

Residency Match: 4 tips for writing a standout personal statement

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A residency application is more than metrics and research. Ideally, a good residency application is well-rounded, and the personal statement is what helps shape it. Read on for these essential tips on how to write a personal statement for residency.

In terms of researching programs, FREIDA™, the AMA Residency & Fellowship Database®, includes the nearly 12,000 Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education-accredited residency or fellowship programs, and the site's look and feel offer a streamlined user experience.

Sonja Raaum, MD, is an assistant professor of medicine and a hospitalist at the University of Utah Hospital. As someone who works with fourth-year medical students and residents, she reviews residency applications and helps students formulate their personal statements.

"I have read hundreds of personal statements during interview season, and it strikes me that when we're looking at applications it is often a missed opportunity for many students," Dr. Raaum said. "Sometimes it can be an afterthought, but what we really want is a holistic picture of the student."

Dr. Raaum offered these tips to students in the process of crafting a personal statement.

Show, don't tell

You can assert that you're a great fit for a program, but if you can cite a real-life example of an attribute that makes that case for you it's going to go much further. If you do cite a personal story, Dr. Raaum recommends that you connect it to your larger career goals.

"A lot of people have clinic experience and really great stories, but if you use a story it should convey

your goals, desires, skills and attributes that you want to highlight,” she said.

Explain any negatives

In some ways, a setback can be a positive, particularly if you can show some resiliency in the face of it.

“The personal statement lets you bring all the pieces [of your application] together,” Dr. Raaum said. “That means it’s an opportunity to address any sticking point in your application, like a low score or low grade. You can show how much you’ve grown since that.”

Be yourself

If you write something in your personal statement because you think it’s what somebody wants to hear—and it’s not something that reflects your passions—that will likely come across in an interview. The best personal statements, Dr. Raaum said, are authentic.

“The best match is when that student can bring their authentic self to a program. And some of the most amazing things have happened when we match with these people and watch them grow into themselves as a physician,” she said. “If you can bring your authentic self to a statement, it increases the chances that you will find a program where you can reach your goals and design your career.”

Solicit feedback

Ask people to read your personal statement when it’s in draft form. Ideally, you are going to be able to find classmates and faculty members who can give you objective, honest insight.

“I would say you want to ask three or four people whom you trust to give honest feedback about how that personal statement is perceived,” Dr. Raaum said. “The other question to consider is how often are you using the word ‘I’ [in your personal statement]. That’s important in terms of terms of recognizing the self-serving interest versus the larger goal for any medical residency program.

“We are, in the end, people who are going to be really good at patient care and being part of a team.”