sup>st</sup> school)
  - \$50 for additional schools
- Prep:
  - In advance (at least 6 months prior to applying) research schools and admissions requirements
  - Begin SOPHAS application at least 3 months in advance (inform your recommenders at the time as well)
- Post:
  - Monitor your application status to ensure all required documents have been received and your application is being processed

\*Some are electronically submitted by recommender; others can be hardcopies

\*Not required by all schools and different schools have different minimum GRE scores

For more information check out: <https://sophas.org/faqs/>

# SOPHAS Tools

## How to Apply Through SOPHAS



# Remember:



- Hook your reader, highlight your strengths and find your theme
- Be true to who you are
- Dig deeper into why you are wanting to pursue medicine
- Have multiple people review your personal statement
- Plan ahead when preparing for your graduate applications, organization is key!



Thank you for attending!  
Please take the workshop survey:

<http://tinyurl.com/PS-AppPrepFA17>

# Questions?

**For additional resources and learning support services see:**

<http://diversity.uahs.arizona.edu/student-learning-services>

**Location: College of Medicine Room 1119B**



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