



13 ESSENTIAL DO'S AND DON'TS FOR YOUR RESIDENCY PERSONAL STATEMENT



Why is your residency essay so important?

Your personal statement is a vital part of [your residency application](#); it's where you'll explain why you've chosen your specialty and show the committee why you're the best candidate for training. And unlike other pieces of your application (such as your letters of recommendation or your medical school transcript), your personal statement is something that you have complete control over.

For a knockout personal statement, heed these do's and don'ts!

1. DON'T reuse your med school personal statement

When you applied to medical school, you had to demonstrate an interest in medicine and demonstrate that you had the potential to become a successful doctor.

At this point in your education, you are a doctor – or about to be one. Unless your premed school career is very relevant to your specialty choice, there's no need to explain why you originally pursued medicine. And if you reuse your med school personal statement, your specialty decision could come across as unformed or immature.

2. DO explain why you have chosen your specialty

Your decision to pursue a certain specialty is a personal one, and program directors want to hear about it. Did you have a mentor who helped you see dermatology in a new way or did you love your time in the pathology lab? What is it about delivering babies that thrills you more than caring for them after they're born? Use specific examples to [illustrate your story](#) and your distinctive experiences and perspectives. Most importantly, where do you see yourself in the future? Make your choice unambiguous and your commitment undeniable.

3. DON'T offer superficial or generic explanations for choosing your specialty

"Internal medicine is like solving a puzzle." "GPs serve as gatekeepers." "The OR just feels like home." [Cliches like these](#) – without the proper care – can be the death knell for

personal statements.

But what if you do love diagnostic puzzles, or enjoy helping patients navigate the healthcare system? What if you really do feel most comfortable in a surgical environment?

4. DO bring out your unique experiences and perspectives

Sharing the very specific details of your experiences and supporting your explanation can elevate your reasons from a generic cliché to a specific, and personal insight. [Use anecdotes to illustrate your story](#) and bring your unique experiences and perspectives to life. To explain why you like the fast-paced energy of the emergency room, share a particular experience you had there, how your people skills and your ability to stay calm under pressure came into play, and how you felt a sense of accomplishment in helping patients in distress. To explain why pain medicine appeals to you, you might mention how you connected with an anesthesiologist who opened your eyes to the potential of this field. The more examples you can give about why this specialty is the specialty for you, the better.

5. DON'T sound pompous or self-important

When describing your skills, be mindful of the line between confidence and smugness. You want to [sound enthusiastic and confident, but never arrogant or boastful](#). For example, it can be very off-putting to a reader if you talk about how work was too easy for you, making it sound like you think you're more accomplished than everyone you worked with. After all, your readers are considering you as a potential colleague.

6. DO emphasize your strengths with tact and grace

You've gained some valuable technical skills and exposure to clinical practice, but so have all your classmates. Which of [your unique qualities](#) will make your #1 residency program rank you as their #1 choice? Your personal experiences, both in medical school and outside, reveal more about you than your CV and USMLE Step exams. A good way to think about this is in the context of what's needed for that specialty. Will the listening skills you developed through mentoring premeds help you as a family practitioner? Have quick reflexes, honed through years of playing piano, prepared you for the technical

dexterity you'll need in surgery? Will teamwork skills developed at the student-run clinic help you contribute to an obstetrics team? Select specific examples that demonstrate your strengths and make your essay come alive.

7. DON'T send the same personal statement to every program

You're probably applying to many residency programs and the thought of tailoring each one is daunting. Yet each program has certain distinctions that make it unique. If your personal statement talks about how much you love research and hope to continue that pursuit during your residency training, program directors in community-based programs might not think you're a good fit for them. On the other hand, a completely generic statement of what you're looking for in residency won't appeal to anyone. How can you show your interest in specific programs without getting overwhelmed?

8. DO create multiple interchangeable versions of your personal statement

While it's unreasonable to suggest writing a different essay for every school, tailoring certain features in a limited number of essays can be a useful strategy. You might have one version for academic programs that emphasizes your future research interests, while your version for community-based programs leaves that line out and focuses on clinical opportunities. Or you might have a version for rural programs vs. urban, or for programs in your preferred geographic location vs. the rest of the country.

ERAS allows you to save multiple versions that you can upload to certain schools – just be sure you give each one a unique name to keep them straight.

9. DO tailor your essay to your top program

Do you have a dream program, one where you're sure you'd be able to excel? If so, it's well worth the extra time and effort to detail exactly why you want to rank it #1. This may sound like a lot of work, but it really doesn't take long to identify why you want to work with a specific researcher or continue learning where you had a great externship. Don't underestimate the bonus points you can get for this approach. [Tailoring your essay](#)

[to their specific offerings demonstrates that you've done your homework and are genuinely interested.](#)

10. DON'T use all 28,000 characters for your personal statement

ERAS permits 28,000 characters for your essay – around 7,000 words! – but no residency director wants to read even close to that much. Instead, stick to a one-page essay – usually 600-800 words – that addresses your key points. Your essay will be more effective if you're more to the point and concise. In order to do that well,

11. DO keep your purpose in mind

As you write, remember that you're trying to land an interview, not detail every aspect of your medical school training. If you throw in everything but the kitchen sink, your story will be generic and lack any impact. Instead, select the key experiences that led you to your chosen specialty, the details that will demonstrate your fit for it, and where you see your future contributions in this field.

12. DON'T submit without proofreading

In their rush to submit, some applicants skip this step, only to later find a typo they're unable to correct. To avoid this, take a break from writing – at least a few hours, or better yet, a day – before carefully proofreading your essay. Try reading aloud as you go along. Since your ear often picks up what your eye misses on the screen, you'll be more likely to catch awkward phrases, repetitive sentences or ideas, or other glitches.

13. DO have someone else also read your essay

Even after you've done your own quality control, your own writing is so familiar that it's all too easy to miss a typo. You also want to ensure that the entire essay reads well, hitting the high points that are most important, and striking the right tone. Getting the all-clear from another reader will give you confidence that you are ready to submit!

What's next?

Residency applicants can submit applications via ERAS (Electronic Residency Application Service) starting September 7th. Don't wait until the last minute – get cracking on those residency essays now!

If you have taken the time to read this guide, congratulations! Writing a residency application essay is not easy.

Now it's time to move from general tips to personalized advice tailored just for you. [Accepted's expert staff](#) is available to assist you in portraying your dynamic, compelling leadership story. Here's how it works:

1. [Explore our admissions consulting & editing services](#) and find the option that best suits your needs.
2. You will partner with an admissions expert who will work with you directly to help you discover your competitive advantage and use it to get accepted to your dream school.
3. Shoot us an email letting us know when you've been accepted. It makes our day!

Need help figuring out which service is best for you? [Click here for more guidance.](#)

GET ACCEPTED!

A word about why our clients love us and you should, too!

No matter where you live and no matter where you're applying, our expert admissions consultants are ready to listen, mentor, and guide you as you prepare an outstanding residency application that will get you accepted. You'll love us because you'll see from the first phone call or email that we care about you and support you as you strive to achieve your goals and dreams.

But you don't need to take our word for it. See what our clients say about Accepted...

"Thank you again for all your help during the Residency process. I ended up matching into the Internal Medicine Program. I had a total of 17 IM interviews, and even got a prematch offer. Going into the process I didn't think I was going to get more than one interview so I was pleasantly shocked how the process turned out. A lot of the programs that I interviewed with, including my prematch offer, did bring up my personal statement favorably. They appreciated the honesty in talking about my failure straight up and perseverance to push through it. In the end the vast majority saw my personal statement as a huge net positive and was a big reason I was able to get so many interviews despite my subpar stats. Thank you again for everything."

"...work of art is all that I can say, thank you very much for a great job [editing my residency essay]. It truly shows how professional you are."

"Everything is a blur since I submitted those residency applications in November that you helped to polish into masterpieces! As it turns out, I matched at ... my first choice. I'm very happy. Thanks again for all your hard work - I really couldn't have done it without you."

[Read more feedback on why our clients love Accepted.](#)

About the Author



A former fellowship admissions committee member and administrator at the University of Washington School of Medicine, [Cydney Foote](#) has been using her healthcare experience, storytelling skills, and eagle-eye for editing to help Accepted's clients gain acceptance to demanding medical schools and residency programs since 2001.

[WORK WITH CYD!](#)