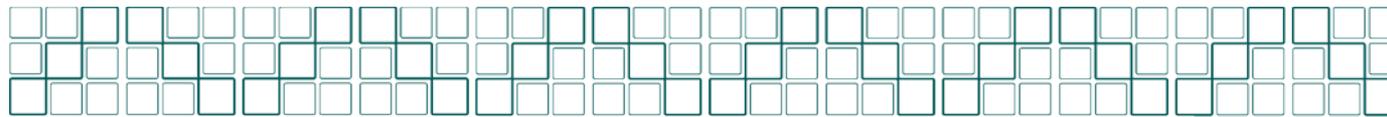
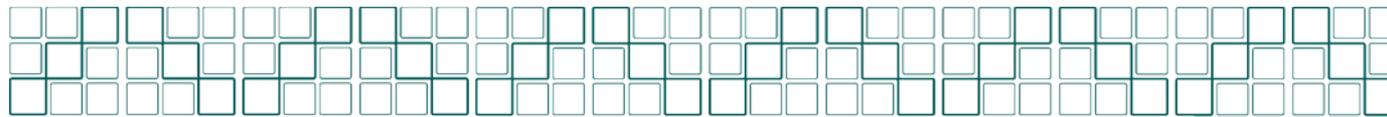

Writing Your Personal Statement for Professional School

William J. Higgins





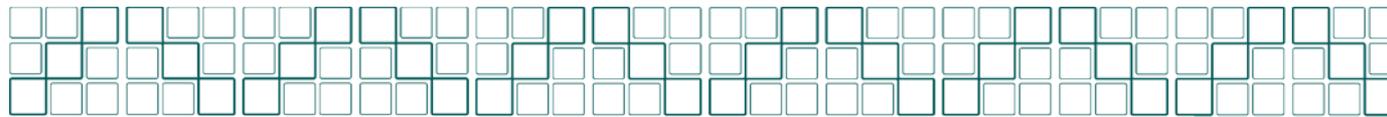
“I want to be a doctor because I want to help people.”



“I want to be a doctor because I like to work with people.”



“Becoming a doctor is a lot like preparing to run a marathon.”



How to write good:

1. Avoid Alliteration. Always.
2. Prepositions are not words to end sentences with.
3. Avoid clichés like the plague. (They're old hat.)
4. Foreign words and phrases are not apropos.
5. One should never generalize.
6. Don't be redundant; don't use more words than necessary; it's highly superfluous.
7. Be more or less specific.
8. Analogies in writing are like feathers on a snake.
9. The passive voice is to be avoided.
10. Who needs rhetorical questions?

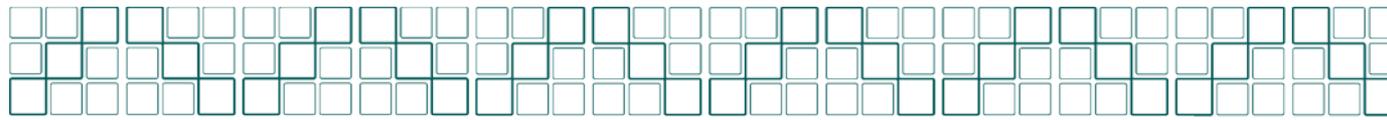
<http://www.plainlanguage.gov/examples/humor/writegood.cfm>



Today....

First, what to write

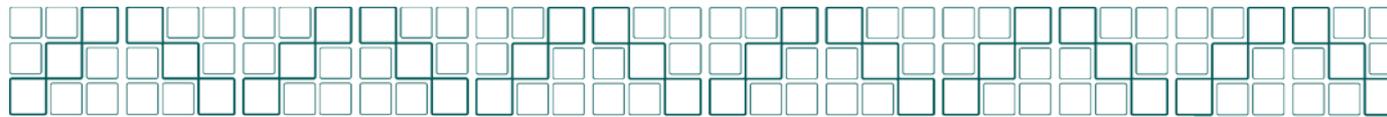
Second, how to write it



Personal Comments Essay

Use the Personal Comments essay as an opportunity to distinguish yourself from other applicants. Some questions you may want to consider while writing this essay are:

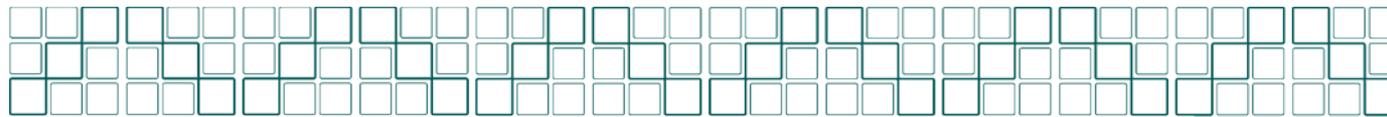
- Why have you selected the field of medicine?
- What motivates you to learn more about medicine?
- What do you want medical schools to know about you that hasn't been disclosed in other sections of the application?



In addition, you may wish to include information such as:

- Special hardships, challenges, or obstacles that may have influenced your educational pursuits.

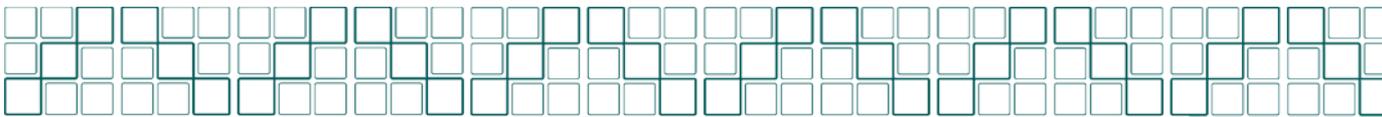
- Commentary on significant fluctuations in your academic record that are not explained elsewhere in your application.



According to AMCAS, your personal statement,

- Attaches your personality to the rest of the application,
- Clarifies how you have prepared yourself for success in medical school,
- Explains why you want to pursue a career in medicine,
- Argues why you will make a good doctor.
- Is supported by your AMCAS activities*

* according to Higgins



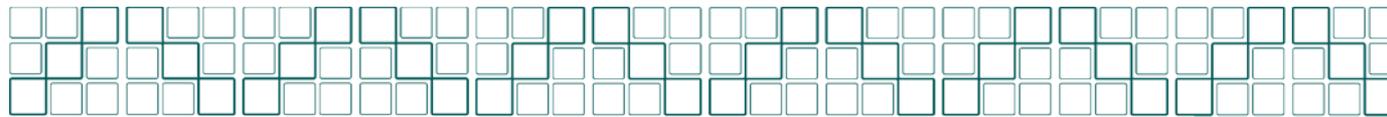
- ng Docs Home
- The Basics**
- xperience
- er Options
- or Med School
- Inspiring Stories

- Aspiring Docs
- Applicants
- Med Students
- Residents

What are the most important things I should write about in my personal statement?

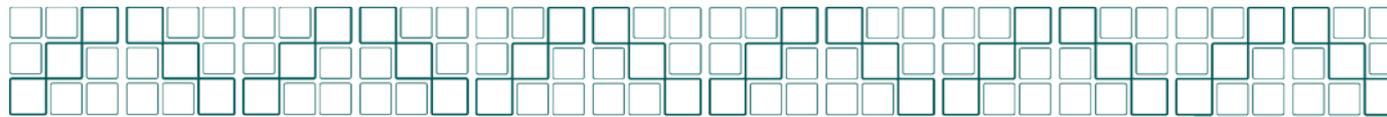
I have not had one single experience that made me interested in medicine, but rather a culmination of events. Do admissions committees prefer to hear about a defining experience or moment? More generally, what are admissions committees looking for in applications? What do they prefer not to see? Are there elements that all personal statements should contain?

<https://www.aamc.org/students/aspiring/basics/284794/application16.html>



It is not that difficult!

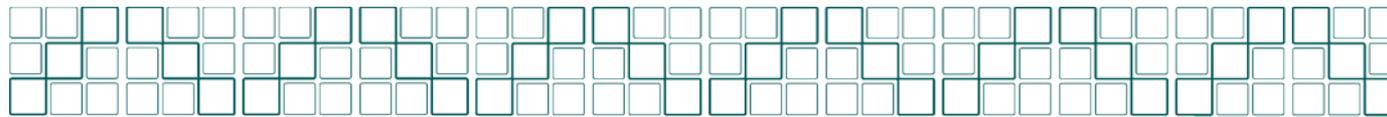
Relax. Remember the objective
and
stop over-thinking it!



What do I want the admissions folks to know about me?

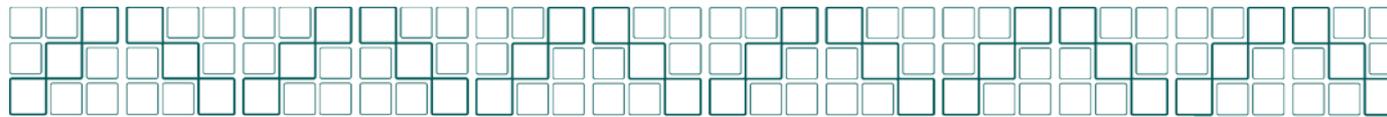
What do the admissions folks want to know about me?

(Same question, different sides of the conversation)



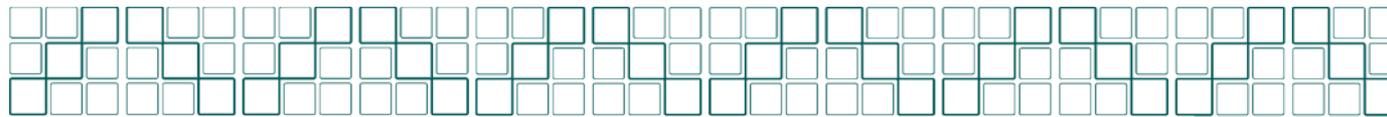
Why do I want to become a
physician?

Why will I be a good one?



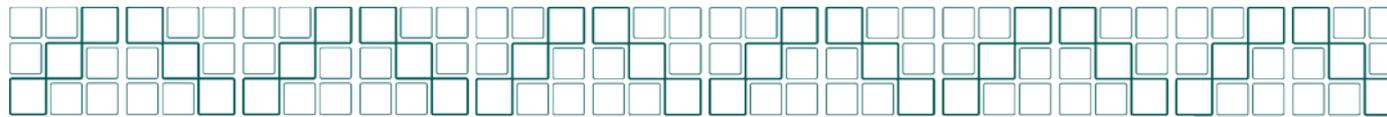
“I look for a sustained understanding of why the candidate wants to enter medicine, how they’ve tested their interest, and how they’ve prepared for the rigors of medical school.”

Dean for Admissions

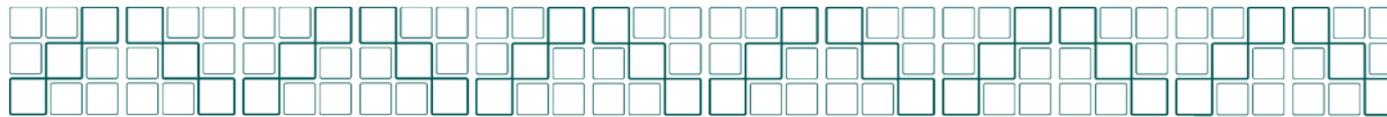


“Touch on your passion to pursue medicine. For many, medicine is akin to a calling, and the evaluator must get a sense that they are hearing and responding to the same motivation.”

Dean for Admissions

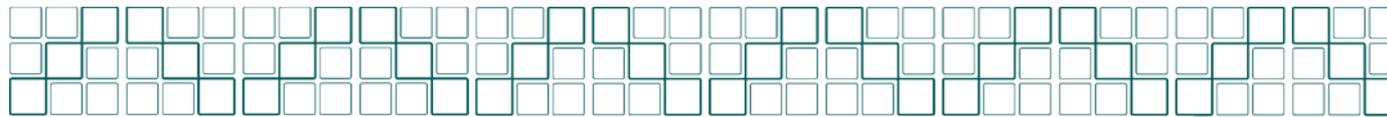


Let us begin writing your
statement.....

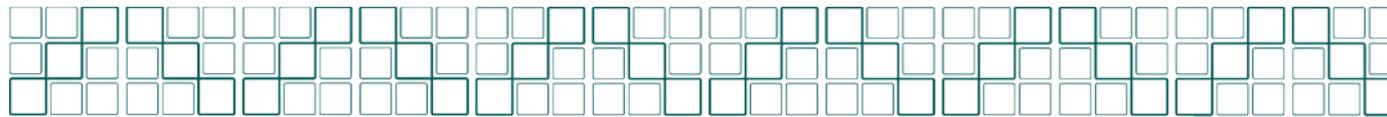


Your must remember the three elements of a Personal Statement:

- Theme
- Substance
- Focus



#1. Incorporate and build around
the one or two **themes** or points
you want to make.

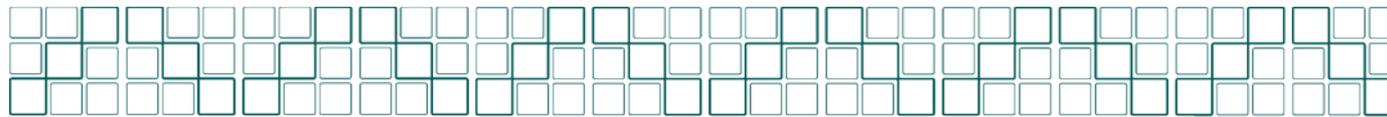


Unite your essay and give it direction with a theme or thesis. The thesis is the main point you want to communicate. The essay is the story that gives it life and credence.

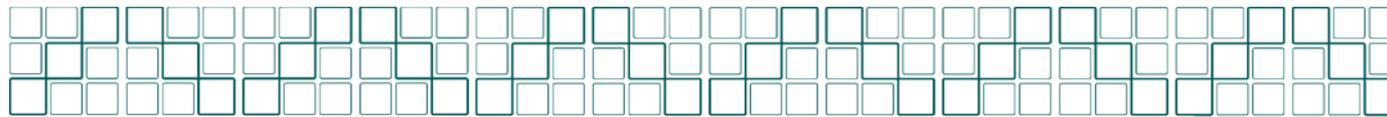
Tell me what you are going to tell me,
then tell me



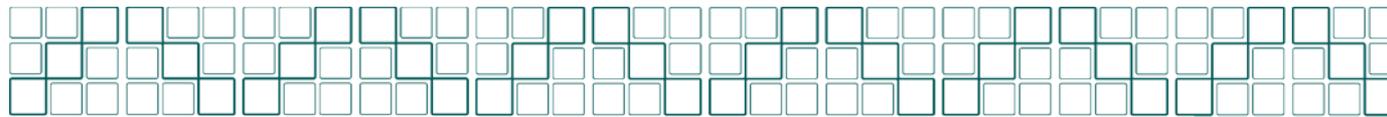
Good essays are built on themes that focus on physicians and medicine, not on patients.



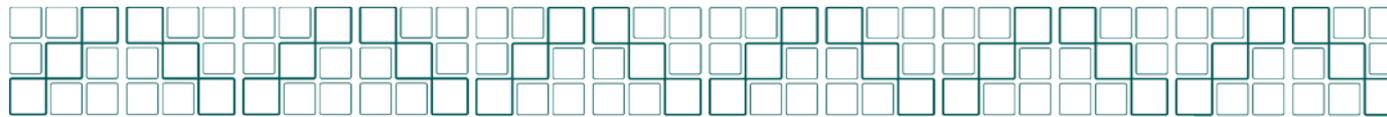
End your essay with a conclusion that refers back to the lead and restates your thesis.



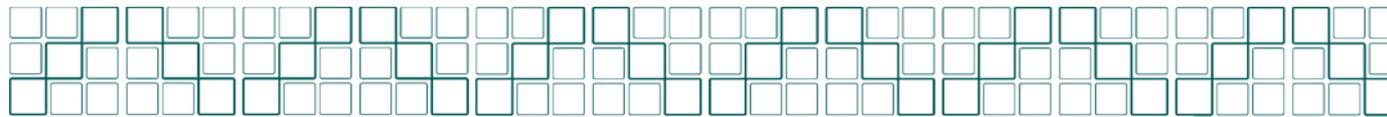
#2. Your Statement must have **substance!**



Write about what interests you, excites you.
That's what the admissions staff wants to
read.



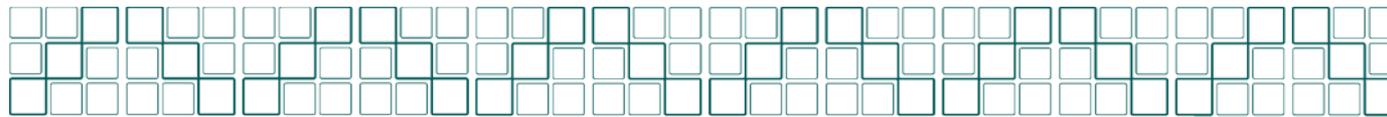
What details of your life (personal or family problems, history, people or events that have shaped you or influenced your goals) might help the committee better understand you or help set you apart from other applicants



“I want to become a doctor to help people.”

Duh. A statement like this seems insincere unless you back it up with evidence. Demonstrate your commitment through the example of your work and your life.

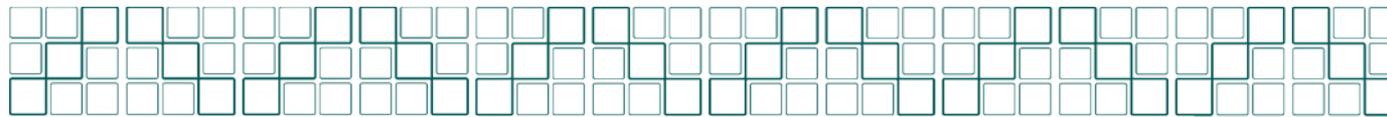
<http://www.princetonreview.com/medical/toxic-personal-statements.aspx>



Give evidence to support your statements.

Don't provide a collection of generic statements and platitudes.

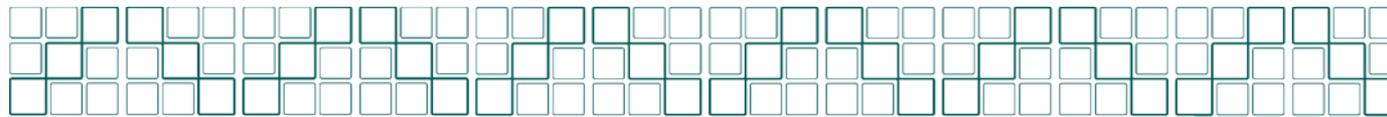
Don't give weak excuses for your GPA or test scores.



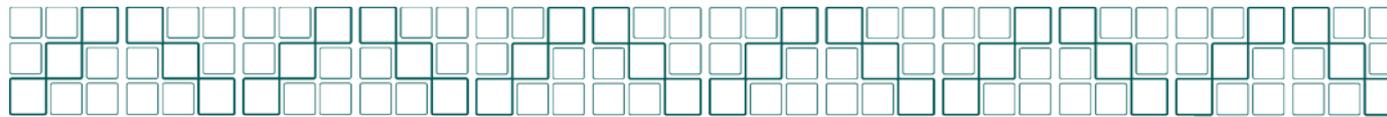
#3. Focus!

You cannot address everything!

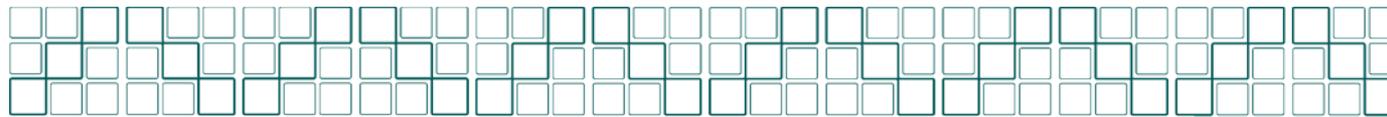
Eliminate the distractions!



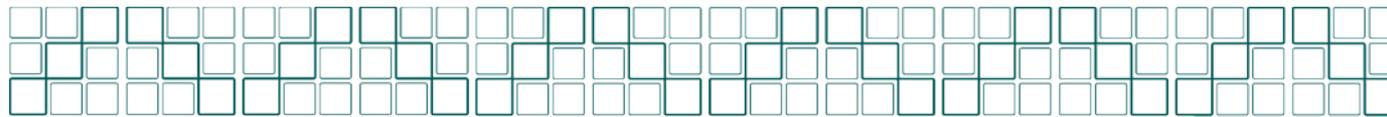
After you have determined your theme(s), then select the anecdotes and experiences that provide the substance and proof.



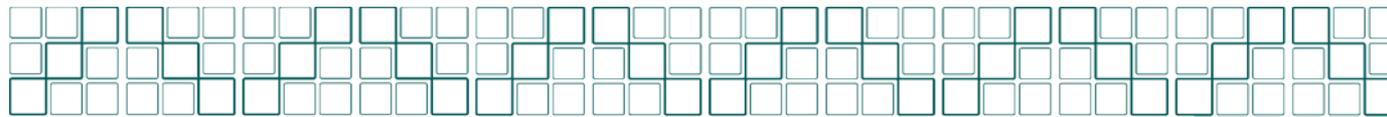
If you do not want to talk about it in an interview, do not write about!



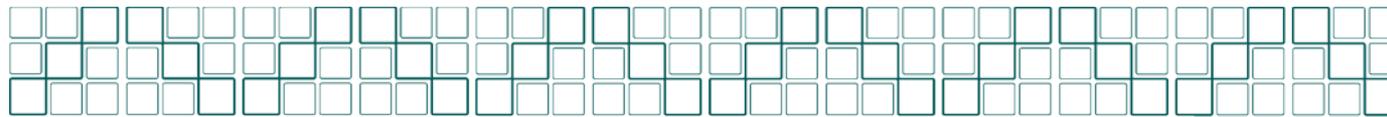
**Eliminate information that doesn't
support your thesis.**



The readers want to get to know **you**,
not your record!

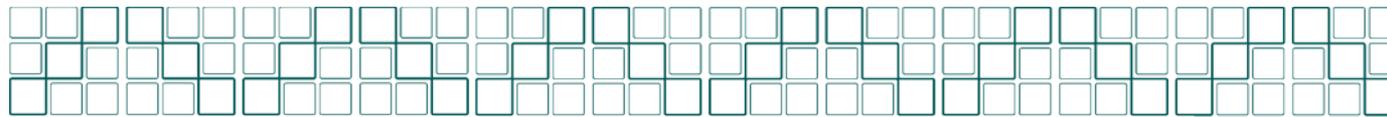


Your statement must be positive
and enthusiastic! No downers,
please!



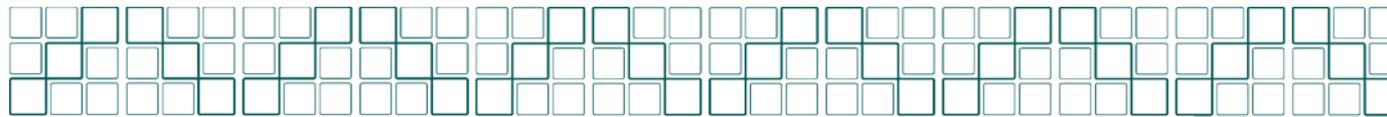
An Example:

- I went to college never considering medicine...
- However several (or one key) event(s) caught my interest and induced me to explore further
- Relate some things you did to test your interest
 - Focus on the physicians
 - Address why they are role models
 - Understand why they enjoy their profession
- Explain why you will be good at or are looking forward to a career in medicine



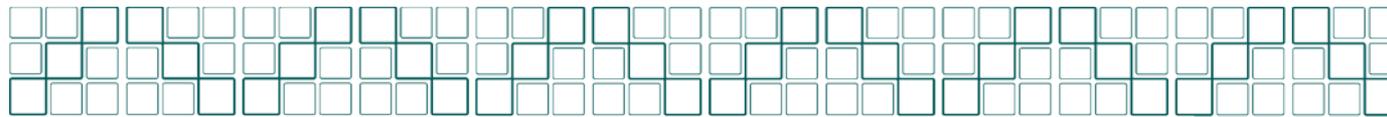
An Example:

- I went to college considering medicine...
- Therefore I pursued experiences to test this
- Relate some incidents
 - Focus on the physicians
 - Address why they are role models
 - Understand why they enjoy their profession
- Explain why you will be good at or are looking forward to a career in medicine



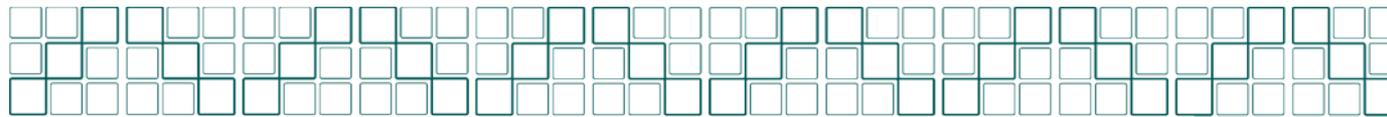
Things to consider while planning the document:

- What sets me apart from other applicants?
- Why am I interested in this field?
- What experiences have stimulated and reinforced my interest?
- Are there any gaps or discrepancies in my academic record?
- What skills or personal characteristics do I possess that would enhance my chances for success in this field?
- Have I overcome relevant obstacles in my life?
- What are my career aspirations?



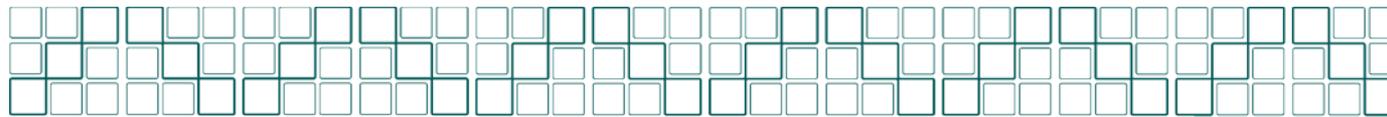
Things to consider while planning the document:

- Who do I want to be when I grow up?
- What does my day look like in ten years?
- What am I really good at? How does this relate to medicine? What evidence can I provide?



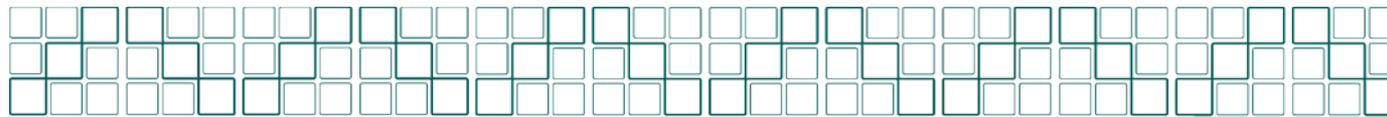
Fatal Flaws

- Lack of substance and supportive evidence
- Cliché ridden; Artificial language
- Failure to address the prompt
- Superficial
- Unfocused
- Lack of humanity or over emotional



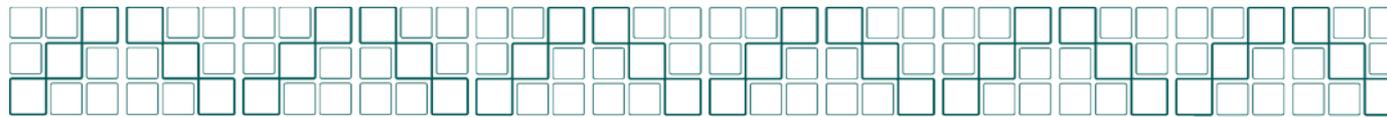
More Suggestions:

- “I want to help people...”
- “I want to cure cancer....”
- “I want to save the medical profession...”
- Humility
- Limit the use of “passion” to twice at most!
- Controversial social issues or religion
- Name dropping (good and bad)
- Excuses are out!
 - There is an art to explaining vs. giving an excuse.



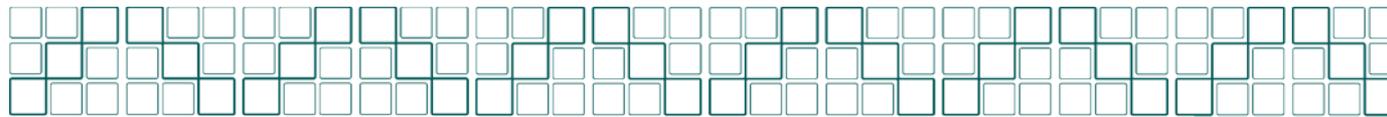
Remember

If you do not want to talk about it in an interview, do not write about it!

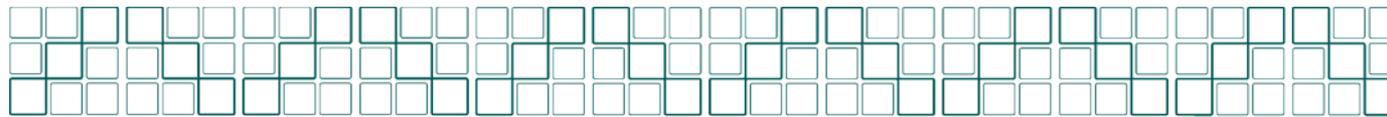


“Start your essay with an attention-grabbing lead--an anecdote, quote, question, or engaging description of a scene.”

Maybe, but not always...

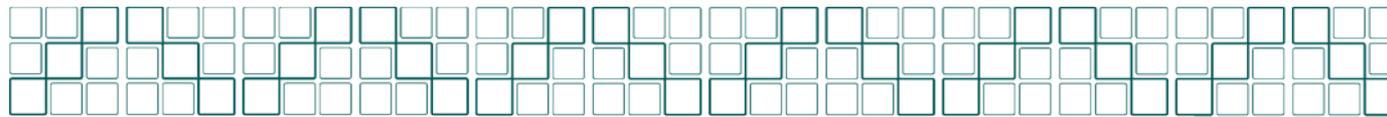


You don't know much about the
practice of medicine, so don't
pretend you do!



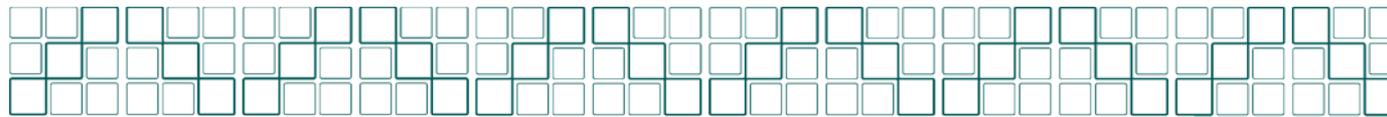
What do I write?

 How do I write it?



“While it is not necessary to be a stellar writer in the medical profession, good writing in general conveys your intelligence and your ability to articulate your thoughts in a clear, concise, and professional manner. To that end, it is important to ensure that your personal statement flows well and doesn’t break any major grammatical rules.”

Dean for Admissions

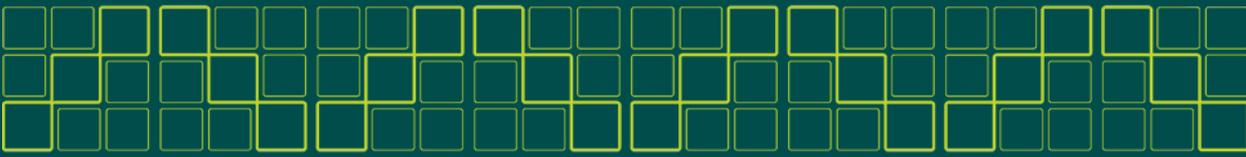


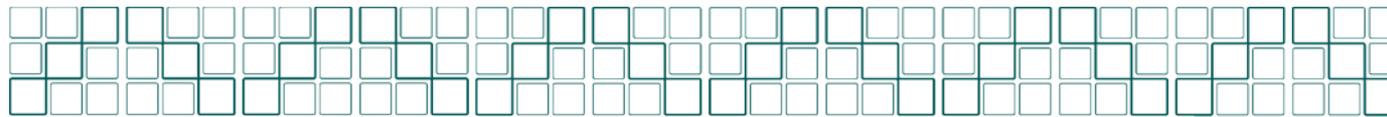
“Bad writing makes you look stupid.

Good writing covers a multitude of shortcomings.”

R. Compton, 2004

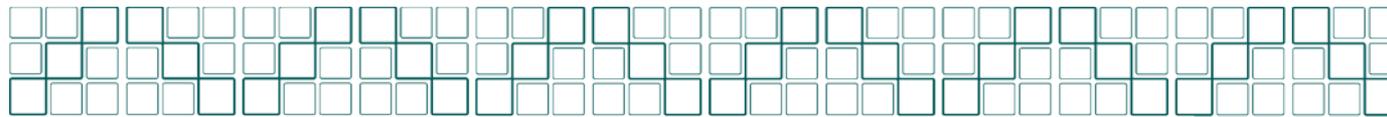
Important message: **how well you say it is as important as what you say!**



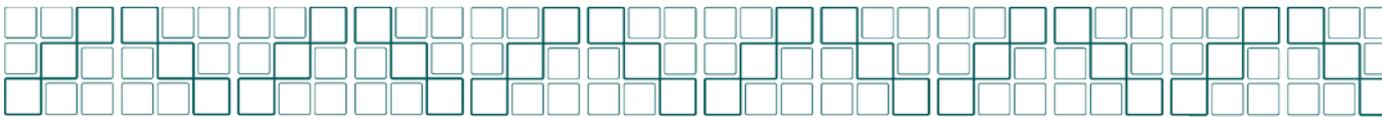


Writing:

- **Step 1:** the use of an essential resource
- **Step 2:** the actual writing process
- **Step 3:** review a few simple rules
- **Step 4:** the proper method for editing your own work



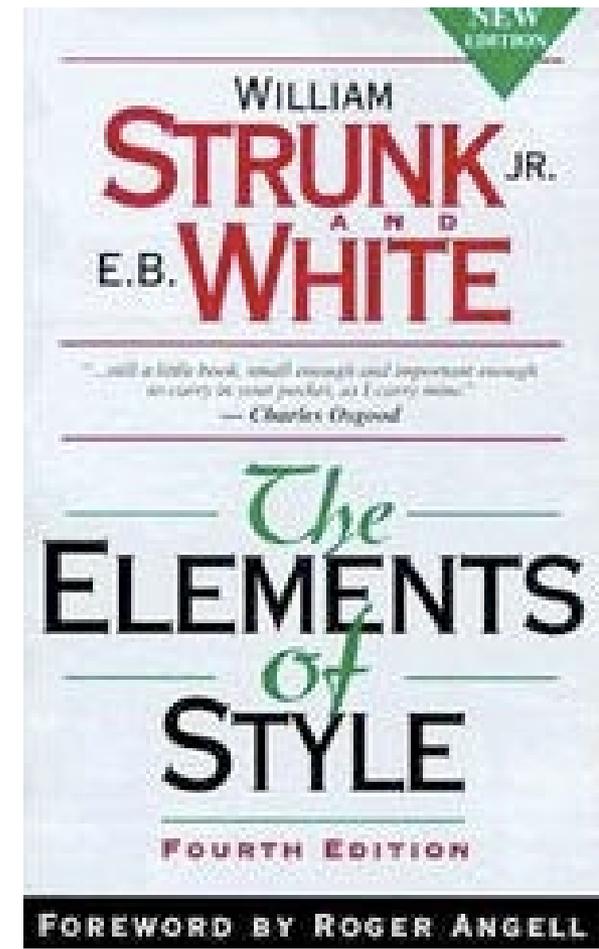
First, let us remember and pity
your reader.....

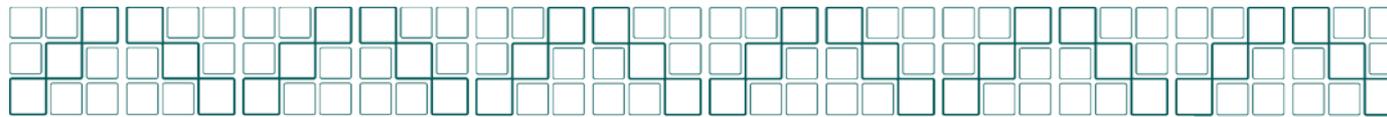


Step 1: the Resource

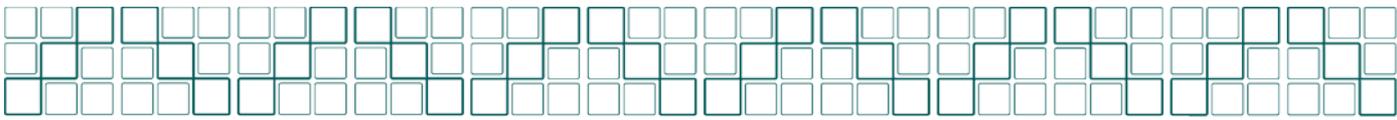
Strunk & White

*The Elements
of Style*



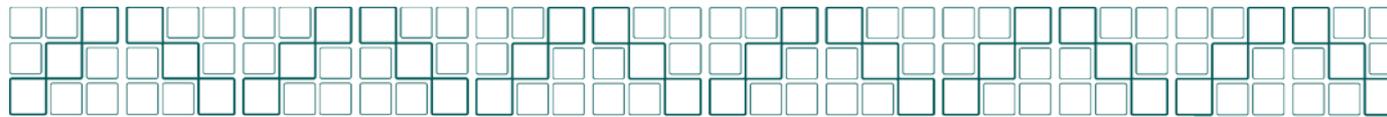


Read *The Elements of Style*
twice in the next two weeks and
then twice each year for the rest
of your life.



Step 2: The Writing Process

Two facts you must accept and remember when composing an essay.

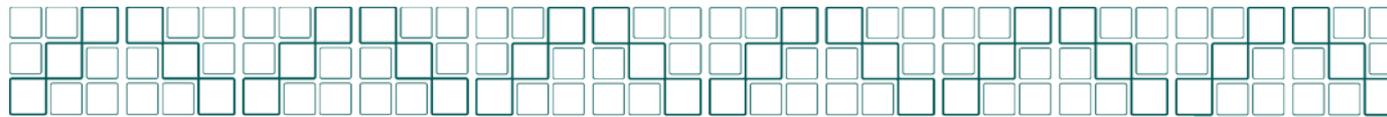


Step 2: The Writing Process

Fact #1:

Once you have it down on paper,
it is almost too late!

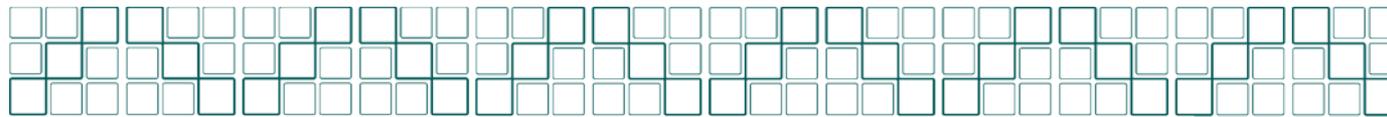
You may already be toast!



Chew gum and walk at the same
time?

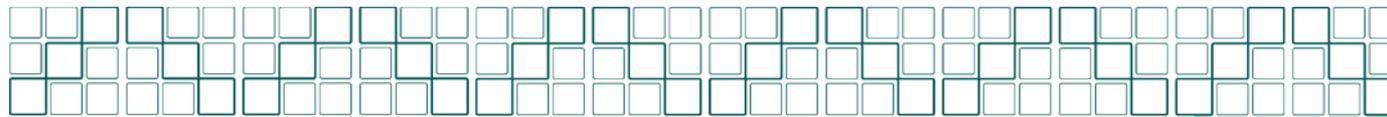
Fact #2:

You cannot compose,
type and think at the
same time?



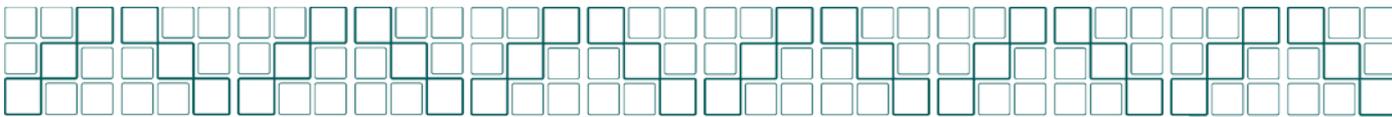
Finding your time

- In advance of the deadline
 - You must avoid writing under stress.
- Each day as part of your routine
- Making notes, but ***UNSTRUCTURED***
 - Not an outline!
- Use the Wall Method!
 - Do not use a written outline constructed in order in one sitting!

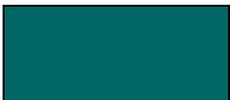


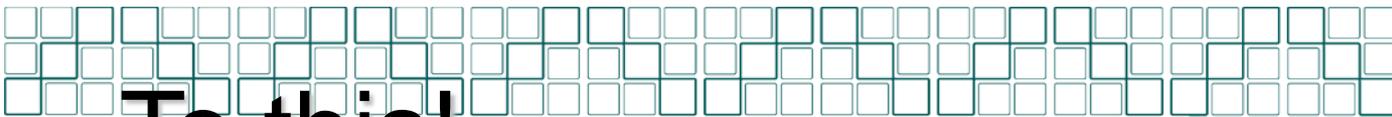
Organize your ideas

Only after you are finished assembling ideas and the outline flows, do you dare begin the actual writing process.

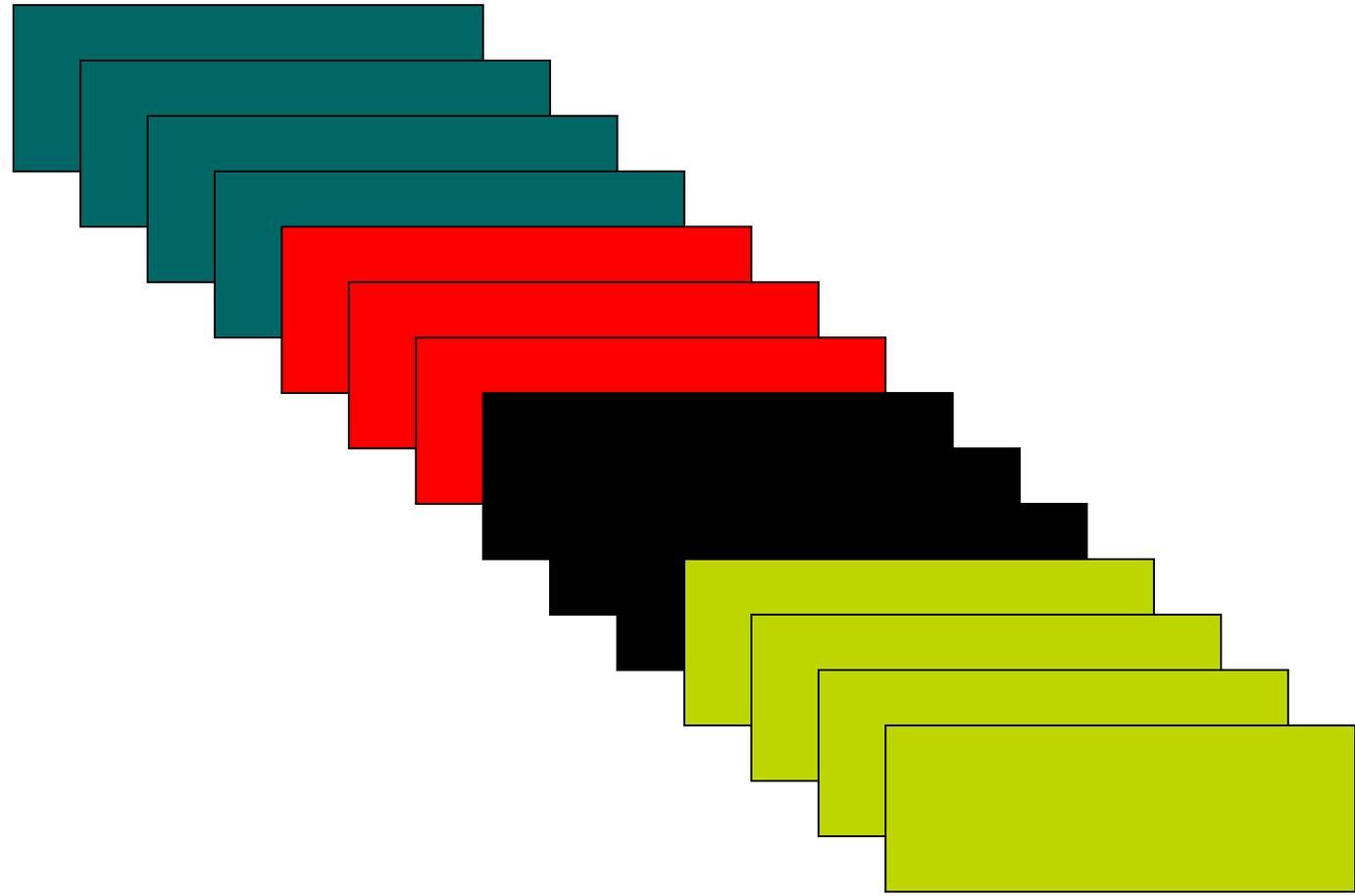


From this

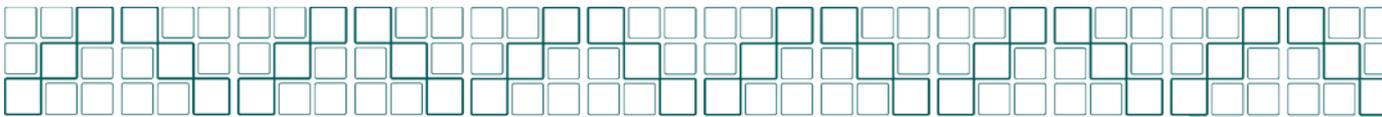




To this!

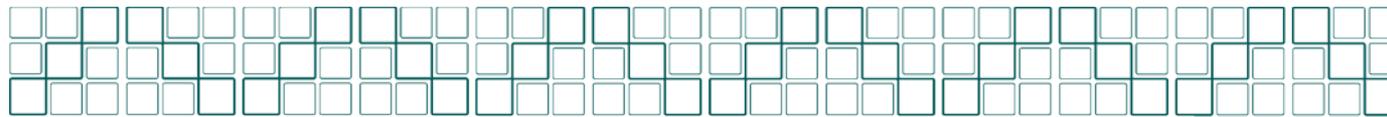


Then write!

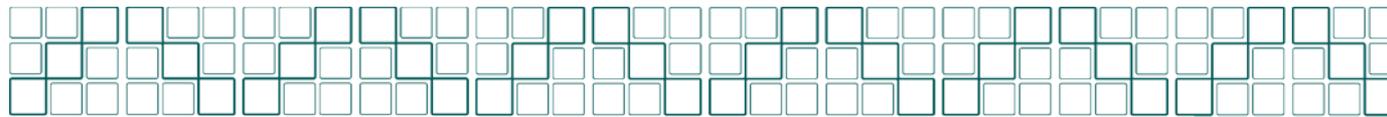


Organize your ideas

- Determine the flow
 - *Always put your Cadillacs in the front row of the lot*
- Begin to form the *story and theme*

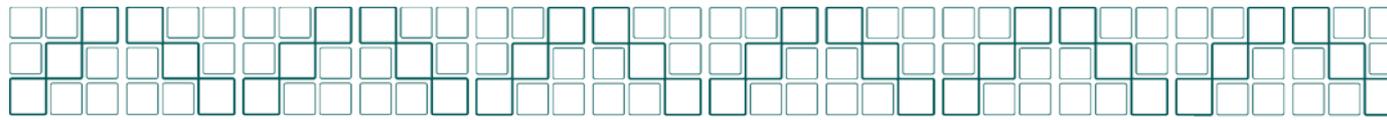


Step 3: A matter of style and grammar.



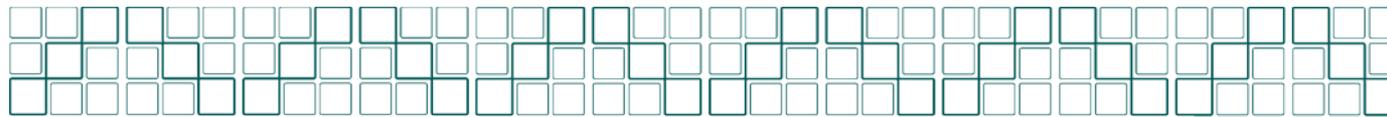
Things I have read in the past year....

- this inspirationally valiant doctor
- our intrapersonal duel between reality and hope
- I want to go to medical school because I think I would be a good doctor.
- I discovered that I possessed an innate inspiration for educating others in resolving misconceptions
- I hope to defend and make sure health care will always be inclusive, equitable, and fair for everyone.



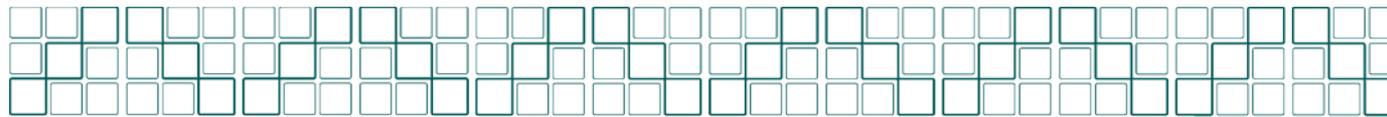
Things I have read in the past year....

- I believe that it is worth taking the time to thoroughly and methodically understand each assignment. As a result, throughout my academic career I have tended to miss deadlines.
- I wanted to possess the appropriate tools in my arsenal to attack all the burning questions and hone my skills as a scientist.
- the substantial ethos one must develop
- Worked with esteemed, heroic physicians....
- Being a doctor is right up my alley!



Good writing begins with strong verbs!

- ~ Always use the active voice.
- Write positive statements! Avoid the negative!
- Simple declarative sentences gives strength and structure to your writing.



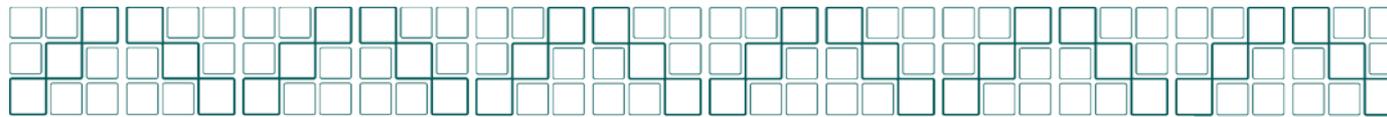
Overused phrases:

- Extensive experience
- Innovative
- Motivated
- Results-oriented
- Seamless
- Dynamic
- Passionate about
- Proven track record
- Team player
- Fast-paced
- Problem solver
- Entrepreneurial
- Life changing



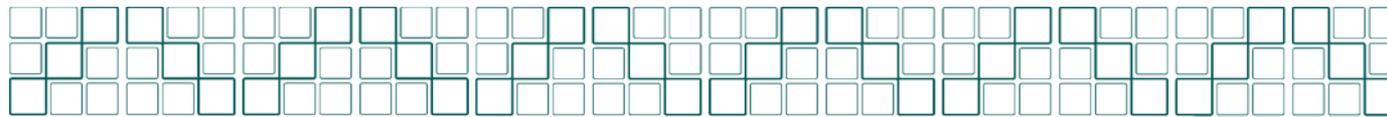
Higgins' s list of useless phrases:

- In terms of
- The ability to
- Based on
- Studies have shown that
- The data indicate that
- By means of
- Are able to



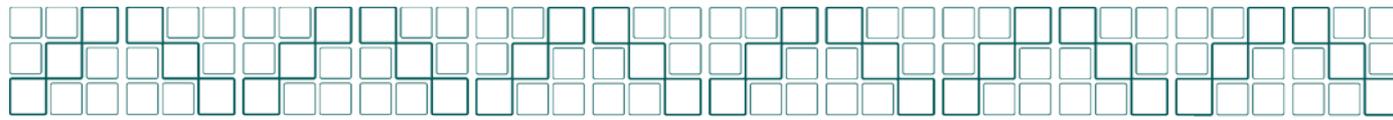
Higgins' s list of useless phrases:

- Function by
- It is believed that
- Appear to be
- Underlie
- Is thought to be
- Interacts with
- What happened was



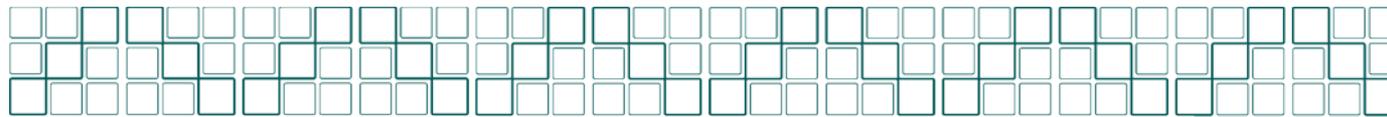
Higgins' s list of useless phrases:

- Is involved with
- Is associated with
- Alters *or* changes



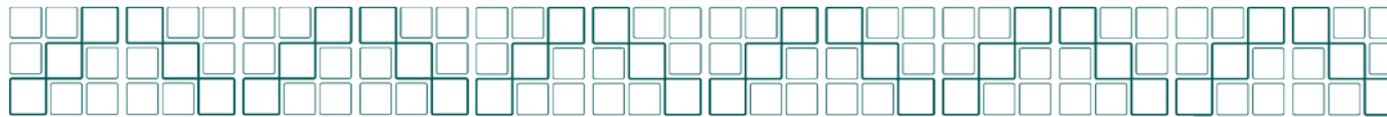
A major warning flag:

- Essentially
- In summary
- What I mean to say



Punctuate your sentences correctly!

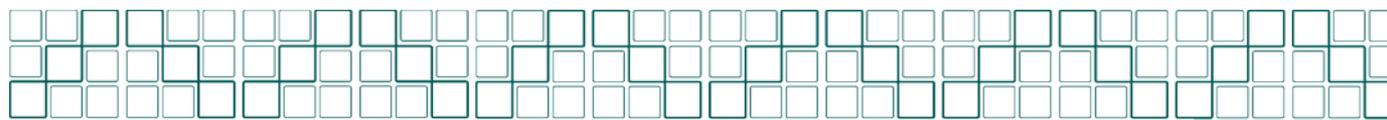
- Semicolon or comma?
- Colon?
- Dash?



Ugh!!!!

“I was attracted to and became passionate about medicine when I first spent some quality time in a hospital as a volunteer in the ER shuttling patients around and watching the attending physicians carry on with their normal routine or care for a serious emergency.”

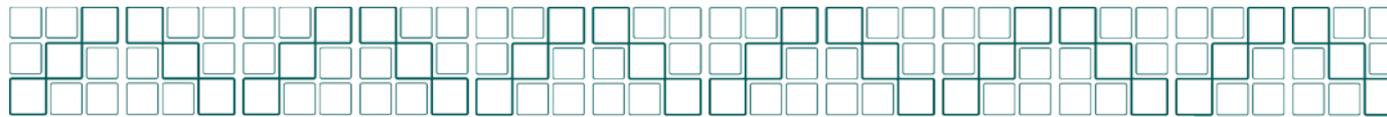
Anonymous, 2010



Ugh!!!!

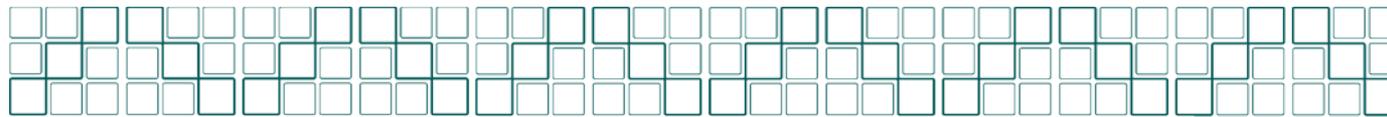
“I was attracted to and became passionate about medicine when I first spent some quality time in *a hospital* as a volunteer in the ER shuttling patients around and watching the attending physicians carry on with their normal routine or care for a serious emergency.”

Anonymous, 2010



Step 4: Editing

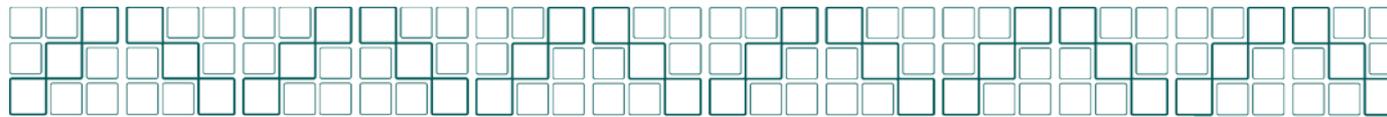
Patience & Diligence



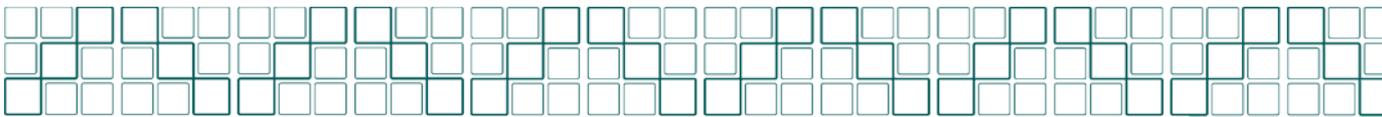
Diligence

Begin by reading it aloud.

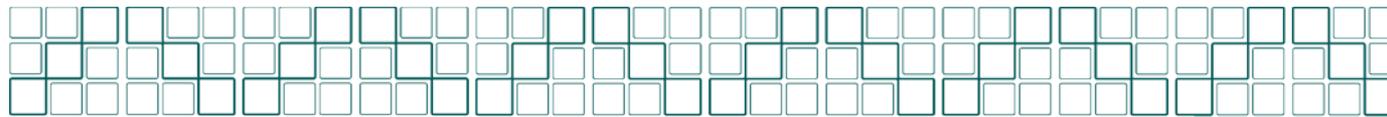
If you wouldn't say it in conversation,
don't write it!



Always underline the subject and verb in each sentence, and be certain the verb is **active**, **appropriate** to the subject, and **definite**.

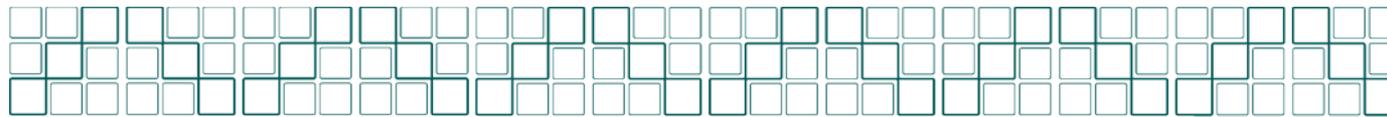


Examine each sentence.
Eliminate needless ~~non-essential~~
words!



Diligence: check each paragraph

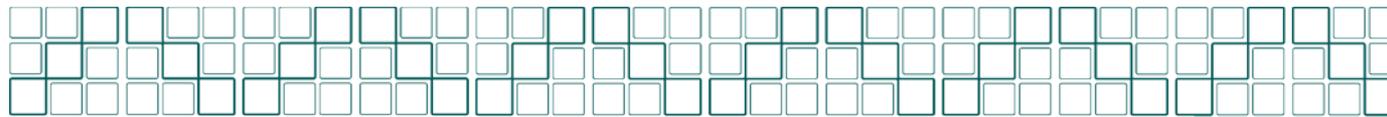
- Identify the structure
- Check for the transition
- Read each one aloud
- Delete empty phrases and extra words
 - Remove one-half of your adjectives.



Threads of continuity

Documents should be linear!

Outline your document after you are finished to be certain!

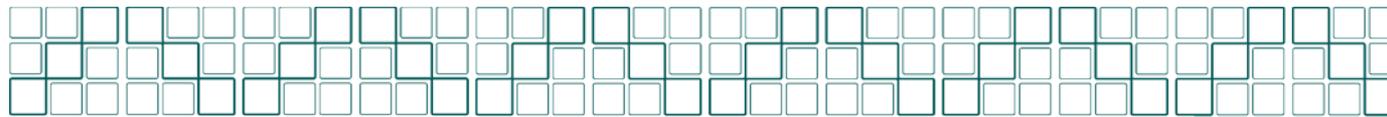


Spell check!

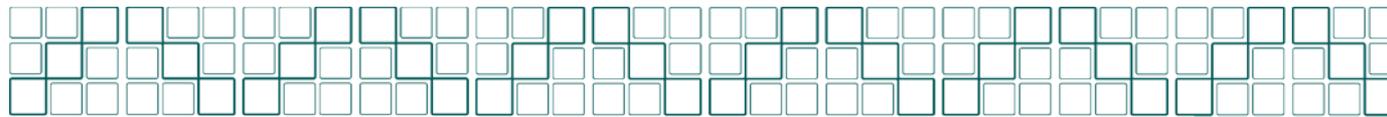


The final edits by ‘friends’

Is it clear, linear, readable, and
you?



OITE Staff will give you **ONE**
review of your FINAL draft!



Thank you!

Questions?

Appointments made via the scheduling
tool on the OITE website:

www.training.nih.gov