

# ESSAY WRITING FOR HEALTH PROFESSION SCHOOL APPLICATIONS

Prehealth Advising  
12-185, (617) 715-5328  
[http://gecd.mit.edu/grad\\_school/health](http://gecd.mit.edu/grad_school/health)

# Purpose of Workshop

- Review role of essay in the application process
- Clarify content of the essay
- Review structure and style of the essay
- Discuss how to start writing
- Provide writing resources

# What is a Personal Essay?

- A brief narrative that describes your past experiences and future goals.
- It provides the opportunity to:
  - Present goals and values
  - Highlight strong points and abilities
  - Distinguish yourself from other applicants
  - Make a positive and lasting first impression

# Suggested Approaches:

- Stories:
  - Capture the audience's attention
  - Invite the reader into a personal experience
  - Reveal personal characteristics through metaphor, analogies, and symbolism
- Actual experiences:
  - Allow you to show rather than tell
  - Provide examples of skills and abilities

# Possible Topics...

- Life events and changes
- Achievements
- Significant people in your life
- MIT experience
- Influential books or quotes
- Extracurricular activities
- Employment experiences
- Travel experience

# Steps To Essay Writing

## Pre-write:

- Determine your theme/topic/supporting points
- Prepare an outline or diagram of your ideas

## Essay structure:

- Introduction
- Supporting paragraphs to (~3 paragraphs)
- Conclusion

# To Get You Started...

## Questions to ask yourself:

- Why did you choose this career path?
- What were some turning points in your life?
- What were some of the biggest challenges in your life, and how did you handle them?
- What person or event influenced you the most, and how?
- What were the reasons for the major decisions in your life?
- What are your future goals, and why?

# Writing Tips

- Keep it simple:
  - Don't focus on too many experiences
  - Don't write the same information about an experience you already provide in your application
- “Show” instead of “telling” the reader:
  - Use examples and stories to illustrate how you have used desirable skills or traits in the past
  - Convey your thoughts and feelings about what you have learned from your experiences

# Writing Tips (cont.)

- Explain weaknesses  
(grades, exam scores, lack of experience, etc.)
  - Be brief. Don't make long-winded excuses.
- Distinguish yourself
  - Focus on the aspects of your candidacy that make your application unique

# Common Pitfalls

- Using highly technical language
- Trying to be too creative (e.g., writing poetry)
- Discussing why you **didn't** think medicine, dentistry, or another health profession was for you

# Common Pitfalls (cont.)

- Claiming that you've wanted to be a doctor or other health professional since birth
- Starting your essay with "I want to be a doctor because..."
- Overusing "I" to start sentences

# Be Cautious Of...

- Providing more information about someone else than about yourself
  - ex. Sick family member, someone who inspired you in life, etc.
- Delicate/emotional experiences in your life (ex. Death, personal illness or disabilities, etc.)
  - Whatever is in your essay has potential to be discussed in the interview.
- Religious or political convictions
  - How important is it to you that schools have this information about you?

# Character Count by Application Service (including spaces)


- AMCAS: 5300 [allopathic]
- AACOMAS: 4500 [osteopathic]
- AADSAS: 4500 [dental]
- VMCAS: 5000 [veterinary]
- PHARMCAS: 4500 [pharmacy]
- AACPMAS: 4500 [podiatry]
- CASPA: 5000 [physician assistant]
- OPTOMCAS: 4500 [optometry schools]
- PTCAS: 4500 [physical therapy schools]

# Medical School Essays

AMCAS Essay: *“Use the space provided to explain why you want to go to medical school.”*

- 5300 characters or less (approx. 1 page)
- 2 additional essays required for MD-PhD
  - Significant Research Experience
  - Why MD-PhD
- Use text-only format and software if you plan to cut and paste
- Grammar is important- correct capitalization and punctuation
- Proofread carefully! Changes cannot be made once you have submitted your AMCAS

# AMCAS Website

American Medical College  
Application Service


MAIN MENU
Help
Contact Us
Log Off

2009 Application
Denise Great Doctor | AAMC ID: 12298729

1. Identifying Information	2. Schools Attended	3. Biographic Information	4. Course Work	5. Work/Activities	6. Letters of Evaluation	7. Medical Schools	8. Essay(s)	9. Standardized Tests
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### PERSONAL COMMENTS

Use the space provided to explain why you want to go to medical school. The available space for your response is 5300 characters, or approximately one full page. You will receive an error message if you exceed the available space. For additional assistance, click "help" on the tool bar at the top of the screen. \*

[What information should I consider including in my personal comments?](#)

dfgdfg

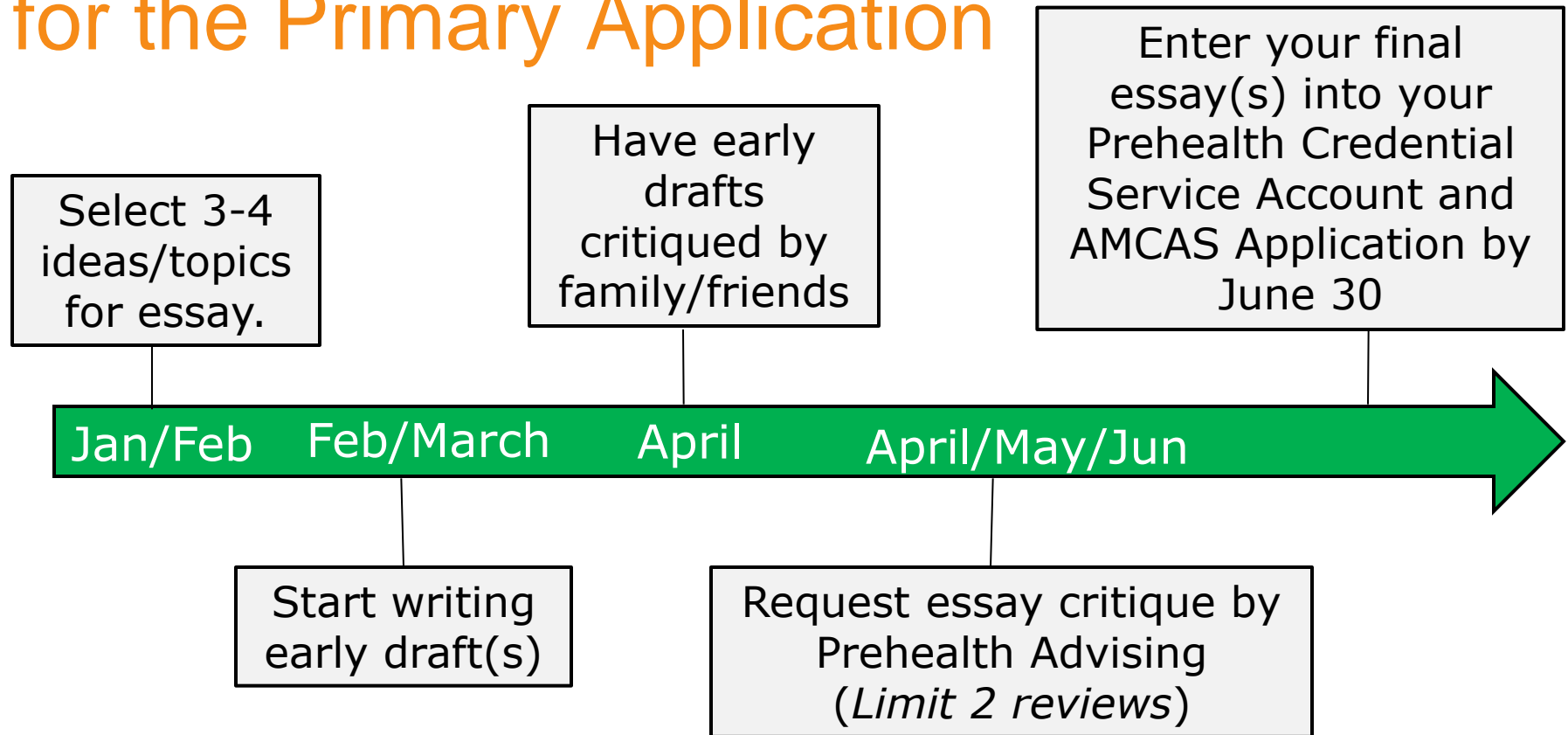
**Character Count:**  (maximum 5300 characters)

Back
Continue

**ESSAY(S)** ▾

Personal Comments	Complete
<a href="#">Section Summary</a>	

# Suggested Essay Writing Timeline for the Primary Application



***Expect to write at least 6 drafts before submitting a final version for your application.***

# Solicit Feedback

- Review your essay with the Prehealth Advising staff and/or your Prehealth Advisor
  - *DEADLINE TO REQUEST A CRITIQUE FROM PREHEALTH ADVISING IS JUNE 15<sup>th</sup>*
- Ask for feedback from someone who knows you well
  - Does this essay sound like you?
- Ask for feedback from someone who does not know you well
  - What did the person learn about you through the essay?
  - Does their image of you match what you were hoping to portray in the essay?

# Primary Application Essay Critique

Options: ***DEADLINE JUNE 15***

## **Option #1: Appointments**

- Call 617-715-5328 to make an in-person or phone appointment.
- Send your essay via email as a word document 24 hours prior to your appointment.

## **Option #2: Email Critiques**

- Email prehealthessaycrits@mit.edu with a Word copy of your essay. (please no PDFs)

## **Essay Critique Policy**

- Applicants may submit their AMCAS/primary application essay for a maximum of 2 critiques.
  - MD-PhD applicants may receive one additional essay critique for the MD-PhD essay prompt on AMCAS.
- Expect to receive your critique within 3-4 business days of requesting an email critique, especially during peak busy times (May through July)

# Secondary Application Essays

Additional essays for secondary applications

- Done in response to a specific prompt
- Should be different than AMCAS essay
- Should relate to the school asking the question

Secondary applications are sent approximately immediately-6 weeks after your primary application (ex. AMCAS) has been verified and processed.

# Sample Secondary Application Essays

**Albany Medical School:** If selected for an interview, what one life experience would you most like to talk about? (160 char limit)

**Albert Einstein:** Imagine that it is the year 2030. What would you like to have accomplished thus far in your life, and how did Albert Einstein Medical School help you achieve these goals? (max 6500 characters)

**Columbia:** What satisfactions do you expect to receive from your activities as a physician?(2475 characters)

**Yale:** Write an essay in which you discuss your interest in the Yale University School of Medicine. (limit 500 words)

Additional sample secondary essays can be found on  
[www.studentdoctor.net](http://www.studentdoctor.net)

# Writing Resources

- Prehealth Advising Staff (12-185)
- Prehealth Advisor (if applicable)
- MIT Writing Center: The Writing Process  
*[http://web.mit.edu/writing/Writing\\_Process/writingprocess.html](http://web.mit.edu/writing/Writing_Process/writingprocess.html)*
- Books: GECD Library
- MIT Online Writing and Communication Center  
*<http://web.mit.edu/writing/>*
- Sample Essays available in the Career Bridge Resource Library:  
*<https://www.myinterfase.com/mit/student/>*

# Essay Critique Activity

Review the following 2-3 essays from the admissions perspective. Ask yourselves the following questions:

- What did you like about the essay?
- Are there areas in the essay that you think needed improvement or further clarification?
- Did the essay give you a clear understanding of the person's motivation for medical school, etc.?
- Did the essay pique your interest in the candidate enough to offer the person an interview?