

UCAS Personal Statements for Medicine or Dentistry

Introduction

The first step in the formal application process for medical or dental school is to submit a UCAS application form. You need to put in a great deal of time and effort before you submit this form to ensure your application is effective. For example, a typical medical school may receive 2,500 – 3,000+ UCAS forms and only interview around 25% of applicants.

Some sections of the UCAS form are purely factual (name, address, exam results, etc) but there is also the opportunity to write about yourself in the form of a personal statement. This is designed to help admissions teams discover more about you and your suitability for the course. It is your chance to distinguish yourself from the other applicants by presenting your goals, experiences and qualifications in the best possible light, and to demonstrate your writing ability. If you are a mature applicant, a small number of schools may ask you to supply a CV or application form in addition to the UCAS form, check requirements with schools.

Preparing to apply

The key to writing an effective personal statement is to prepare thoroughly. Think carefully about what you have to offer, in the context of what the dental or medical school is looking for. Make contact with admissions teams if you have any questions - initiative is often appreciated.

Academic requirements

When applying for medicine or dentistry as a second degree, you will need to have (or be about to gain) a good honours degree and sound A-level results (or equivalent qualifications). Some schools will also require good GCSE grades. See **Getting into Medicine as a Graduate: Key Points** or **Getting into Dentistry as a Graduate: Key Points** for general information about entry requirements but always check on the medical or dental school's website for specifics.

Personal qualities

What personal qualities do you possess? In particular, dental and medical schools will be looking for:

- Strong academic ability, self-discipline, motivation and enthusiasm (for medicine / dentistry)
- Commitment to caring for others; compassion
- Communication skills and ability to establish rapport with a wide cross section of society
- Integrity and a professional attitude
- Teamwork, leadership and acceptance of responsibility, perseverance
- Ability to cope with ambiguity, complexity and uncertainty
- Ability to deal effectively with stress
- Commitment to your personal and professional development
- Manual dexterity (especially for dentistry) and the ability to maintain intense, prolonged concentration
- IT skills are becoming increasingly important e.g. computerised records and digital imaging

Think carefully about what evidence you have to demonstrate your qualities (good self-insight itself is a quality that admissions teams seek!). Your evidence could come from your current studies, work experience, previous employment including part-time jobs and a wide range of outside interests. To help you think about these in more detail, refer to any self-reflective portfolios you have produced such as your Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR), the Careers Service's Skills for Work Certificate or The Sheffield Graduate Award (www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/advice). Consider the range of skills (technical & transferable) developed during your course, especially skills development modules.



Relevant & recent work experience and workplace observations

Recent, hands-on work experience in a caring profession, such as in a dental practice, GP surgery, hospital, care home or hospice is vital. Not only does this demonstrate your concern for the welfare of others but also helps you gain an insight into the work of a dentist / doctor, even if your role was as a nursing auxiliary or receptionist. You should also try to work shadow (or at least talk to) dentists / doctors in different clinical settings to gain an understanding of their role. Take notes and even produce a portfolio of your observations – you could submit a copy of this to the dental or medical school as supporting material to go with your application or take it along to interview.

Understanding medicine / dentistry as a career

Why do you want to do medicine / dentistry? Think about this carefully before you apply so that you can provide your reasons in such a way as to show that you have actively chosen this as a career. Be prepared to demonstrate what you have done to find out about the profession and why this is a good career for you. Think about why you are applying as a graduate and how this may be an advantage. Brush up on your knowledge of the profession and current issues. Think about the science of medicine /dentistry and what have been the most important advances. Have these influenced you? In what way?

Writing your personal statement

When you write your personal statement, put yourself in the shoes of the admissions tutors and write about what is going to be relevant to them. Bearing in mind that they may not have long to read your personal statement, start with a strong opening paragraph to grab the reader's attention.

Try to be original in what you write throughout your statement. Keep the whole thing succinct yet meaningful and within word limits. Use language which reflects your motivation. Amongst others things:

- explain why you want to be a doctor / dentist & that you know what it involves
- demonstrate your commitment to caring and a career in medicine / dentistry
- describe your participation in University and community life
- highlight your achievements and evidence personal qualities that will make you a good doctor or dentist
- describe your hobbies and interests
- be positive about your first degree and how this will help you undertake your second degree
- try to show how you share the values of the NHS (as stated in the NHS Constitution)

Remember that not only do admissions tutors want to know about your experiences but what you have got out of them and how this makes you an excellent candidate.

Try to end on a high note - give them a memorable, relevant fact about yourself.

Spell and grammar check your personal statement and get a second opinion from your tutor or a Careers Adviser if you need help. **Keep a copy**, as it is likely to be referred to during your interview.

A note on references

Your referee would normally be your academic/personal tutor. Give them plenty of notice when you ask them to be your referee (ie, before the summer vacation) and brief them fully about the course(s) you are applying for and your 'selling points'. Make sure they have a copy of your personal statement.

Useful resources

- UCAS: www.ucas.com for a guide to applying via UCAS
- Individual medical and dental schools may provide suggestions on their website to help you when writing your personal statement
- 'Getting into Medical School', 'Getting into Dental School' and other books available from Careers Service – www.careers.dept.shef.ac.uk/infotree/Health.php
- British Medical Association: www.bma.org.uk and General Medical Council: www.gmc-uk.org
- British Dental Association: www.bda.org and General Dental Council: www.gdc-uk.org
- NHS Healthcare Careers: www.healthcareers.nhs.uk
- www.theguardian.com/education/2013/oct/01/personal-statement-for-medicine
- Also see the Careers Service information sheets **Getting into Medicine as a Graduate: Key Points** or **Getting into Dentistry as a Graduate: Key Points** which list other useful resources.