


WHAT TO BUY MY LATEST INVENTION?  
 WHAT IS IT?  
 IT'S A WRITER'S BLOCK! YOU PUT IT ON TOP OF YOUR DESK AND THEN YOU CAN'T WRITE THINGS ANY MORE!

Continuing Ed Pre-Health Advising  
**Pre-Application Workshop**  
 Part II: *Writing Exercise*  
*Personal Statement*  
*Experience Descriptions*  
*Sensitive Topics*

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**Get Ready For Some...**



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**Before We Begin**

**Be sure you have the following documents:**

- Pre-Application Workshop handout packet
- Slides for this presentation
- Paper and a pencil/pen for the writing exercise

**Reminders:**

- Keep a running list of topics you'd like to discuss further at your next individual pre-health advising session.

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**Emily and Amelia Nagoski,**  
*authors of Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle*

"The world is an infinite, sucking vortex of need. It is not your job to fill all of the needs. It is your job to do your part.  
 The key is to figure out which part is your part. How to choose when it's *all* important?"

**Guidelines:**

1. What kind of problems do I enjoy solving?
2. What kind of people do I love working with?

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**As a reminder, you can find additional resources on our website...**

**Pre-Application Workshop**

**Watch Part 1 of the Pre-Application Workshop** (~1 h duration; password: CEprehealth)

- Sample Applications
- Application Timeline
- Letters of Recommendation
- Self-Assessment


**Watch Part 2 of the Pre-Application Workshop** (~45 min duration; password: CEprehealth)

- Tips for writing an effective personal statement
- Tips for writing effective experience descriptions
- Disclosing sensitive topics

**Handouts:**

- Powerpoint Slides for Part 1
- Powerpoint Slides for Part 2
- Pre-Application Workshop handout packet
  - Additional handout for pre-PA applicants: Tips for CASPA Experience Descriptions
- Downloadable Excel spreadsheet to organize your pre-health activities
- Download the Quick Facts guide for your intended profession


• Also, send an email to CEprehealth@colorado.edu to ask for copies of sample applications


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**Howard Thurman, civil rights leader**

"Don't ask what the world needs.  
 Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it.  
 Because what the world needs is people who have come alive."



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## Writing Exercise

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How did you become interested in pursuing a clinical career in the first place?

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## Writing Exercise

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### Left side of page:

List 4 or 5 of the most impactful experiences that you've had since graduating from high school and that:

- Helped you become the person you are today  
and/or
- Were instrumental in informing your decision to become a clinician

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## Writing Exercise

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Out of all of the healthcare careers, what are the distinctive elements of the one you've chosen that makes it a particularly good fit for your personal strengths, values, goals, and motivations?

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## Writing Exercise

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### Left side of page:

List 4 or 5 of the most impactful experiences that you've had since graduating from high school and that:

- Helped you become the person you are today  
and/or
- Were instrumental in informing your decision to become a clinician

### Right side of page:

For each item on your list, identify a few ways in which that experience shaped you:

- personal strengths
- values
- motivations

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## Writing Exercise

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What are your guiding principles for effective, compassionate care of sick and injured patients, as informed by:

- Your own experiences interacting with patients in clinical settings
  - The examples set by the clinicians you've shadowed

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## Writing Exercise

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### Take a moment to wax philosophical:

- What do you find satisfying about scientific learning and inquiry, in general?
- What excites you about learning about the science of the human body, specifically?

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## Writing Exercise

**What is the *impact* you hope to make in your clinical career?\***  
(How do you hope to do better than simply becoming a competent clinician?)

Potential topics could include:

- Your personal approach to patient care
- Strong interest in caring for patients in a certain population
- Research
- Becoming a member of the teaching faculty of an academic institution
- Etc.

\* What you say here should follow naturally from your history of long-term experiences.



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## Sample Essay

Read the sample essays in the *Pre-Application Workshop handout packet*

Also read "Guidelines for Writing Your Personal Statement"



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## Writing Exercise

Have you overcome personal hardships, challenges, or obstacles that influenced your educational pursuits?  
Did you have any significant fluctuations in your academic record?

... If so, jot down a quick list of factors that you may want to acknowledge in your application so that your reviewers will have context for understanding what you have overcome.



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## Tips for Writing a Compelling Personal Statement

### Commonalities among highly effective personal statements:

- The writer wrote multiple drafts over many weeks, got feedback from others, did careful proofreading
- Not a sales pitch, not a comprehensive play-by-play of your experiences.
- Focus on their "why."
  - Admissions reviewers want to know **why** you want to be a clinician, not why you think you'll be a good clinician
- Written as a series of anecdotes/stories and your thoughtful reflections upon them.
- Often, the most compelling stories are of situations that were *not* externally flashy, but they describe experiences that were deeply meaningful to you. They should capture the essence of your motivations to become a clinician.
  - Direct experience is more compelling than observational experience
  - Situations in which you had a high level of competence are more compelling than first-time experiences
- You'll have room for just ~3 stories, each carefully chosen because it implicitly conveys your reasons for wanting to become a clinician
- Tip for using pseudonyms: Use a short name (i.e., "Pat") and put it in quotation marks the first time



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## Pre-Application Workshop

Part I:

- Examples of successful applications
- Overview of the application process
- Dean's Letter of Good Standing
- Pre-application timeline
- Tips for asking for strong letters of recommendation
- Self-assessment of your readiness to apply next summer

Part II:

- Writing exercise
- **Tips for writing a compelling personal statement**
- Tips for writing effective experience descriptions
- Disclosing sensitive topics



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## Tips for Writing a Compelling Personal Statement

### Guidelines for Getting Started

Detailed suggestions provided on [colorado.edu/ceprehealth](http://colorado.edu/ceprehealth) website:  
*Pre-Health Advising > Application Tips > Personal Statement*

### Suggested work to do over winter break:

- Brainstorming activity posted on webpage listed above
- If desired, read a reference book on the topic
- Early draft of your personal statement
- Complete your first 1:1 personal statement coaching session w/ Jess Talbot



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## Tips for Writing a Compelling Personal Statement

Home > Health Activities > Application Tips > Personal Statement

### Personal Statement

#### Tips for Writing an Effective, Memorable Personal Statement

- Tip #1: Attend the Pre-Application Workshop or watch the video
- Tip #2: Learn more about this genre of writing
- Tip #3: Brainstorming session
- Tip #4: Tell stories and share reflections upon your experiences
- Tip #5: It is okay that you like science and want to help people!
- Tip #6: Once you have an early-but-complete draft, engage in 1:1 personal statement coaching
- Tip #7: Ask for additional feedback from other people
- Tip #8: Find a good proofreader

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## Tips for Writing Effective Experience Descriptions


### How to Write About Them?

Experience descriptions are different than resume entries.

Goals:

- Convey your level of involvement/scope of responsibility in the activity
- Provide a thoughtful, heartfelt description of the way in which the experience impacted you:
  - The insights you gained from the experience
  - How the experience shaped your motivations
  - How the experience shaped your personal development
- ... Do NOT provide a list of technical skills that you have mastered. Avoid jargon.

Detailed tips in the *Writing Effective Experience Descriptions* handout



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## Tips for Writing Effective Experience Descriptions


### For AMCAS Applicants: Your Three "Most Meaningful Experiences"

- AMCAS allows you to enter up to 15 Work/Activity entries. Each entry has a 700-character field (including spaces) for your experience description.
- Three of your entries can be marked as "Most Meaningful." For those three, you are given an additional 1,325-character field (including spaces) to explain why they were most meaningful to you.

### How to choose your three Most Meaningful Experiences

There isn't a strategy here, *except that Shadowing should not be listed as Most Meaningful*. You should choose authentically, according to the following guidelines:

- Your Most Meaningful Experiences should be ones that:
  - Were transformational in nature: They fundamentally changed or informed who you've become and what you stand for.
    - "If you didn't have this experience, how would you be a different person today?"
  - Utilized skills that are transferable to your future work as a clinician




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## Tips for Writing Effective Experience Descriptions

### Which Activities to Include?

- You can enter a limited number of your work and extracurricular activities since graduating from high school.
  - Recent experiences (within the past 3 years) and long-term experiences (multiple years) are generally considered most important
- Think broadly about relevance: Many non-clinical/non-research activities are considered highly valuable because they allow you to develop relevant competencies.
  - Refer to list of competencies on back of *Writing Compelling Letters of Rec* handout
- Each experience you enter should be truly meaningful to you. Do NOT add activities that "look good" but were not important to you. Anything you enter is fair game for an in-depth interview question.
- You can use the Excel spreadsheet posted on the Pre-Application Workshop webpage to organize your activities




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## Tips for Writing Effective Experience Descriptions

### For AMCAS Applicants: Your Three "Most Meaningful Experiences"

### How to write about your Most Meaningful Experiences

- In the PDF version of your application, your response in the Experience Description field will be displayed immediately above your response in the Most Meaningful field. Essentially, they will read like one long response.
- In the Experience Description field, start as you normally would, by conveying your level of involvement/scope of responsibility in the activity.
- For the rest of the Experience Description and the Most Meaningful field, reflect upon the ways in which the experience shaped you, especially as it influenced:
  - Your values
  - Your motivations
  - Your understanding of what other people need
  - Your understanding of how you want to engage with others



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## 1:1 Application Coaching with Jess

Each student is eligible for a total of six application coaching sessions with Jess per year, to include:

- Personal statement
  - First session can be for brainstorming -or- to review a draft (send to her in advance)
- Your set of experience descriptions (including Most Meaningful essays)
- A representative sample of your supplemental application essays
- (Don't use them all up on your personal statement.)

For those applying through TMSAS (Texas Medical and Dental Schools):

- 2 additional appointments for feedback on additional TMSAS essays and the necessary adjustments to the personal statement and experience descriptions due to character limitations.



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## Sensitive topics

- Other Impactful Experiences
- Disclosing group identity (in your personal statement and/or Experiences list) that may subject you to discrimination
- Mandatory disclosure statements:
  - Misdemeanor conviction
  - Felony conviction
  - Institutional action



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## Process for Scheduling 1:1 Application Coaching Sessions

Sign up for application coaching sessions using Google Sheets (not Buff Portal Advising)

- Plan ahead! Sessions will get booked up if you procrastinate.
- Max of two application coaching sessions per two-month time period
- Links to the sign-up sheets can be found on [colorado.edu/ceprehealth](http://colorado.edu/ceprehealth) website:
  - Pre-Health Advising > Application Tips > Pre-Application Preparation > 1:1 Application Coaching Sessions
- Send drafts to Jess in advance, via email

Please note that all 1:1 application coaching with Jess is conducted in the context of advising appointments (not electronic edits sent via email).



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## NEW in 2024: Other Impactful Experiences (instead of Disadvantaged Status)

To provide some additional context around each individual's application, admissions committees are interested in learning more about the challenges applicants may have overcome in life. The following question is designed to give you the opportunity to provide additional information about yourself that is not easily captured in the rest of the application.

Please consider whether this question applies to you. Medical schools do not expect all applicants to answer "yes" to this question. This question is intended for applicants who have overcome major challenges or obstacles. Some applicants may not have experiences that are relevant to this question. Other applicants may not feel comfortable sharing personal information in their application.

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.

**1325 characters**



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## Other Impactful Experiences

This question is designed to give you the opportunity to provide additional information about your background or life experience that is not captured elsewhere in the application.

- Examples of the types of experiences that are appropriate to share:
  - Family Background (first-generation college student, serving as a caretaker of a family member, loss of a family member)
  - Financial Background (e.g., low-income family, worked to support family growing up, work-study to pay for college, participation in federal or state financial support (e.g., Medicaid, food stamps, unemployment compensation), Pell Grant recipient)
  - Community Setting (e.g., rural area, food scarcity, high poverty or crime rate, lack of access to medical care)
  - Educational Experiences (e.g., limited educational opportunities, non-traditional student, limited access to advisors or mentors)
  - Other General Life Circumstances that were beyond your control and impacted your life and/or presented barriers (e.g., religion).



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## Whether or not to disclose other sensitive topics ...

The categories listed below are considered "illegal interview question" topics. Interviewers are not allowed to ask about them *unless you disclose them first* (either in your application or during the interview)

- Religion
- Gender identity (though there is now a place to provide preferred pronouns on most apps)
- Sexual orientation
- Pregnancy status
- Disability
- Mental Health Diagnosis and/or traumatic events
- Genetic information
- Citizenship status
- Marital Status or number of children

**You may have good reason to bring up some of these topics in your application.**

If you do, they are also fair game for interviews.



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## Mandatory Disclosure Statements

### Institutional action by a college or university

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

You must answer "Yes" even if the action does not appear on or has been deleted or expunged from your official transcripts due to institutional policy or personal petition."



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## Mandatory Disclosure Statements

- Misdemeanor conviction
- Institutional action by a college or university

*Quick Pep Talk:* These types of issues are common. Young adults sometimes make poor choices.

No need to worry unless:

- You have a recent or ongoing pattern of offenses
- You have a felony conviction, which can prevent you from being licensed as a healthcare professional ... but you must write about the issue in a thoughtful, responsible, and mature manner.



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## Mandatory Disclosure Statements

### How to write your disclosure statements:

- Make sure the reader understands the timeline ("Ten years ago, in my first year of college ...")
- State the facts, explaining what happened and what you did to make amends
- Take responsibility for the poor choices you made in the past: no excuses, no blame on others
- Reflect on what you learned from the experience *and how you changed your behavior accordingly*
- Express remorse in a mature manner

**Tip:** Write disclosure statement(s) in advance, ask for feedback from advisors.



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## Mandatory Disclosure Statements

### Misdemeanor conviction

"Have you ever been convicted of, or pleaded guilty or no contest to, a Misdemeanor crime, excluding:

1. Any offense for which you were adjudicated as a juvenile
2. Any convictions which have been expunged or sealed by a court, or
3. Any misdemeanor convictions for which any probation has been completed and the case dismissed by the court (in states where applicable)?"

**\*You need NOT disclose any instance where you:**

- Were arrested but not charged
- Were arrested and charged, but the charges were dropped
- Were arrested and charged, but found not guilty by a judge or jury
- Were arrested and found guilty by a judge or jury, but the conviction was overturned on appeal
- Received an executive pardon"



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### Part II:

- Writing exercise to get you on the right track
- Examples of successful applications
- Tips for writing a compelling personal statement
- Tips for writing effective experience descriptions
- Disclosing sensitive topics



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