

How to write a good personal statement

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Demonstrate understanding

- Public Health
- Your desired track(s)
 - Separate statements for each track

Public Health is the health of the population as a whole.

Can anyone explain what ... HPM, BIOS, EPI, CHSS, EOHS is about? Using the example of asthma in children.

EOHS – Measures the amount of air pollutants that children are inhaling. Advise on how to reduce allergens in apartments.

HPM – Makes a policy financially penalizing landlords who don't take action to reduce allergens. Lobbies for health insurance to cover asthma medication.

EPI and BIOS – Do allergens cause asthma? How many children have asthma? How many people die from it? On average how much does asthma shorten someone's life?

CHSS – Develops a program training parents to use inhalers. Organizes community to protest bus depot in their neighborhood. Develops awareness campaign of the symptoms of asthma.

Let's use the example of mesothelioma. Mesothelioma is a rare, aggressive form of cancer that develops in the lining of the lungs, abdomen, or heart. Caused by asbestos, mesothelioma has no known cure and has a very poor prognosis. People who have worked with or been [exposed to asbestos](#) have the highest risk of developing mesothelioma.

EOHS – Measures the amount of asbestos that workers are inhaling. Advise on proper protective equipment.

HPM – Makes a policy financially penalizing employers who don't take action to reduce asbestos exposure. Lobbies for health insurance to cover mesothelioma treatment.

EPI and BIOS – Does asbestos cause mesothelioma? How many people have mesothelioma? How many people die from it? How many people have been exposed to asbestos?

CHSS – Develops a program training workers to use protective equipment. Organizes community to protest unsafe work conditions. Develops awareness campaign of the symptoms of mesothelioma.

Be specific

- Use examples
 - It doesn't have to be personal

Demonstrate your understanding of the field by giving good examples.

Broad: Lots of people die from AIDS and I want to do something about that.

Specific: 25% of my country is living with AIDS, and nearly half of them are under the age of 15 and I want to develop a program in schools for teenagers teaching them how to negotiate safe sex.

If you have a personal story that's great but if not that's also okay.

Connect your past to your future

- Prior experience
 - Skills
 - Knowledge

We ask that applicants have at least one year of experience in public health. What does that mean?

1 – Work, volunteer, intern

2 – Public health is a really broad field so you may not realize it but you have experience

3 – Even if you can't connect your experience to public health, you have skills that are transferrable

4 – Such as if you have a degree in English, you can transfer your skills in analyzing text and writing up your conclusions to qualitative research.

Address the elephant in the room

- GPA
- Gaps on resume
- Career change

If your GPA is below a 3.0, then discuss it in your personal statement, because everyone is thinking about it anyway. Sometimes the reason behind the low GPA is related to your motivation for public health. For example, someone told me that her undergraduate GPA was low because her niece was taken away by child services and she spent a lot of time dealing with that, and this was part of the reason she wanted to go into public health, so no one else would have to deal with it. If you have gaps on your resume, or if you are changing your career, address that. For example, I spoke to a doctor that was now managing a store. I don't know the whole story why, but it certainly raises a flag. If you had to take medical leave and so you don't have a job listed for a year, talk about it.

If your GPA is low, my advice is to score very well on the GRE and/or take additional undergraduate classes which will be used in your overall GPA calculation and may bring your GPA up to acceptable standards.

Tell me something I don't know

- Avoid platitudes
- Use stats with a purpose
- What are you going to do about the problem at hand?

1 – I have always wanted to be part of something greater than myself

2 – We know malaria is endemic in your country. We know how many people don't have health insurance. We know the government isn't doing a good job. What don't I know? What are you going to do about it? That's new information.

3 – Don't just list a lot of facts

Why do you need an MPH?

- Be explicit
- Explain what you will do with your MPH

1 – I see essays where people write about how they want to be a doctor. You don't need an MPH to be a doctor. You do need an MPH if you want to go beyond treating individuals and address populations. Do you want to treat the person with a broken arm, or do you want to explore why there are so many patients with broken arms in your hospital? Maybe you know that you want to be a doctor that does public health, but you didn't explicitly state this in your statement. The admissions committee cannot read between the lines – say it.

2 – If you want to work one on one with clients, then social work may be more suited to you. This is not to say social work isn't compatible with public health; it is, but if I saw that essay I'd ask why you're getting an MPH instead of psych degree.

Tips

- Length
 - 500 words
- Proofread
- Format
- You're not bound by what you write

- 500 words, give or take a few. Committee wants to see that you can write concisely.
- Proofread, proofread, proofread. Read it yourself, give it to friends. Especially if English is not your first language.
- Make it look nice. Double space, font 12, times new roman, ariel, nothing too fancy
- If you write that you want to focus on elderly populations but during the program realize you prefer teenagers, that's okay. No one is going to throw you out the program because you changed your mind. Interests evolve.