



## The Five-Minute Mentor: What Shall I Put in a Personal Statement?

**I** am a junior faculty member who will soon be eligible for promotion and tenure. I need to include a personal statement in my portfolio, but am at a loss as to what to include in it. I would appreciate any advice—for this purpose and for others, such as grant or program applications.

Often in our careers, we are asked to write personal statements either for awards, grant applications, or promotion/tenure. These personal statements can be the key to whether or not we get accepted into a program, obtain an award, receive a grant, or get promoted/tenured. The purpose across these situations is to supply the reviewer with a sense of you in a more individualized and personalized fashion.

The first step is to ensure that you are a good applicant for a particular grant or are ready for promotion. Thinking about writing the personal statement, as well as talking to others, can help you answer that question. If you cannot imagine even writing an outline, perhaps it is because you are not appropriate for the program or grant. As part of this process, you should also talk to people who have been successful in your area of interest and find out their perceptions of what would make a good match. Ask them if they will share their application and/or if they will read the draft of your personal statement. As you prepare your outline, think about what is most important to convey about yourself for this particular situation, and in doing so, think broadly. Consider how this application fits with your professional development and with the needs of the department and institution.

### Telling the 'Story'

Once you are confident that you are a good fit, and have developed an outline of the content that you are eager to convey, you need to think about how to organize the "story." Sometimes the story is better told chronologically, but for other people or situ-

ations, a thematic organization is better. On occasion, it is helpful to try writing it both ways to see which one makes more sense. Remember, the point is to tell a story; thus, it is appropriate to make it sound more coherent than it felt at the time. Focus on your uniqueness and your contribution to the work or project. For example, many faculty teach medical students; what do you

of the impact of a publication, such as the fact that it has been cited more than 100 times in other articles. Gaps in productivity could be explained in a personal statement as well, such as a period of time during which you were caring for an elderly parent. But in the event of issues that might be problematic, you need to stick to the facts and not sound defensive.

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bring to teaching that is unique? Focus on this aspect—for example, perhaps it is the ability to relate the basic science to its clinical applications.

Do not make your personal statement redundant with your CV. This is your opportunity to pull the information together into a theme, to provide information that does not easily fit into a CV, or to explain things that you think might be worrisome to a reviewer. For example, you might have studied how social support influences coping with chronic illnesses, but a reviewer might look at the CV and see only that you have publications on many different chronic diseases and wonder if you have a programmatic line of research. You might include in a personal statement more detail

### Additional Tips

Other specific writing tips include:

- ❖ Be concise. If you are long-winded, reviewers may miss key points you are trying to emphasize.
- ❖ Go back and see if you can summarize the point of each paragraph. If you can not describe the point, the paragraph probably needs revision.
- ❖ Do not include a process that is self-evident. For example, avoid sentences such as "I applied and I was accepted" or "I was asked to serve on this committee."
- ❖ Do not include events that were planned but did not happen. An example would be "The chair planned for me to take over the residency program, but instead

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### ATTENTION DEANS, DEPARTMENT CHAIRS, AND DIVISION CHIEFS!

We want to hear about your own innovative residency programs, faculty development initiatives, cutting-edge curricula, or any other unique features of your school that you think would be of interest to our readers. Please contact APS Editor Deborah Wenger at [apsedit@lwwny.com](mailto:apsedit@lwwny.com).



## News & Views

### NRMP and AAMC Issue Report on Applicant Qualifications and Success in the Match

The National Resident Matching Program (NRMP) and the AAMC have released the second edition of "Charting Outcomes in the Match," a report created in response to student and advisor requests for more information on how applicant qualifications affect Match success. Based on 2007 Match results, the publication includes data for two additional specialties, several new measures including USMLE Step 2 scores, and regression analyses on how the measures contribute to the prediction of Match success.

The report notes that applicants who are successful in matching to their preferred specialty are more likely to rank more programs within their preferred specialty; be seniors in US medical schools; and have relatively higher USMLE Step 1 and Step 2 scores.

A high score is not a guarantee of success, however. Distributions of scores show that program directors consider other qualifications in addition to scores on the USMLE examinations. Even in the most competitive specialties, a few individuals with the most impressive scores are not successful, and mediocre scores are now always a bar to success. In the less competitive specialties, US seniors with barely passing scores usually

match to their preferred specialties.

The report recommends that program directors advise applicants to:

- ❖ Rank all of the programs they really want, without regard to estimating their chances with those programs.
- ❖ Include a mix of both highly competitive and less competitive programs within the preferred specialty.
- ❖ Include all of the programs that have expressed an interest in them and where they would accept a position.

have signed a formal agreement to find more ways to work together in order to increase resources and academic options for students. EVMS is unlike most medical schools in that it is not attached to a university, and therefore does not have access to resources of a larger institution. Although some state legislators suggested an outright merger, EVMS chose this type of agreement because it prefers to work with a number of different institutions, including local health systems.

### Program directors consider other qualifications in addition to USMLE test scores.

- ❖ Have a Plan B. For a competitive specialty, and if the applicant would want to have some residency position in the event he or she is unsuccessful in gaining acceptance to a program in a preferred specialty, he or she should also rank preferred programs in an alternate specialty.

For further information on this report, go to [www.aamc.org/matchoutcomes](http://www.aamc.org/matchoutcomes).

### Two Virginia Schools Sign Cooperative Agreement

Officials at Old Dominion University and Eastern Virginia Medical School (EVMS)

The two schools have been working together for years on shared programs, including clinical psychology and public health degrees. But such efforts previous took place on an ad hoc basis. The new agreement, which includes the establishment of a joint committee that will meet at least once every two months, will make that relationship more formal. It will allow the two schools to work more strategically together to share resources, attract strong faculty, and possibly embark on new programs, such as a school of public health, which Virginia does not have. ❖

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I got my R01 and changed plans."

- ❖ Include a process that justifies a decision if this decision is not self-evident. For example, "I chose X residency because of its strong mentoring program."
- ❖ Do not make excuses for lack of performance; instead, put your track record in a positive light. So instead of saying, "I would have had more publications

but I had too many administrative responsibilities," you might say, "The administrative opportunities I have had qualify me to manage this grant, and as I have now relinquished many of them, I will have sufficient time to devote to this project."

- ❖ Always proofread your work.

Personal statements can be challenging to write because you have to organize your experiences in a manner that others can follow, and as you do this you need to find the

right combination of ingredients—the appropriate amount of gratitude, self-confidence, or self-promotion. We hope that these suggestions have helped—but remember that the most important key is to start early enough to get feedback from others.

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