

# Grammatical Rules for Writing Personal Statements

Please Note: any of the grammar points will not keep you from getting into health school as you will find errors of this kind in the essays that follow. All of the following essays were written by students who were accepted to health schools. However, these grammar errors can be an eyesore and stick out to the reader, therefore, hurting your application. The grammar points given here are not all inclusive to the rules you should follow when writing your essay. They are common errors in personal essays that should be avoided and will strengthen your application. For the essays, the collection of essays presented here for you are not all the best, nor are they all the worse. They are examples of very strong essays as well as ones that are a bit weak; however, they all were accepted to the type of school they desired. These essays should serve as a model, and hopefully will help you gather ideas about what you want to tell an admissions committee about yourself.

## Grammar

- Basic Grammar Rules:
  - While both are correct in the English language, *toward* is American and *towards* is British. Therefore, when you write use *toward* and not *towards*.
  - Premed or Premedical is one word. Pre-vet, Pre-dental, and the like are all hyphenated.
  - Healthcare is one word. In the past it has been hyphenated, however, now it is considered to be a single word.
- Abbreviations:
  - When giving the name of something that has an abbreviation for the first time in a document, always give the full name and then the abbreviation in parenthesis.
  - In your personal statements there are a few common abbreviations for which you do not necessarily need to give the full name: ER, OR, OB/GYN.
- Apostrophes:
  - Singular: The *farmer's* crop was bought by the city.
  - Plural: The city buys ten of the local *farmers'* crops.
- Capitalization:
  - The seasons of the month are not capitalized.
  - When dealing with places, the location in reference to a compass is not capitalized unless it is well known. For example: *East Asia* and *South Africa* are capitalized, whereas *northern California* and *southern Beijing* are not.
  - Adjectives derived from proper nouns retain their capitalization. For example: We visited a *Buddhist temple* during our trip to Tibet.
  - Proper nouns are capitalized, along with titles (*France, the King of Spain*).
  - When places are preceded by a definite article, the definite article is not capitalized. For example: *the Philippines*.
- Classes/Subjects:
  - A general subject or class such as biology, genetics, computer science, biochemistry, etc. is not capitalized.

- If you are referring to a specific class, such as JSD's Accelerated Introductory Chemistry or Professor David Sadava's Biology of Cancer class, then it becomes a title to a specific course and, consequently should be capitalized.
- Commas:
  - When you are writing a series or a list, there are some general rules:
    - If there are only two items in your list then there is no comma. For example: I had a *peanut butter and jelly* sandwich for lunch.
    - If there are more than two items in a list, there should be a comma after each one, including the one before the *and* unless you want to group two of the items on the list together. For example: Three characteristics I would say describe myself are *friendliness, compassion, and empathy*. (These are separate characteristics).
- Ellipses:
  - There are three periods/dots in ellipses: no more, no less.
  - Also, there should not be any spaces between the ellipses and the words they follow or precede. For example: *On the count of three...one...two...three!*
- Em Dash:
  - The Em Dash is used commonly in the English language, but it is sometimes mistakenly represented as -- instead of —.
  - There are several ways to create an Em Dash:
    - One is by pushing the combination Ctrl+Alt+Num.
    - You can also find it in the Special Characters in the Insert: Symbol section.
    - Finally you can create an Em Dash by inserting two regular dashes between the last letter of your first word and the first letter of your second word (there should be no spaces). Then, after the second word is complete and you press the space bar, the two dashes should turn into the longer, correct Em Dash.
- Hyphens:
  - Ages are hyphenated when they are modifying a noun. For example: *ten-year-old* boy. They are not hyphenated otherwise.
  - Any set of words that you want to characterize a single attribute should be hyphenated, for example: He was your *run-of-the-mill* boy.
  - Some single attributes are also so common that they are no longer hyphenated but are one word. For example: The boy was a *redhead* with blue-green eyes and a warm smile.
- Numbers:
  - The journalistic style is to write out numbers one through ten and then spell out any others.
  - The literary style is to write out any number that can be spelled in two or less words. This includes anything one hundred or less, as well as numbers like one million, etc.

- Either of these rules is fine to use in your essays, however, please stick to one and use it throughout all of your writing.
- Spacing:
  - When people used typewriters they put two spaces between their sentences.
  - However, word processors automatically add the extra space needed when you end a sentence and start a new one. Therefore, you should only put one space between a period and the beginning of a new sentence.
- Symbols:
  - Spell out “percent,” “number,” “and,” and “dollars.”
  - Do not use the “%,” “#,” “&,” and “\$” symbols. These symbols have a use; however, their use is not for literary purposes, but for accounting, mailing, legal, etc.
- *You and I*:
  - While it is commonly used in many documents, including this one, try to avoid using the word *you*.
  - *You* is okay in documents that give advice or instructions; however, it should be avoided in personal statements as you do not know who will be reading your essay.
  - There is one exception to this rule, and that is in dialogue, or quotations, where the *you* is directed at someone specifically in your recounting of an event.
  - While it is not a good idea to use *you* in the body of your essay, you should use the word *I*, since your personal statement is about why you want to become a part of a specific healthcare field. You are telling your reader(s) about yourself.
- Miscellaneous:
  - For foreign names and words, use what is generally accepted—either the English translation or the original form. (This is more a problem with languages like Greek, Danish, Latin, etc. which have diagraphs. One example is *Ædipus* and *Oedipus*. While both are correct, the later is much more generally accepted than the former in the English language).