

The process of applying to professional school requires commitment, including time to find meaningful volunteering and shadowing experiences, studying for entrance exams, and completing prerequisite coursework. Similarly, the process of writing the application essays for professional school requires ample time and attention throughout the composition, revision, and editing stages.

## Brainstorming and Pre-writing

Before you begin writing your personal statement, generate ideas for your responses by brainstorming or pre-writing. Closely examine the prompts. All schools require a personal statement in which you describe your motivation for pursuing professional school, but the Texas Medical and Dental Schools Application Service (TMDSAS) application also includes a personal characteristics and a unique circumstances or life experiences essay (which may be listed as optional, but the Health Professions Advising Committee [HPAC] encourages each applicant to write essays for all prompts).

- In your **personal statement**, you want to describe experiences that have driven your career choice using concrete examples and personal details.
  - You may also choose to include long-term goals to conclude your personal statement.
- The **personal characteristics** essay describes how your experiences will enrich a class with individuals of diverse backgrounds (age, cultural background, gender, special skills and/or talents, or disadvantaged factors).
- The **unique circumstances** or **life experiences** essay is an opportunity to address any additional experiences related to your choice to become a medical, dental, or veterinary professional, including difficult times in school that may be reflected in your application.

To brainstorm is to make a list of possible topics. Brainstorming strategies for these essays include:

- **Listing:** Write down possible topics.
- **Freewriting:** Write without stopping for a set amount of time (2-5 minutes) and build up "stamina" slowly.
- **Looping** (variation of freewriting): Choose one aspect of your topic to begin writing on, freewrite for 5 minutes, then read over what you have written. Underline the most important or interesting idea or sentence. Freewrite on this idea(s) for another 5 minutes. Find your focal sentence (again) and repeat as desired.
- **Clustering:** Write the topic in the middle of the page and put a circle around it. Then, branch out from the circle with associations and details about the topic. Write down anything you can think of, making connections as you see fit.
- **Invisible Writing:** Using a computer, turn the contrast down on your monitor so the screen is blank. Type for at least 20-30 minutes without looking at what you've written. Then, turn the contrast up, ignore typos, and read to see what topic(s) you wrote on.

## Planning and Drafting

Once you have generated ideas for your essay(s), solidify your plans for each. Keep your readers in mind and remember that you want to convey your **interpersonal** (service orientation, social skills, cultural competence, teamwork, oral communication) and **intrapersonal** (ethical responsibility to self and others, reliability and dependability, resilience and adaptability, and capacity for improvement) competencies. Specifically, you want to convey your unique combination of competencies and relevant experiences to persuade your readers to consider you for an interview.

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- **Genre:** These essays should each be a narrative that has a beginning, middle, and end, with a unifying theme.
- **Style and Tone:** Use a formal tone and concise sentence structure. Be personal and professional. Refrain from using contractions, abstract language, or empty phrases.
- **Point of View:** First person (“I”) conveys that the writing reflects the writer’s perspective.
- **Active Voice:** In this voice, the subject performs the action stated by the verb.
  - Ex: I volunteered at the hospital. (I = subject) (volunteer = verb)

## Revising and Editing

Once you have finished writing, you are ready for revising. Before moving on, take a break, set the writing aside, and return to it later with fresh eyes for revising. The revising stage involves two parts: Global and Local revisions.

### Global Level Revising

- This type of revision focuses on “big picture” concerns, such as purpose, audience, focus, organization, and overall development. It is important to consider these global concerns before moving on to local concerns because global revisions often require more thinking and time than local.
- To ensure you have addressed all topics in the prompt, **locate each response in your writing**. Put yourself in the **role of your reader**, and imagine how they might understand each of your responses to the prompt.
- Consider the following questions...
  - Is the draft appropriate for my audience? Does it account for my audience’s knowledge of and attitudes toward the subjects?
  - What is my unifying theme? Is it addressed in every paragraph of the essay? If not, how can I incorporate it?
  - Will my reader be guided throughout my essay? Are my ideas in a logical order (chronological, order of importance, etc.)?
  - Should some sentences or paragraphs be moved or separated?
  - Is similar information kept together?
  - Is every paragraph organized around a single main idea?
  - Do I use specific language and concrete examples to support my claims? Do any ideas need further development?

### Local Level Revising and Editing

- Local revision focuses on local concerns, including sentence structure, grammar, word choice, and punctuation.
- Revision of local concerns is most beneficial during the **final stages of the writing process**.
- **Take a break.** When writing and revising a draft, you spend a considerable amount of time re-reading. Give your eyes and mind time to relax. Even a short break of 30 minutes can be beneficial.
- **Choose a medium.** Some people prefer working with a printed copy of their work while others prefer digital. Try to determine which is the best fit for you.
- **Change the look.** Sometimes it is helpful to change the font type or color, so your eyes are tricked into thinking that you’re looking at a different document.
- **Make a plan.** Plan how much you will work on during each revision session. Begin with areas that need more attention than others.

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- **Read aloud.** Read slowly, and be sure to read every word. Reading aloud will help you hear how the words sound together, and it can help you find areas that need attention. Note any areas where you stumble, are left gasping for breath, or where the writing simply sounds like it needs extra attention. You can also check the accessibility options on your computer to see if there is a read-aloud function.
- **Read sentence by sentence.** Separate the text into individual lines, and read one line at a time using a ruler, or read the essay backward, from last line to first. This will allow you to focus on each sentence and more easily identify errors.
- **Don't rely exclusively on grammar check.** Grammar check programs do not consider all grammatical rules, and they often fail to provide an explanation as to why your sentence may be incorrect. If you have a grammar question, ask your advisors, a CASA Writing Consultant, or consult a credible grammar resource.
- **Focus on one task at a time.** For example, first go through your paper looking for spelling problems. Next, go through and look at only punctuation. By limiting your focus, you are better able to locate and correct the errors.
- **Ask a friend.** Getting a fresh perspective is always helpful when revising your writing. Even if you decide not to act on your reader's ideas, it's good to know how someone responds to your work.

### Pro-Tips

- Avoid using...
  - "I" excessively
  - Quotes
  - Words beyond your own vocabulary
- Use the opportunity provided to you (**unique circumstances** or **life experiences essay**) to address any difficulties in school that may be reflected in your application. Accept your responsibility for these difficulties, and demonstrate what you have learned or how you have grown from them.
- Compose your texts in a Word document, save the document, and then paste them into the online application forms. Double-check the pasted responses for formatting.
- Give yourself time to take breaks between writing, revising, and editing. Incentivize your writing with treats, a movie night, or other rewards based on your progress through your writing process.
- Visit the CASA Writing Center throughout your writing process. We provide face-to-face and online consultation services, and are happy to help during any writing stage!

The information for this handout was compiled from the following sources:

HPAC Committee. Personal interview and communication. 19 May 2019.

Chopin, Suzzette. "Your Application Essays." 5 Feb. 2015, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.

Texas Medical and Dental Schools Application Service. "Making Your Application Reflect the Best You." 4 Mar. 2015, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.

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