

# Critical Elements of an AMCAS Essay

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# Goals

- Express your genuine **motivation**
  - revelation by epiphany
  - insidious in origin
- Show your personal **attributes**
  - academic credentials
  - personality traits

# Message

- Clear, concise, and correct
  - clarity in paragraphs
  - frugal use of words
  - full use of space
  - accuracy in spelling
  - accuracy in grammar
  - accuracy in punctuation

# Message

- Have a **theme** in your essay
- Use a **format** of compelling beginning and conclusive end
- Focus more on **positives** than negatives
- Focus more on **self** than others quoted in the essay
- Take **time** to write

# Message

- Express with **honesty**
- Let the essay be **unique** to your circumstances
- Use **simple** words (not a show of vocabulary)
- Have the essay **reviewed** by someone unbiased and knowledgeable

# Expression

- Anecdotal
  - captivating stories
  - be cautious of over-interpretation
- Type of language
  - active expression
  - passive expression
  - balance

# Caution

- Conventional versus unconventional approach
- Use of humor
- Avoid cliché expressions
  - \* “----- because I love people”
  - \* “----- because I love science”
  - \* “----- as long as I can remember”
  - \* “----- made me who I am today”
- Avoid professional essays

# Example of a Good Essay



## Compelling Beginning:

- Like many applicants preparing to write this critical essay, I read samples from Barron's and attended my school's pre-med meetings looking for insights into the perfect medical school application. Many of the stories I heard or read contained dramatic examples of a life changing event that led the person to medical school. I have no such event. Neither do I have a family tree of physicians who inspired me to choose medicine, nor any unpleasant medical experience that I could remedy by becoming a doctor. In fact, if you were to put this essay into a headline, it would simply read, "Service and Science Guide Girl to Medicine."

# Humility:

- I attended both Catholic grade school and high school. A Catholic education in the Midwest is all about service with just a touch of education thrown in for our own good. I remember the ladies at CM Retirement Home looking forward to my piano concerts even though I played the same three songs every week throughout fifth grade. By eighth grade I was volunteering at ChildServe, a residential home for children with special health care needs in chronic developmental and physical conditions. Some of the children communicated by blinking, had frequent seizures, or couldn't control their movements. Even as an eighth grader I felt completely comfortable with these children, playing dolls and reading stories.

## Communication:

- In college, I volunteer at Yale-New Haven Hospital. Most pre-med students think that the ideal volunteer hospital job is in the Emergency Department. It isn't. The ideal job is the book cart. I meet the patients, their families, the doctors and the nurses. Though I never know what I will encounter walking into a patient's room, like seeing my much feared organic chemistry professor, I do know that the patients want to talk. They want to talk about their children, soap operas, even my hometown and roommates, basically anything but their medical condition. I am happy to oblige. I love to talk and am as comfortable talking about whether Brad and Angelina will get married as whether Bill and Hillary will get divorced.

# Humor:

- While my interest in service came from my education and upbringing, my interest in science and medicine is self-motivated. No one in my family is a doctor. My nearest medical relative was my grandmother's first cousin, Dr. Wentworth, who stitched my father's head together after a blow from his brand new Eddie Mathews' baseball bat. ...For me, the study of human biology, delving into details of how tissues and organs work together to adapt to the environment or to repair themselves, is not rote memorization. It is an appreciation of the amazing, almost inconceivable group of happy accidents that are necessary for human life. Biology is elegant and I love those "Aha!" moments when it seems that I have learned the secret code, the way things work. It would be wonderful to take this academic love and make it my life's work.

## Compelling Conclusion:

- Science is based on an understanding of our innermost workings, what keeps us going or makes us stop. Medicine is more than that; it is a tangible way to help others, to relieve their pain. This is the beauty of a medical career. I can be of service to others in a concrete way while using my talents in an area of science which I love. If you are lucky, a very few times in your life, maybe only once, you have a minor epiphany, a decision that seems so right that once you make it everything you have done and hope to do fits into place. For me, that moment came when I decided to become a doctor.