

INTERNAL APPLICATION ESSAYS AND OTHER UPLOADS FOR LINKAGE AND GENERAL CYCLE APPLICANTS

Introduction

The main work of the internal application is the composition of a clear, comprehensive, and self-reflective account of your life (emphasizing your experiences as an adult) and of the circumstances that have led you to pursue a career in health care. The statements you will write fall into two categories:

- (1) Essays for internal use by the Columbia GS Premedical Committee; and
- (2) Drafts of your personal statement, work & activities entries, and select secondary application responses, revised versions of which you will use in your common and secondary applications.

For General Applicants, there are five mandatory essays, while for linkage applicants there are six. All applicants can write a supplemental essay if they choose to; in practice, very few of these optional essays are submitted. Ideally, the contents of the essays should complement the contents of the personal statement, the work & activities entries of the common application, and secondary responses, rather than replicate them.

The five or six essays are for internal use. They won't be sent to medical schools. We are not grading the essays (assuming you have made a good faith effort to write them). Rather, they are a source of information for the purpose of writing the committee letter. Furthermore, writing these essays will compel you to revisit your past, ponder your most important experiences, and explicate your choices and decisions. All of this is crucial preparation for the tasks of writing your personal statement, work & activities entries, and secondary applications, and eventually preparing for interviews. We recommend that you write all the essays before you write your personal statement.

We are clearly asking you for a great deal of information about some of your most profound experiences, especially those that may have influenced your decision to pursue a career in health care. More than that, we are asking you to think deeply about those experiences. For some students, the work of pondering sensitive experiences may stir difficult or upsetting memories. We therefore wish to remind you of campus resources that may be able to help you process your feelings. These include:

- [Gender-Based Misconduct Office](#)
- [Disability Services](#)
- [Sexual Violence Response](#)
- [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#)

We also wish to remind you that all University faculty members, staff members, and administrators, with the exception of those working in a confidential capacity (e.g., counselors, sexual violence response advocates, medical providers, and clergy) who learn of suspected instances of discrimination, harassment or gender-based misconduct, directly or indirectly, have a duty to refer the information immediately to the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action

(<http://eoaa.columbia.edu/contacts>) or the Gender-Based Misconduct Office (studentconduct.columbia.edu/gbm.html). Such reports may result in outreach from the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action to ensure that you have access to pertinent forms of support, information, and guidance.

Uploading Documents

Students are required to upload the following to their internal applications:

- a photo (headshot)
- résumé
- the essays described below under I
- a first draft of your personal statement and a set of “work & activities” entries (discussed below under II)

Please consult the timeline for the date by which these and any other materials are due.

I. Internal Essays

ESSAY INSTRUCTIONS

The answers to the following questions will enable the Committee to get a better understanding of who you are and why you are applying to a health professional school. Your answers will form the groundwork for the essays you will need to write on your application and questions you will be asked in your interview. There are six sections below (for the five required and one optional essay). Under many of the essay prompts or themes, you will see a bulleted list of sub-questions. The purpose of these is to provide ideas about what to write and what we are interested in learning about you. You are not expected to address every question under the individual essay prompts.

Each essay should:

- include as a header your name and the title of the essay question;
- be individually paginated (i.e., you must include page numbers);
- be approximately 750 words (range 500-1,000 words) , typed, and double-spaced; and
- be stored in a separate file for uploading at the proper place in the online application form.

1. Autobiography

Please provide us with a concise chronological narrative of your life. Tell us about your childhood and growing up, and about events that shaped, defined and guided who you are and the choices that you have made. As appropriate, please tell us:

- Where are you from and where did you grow up? Were there significant events or transitions that directly or indirectly influenced your future educational or career choices?
- At any point in your life, would you consider yourself or your family to have been disadvantaged (socially, economically, or educationally)? Have you overcome any obstacles in your personal or educational life that may be you think are important for medical schools us to know about?
- Who are the members of your immediate or extended family who have been important to your development?
- Tell us about your upbringing. What adults—parents, grandparents, guardians, or others—were intimately involved in raising you. Please share some information about your parents or guardians, what they do (or did) for a living, and what level of education they attained (having the year/school/degree is often helpful).
- What sorts of responsibilities did you have in your family's household when you were growing up? Were you expected to work and contribute to the family's finances? Were you expected to care for siblings?
- Are there extracurricular interests, pursuits, or hobbies to which, at any point in your life, you devoted significant amounts of time or are meaningful to you (for example, music, sports, travel)? How have these pursuits benefited you and or other people in your life? (If you need an extended space in which to write about this subject, you are welcome to write a supplemental essay.)

2. Undergraduate Experience

Please reflect upon your experience as an undergrad and tell us about that experience.

- Why did you decide to attend your undergraduate school? What led you to your choice of major? What were the most important classes you took as an undergrad? What extracurricular activities were important to you? What do you consider your greatest accomplishment during your undergraduate career?
- What were your initial post-college career plans when you started college? How did those change as a result of your college experience? What in your college experience contributed to your decision to pursue further preparation for a health profession through premed work either as an undergrad or as a Postbac?
- Please address any poor or weak grades on your undergraduate transcript(s), including withdrawals and incompletes.
- If you attended more than one institution over the course of your undergraduate career (including summer study and study abroad), please list in chronological order the institutions attended, including dates, the reason you attended and why you left.

- If you took time off during your undergraduate career or if there is a gap in your record of attendance (e.g. leaves of absence, medical leaves), please explain the reason you interrupted your studies and what you did while you were away.
- If you worked 15 or more hours a week during your undergraduate and/or postbac studies, please mention that here and discuss in detail in your “Work Experience” essay.

3. Work Experience

- **[Postbacs:] If you took time off from academic study between your undergraduate degree and the Postbac Program**, what did you do in the intervening years? Please let us know about your employment and/or graduate school history. What led you on this path? What do you consider among the most influential experiences during this time? What are some of your career highlights? What lessons or skills did you learn that would be transferable to a career in medicine?
- **[Postbacs:] If you did not take time off between your undergraduate and Postbac study**, why did you decide to pursue your pre-professional studies after your bachelor’s instead of while an undergraduate; in other words, what led to your decision to enter the Postbac Premed Program. Also, describe to us what work experience you have had during college and the Postbac Program and what skills you think are pertinent to your desired career.
- **[Undergrads:] Tell us about your work experience or career.** If it led to an interruption or postponement of your studies, please explain the circumstances. If you have been working while pursuing your degree, it is important to discuss this situation and all the challenges it entails.
- **[Postbacs and undergrads:]** If you held internships or externships as an undergraduate or during graduate school, please write about them. What was their purpose? Were they integral to your academic studies? What did you learn from them? Did they help you launch a career?
- **[Postbacs and undergrads:] If you have worked 15 or more hours per week during either your undergraduate or postbac education**, please discuss this. Did you do so out of financial necessity or were there other compelling reasons? How did you manage the competing demands of study and work?

4. Health Profession Interest

- What led to your decision to enter the Postbaccalaureate Premedical Program? What brought you to the decision to pursue a career in health care? Be as concrete as possible. An understanding of the actual biographical circumstances that contributed to your interest in medicine may help you address the next prompt.
- Why health care? Most health professional school applicants cite the interaction with people, life-long learning, and helping others as reasons for wanting to enter the healthcare field. One could find these same satisfactions in other career choices, however; consequently, they are not sufficient reasons for choosing a career in medicine. While you are welcome to mention any of these factors, your answer needs to account for your desire to take on the acute and peculiar demands of the particular health care career you wish to pursue. Without focusing on the negative aspects of your previous career or pursuits, explain why health care is the appropriate career choice for you.

5. Experiences in Health Care

- Please discuss the health-related volunteer or work experiences you have had, specifying clinical, wet lab or dry lab. Describe the setting of each work site. Who did you work under? Were there peer workers? If so, how many? Were they also premeds?
- What have you learned about the health field through your health-related work experiences?
- What have you learned about *yourself* through these experiences? Is there an incident or event that occurred during your clinical volunteer or work experience that made an impression on you or that was a defining moment for you?
- If you have engaged in extensive research for the purpose of applying to MD/PhD programs, please indicate this briefly here and write a Supplemental Essay to discuss your research experiences.
- Many applicants to health professional school will have similar grades and similar exam scores. Without comparing yourself to others, explain what will make you stand out to an admissions committee. What makes you a good fit for your chosen profession?
- If you are applying to MD/PhD programs, explain what has led to this decision, and why you prefer the particular career path it affords through the field of medicine over an MD program. What can you point to in your experience to demonstrate that you have the right skills and temperament for such work? (Please write a Supplemental Essay to discuss your research experience to date.)

Linkage Program (For Postbac Premed Program applicants only)

[N.B. This essay is not due until December 1st to allow you time to visit schools.]

There are many obvious advantages in applying to health professional school through the Linkage Program, but it is important that an applicant be clear on why they are willing to commit to a particular school. Your informed decision is critical to this process. Students accepted by a linkage school are committed to attending that school. Explain in an essay the following:

- What about this school makes it the number one choice for you over all other schools?
- What steps have you taken to learn about your chosen school? (visits, contact with students, etc.)
- Why do you feel you will benefit from the opportunity to attend this particular school?
- What aspects of the school's curriculum or educational philosophy appeal to you?

Alternate school option: Postbacs pursuing linkage at a medical school have the option of designating an alternate to their first-choice linkage program prior to nomination. Designating an alternate school is not required, and we recommend that linkage candidates discuss the pros and cons of doing so with their advisors. It is important to consider that by identifying an alternate, you are authorizing the Premedical Committee to decide where to nominate you (candidates can be nominated only for a single school). We recommend that you choose an alternate if you would be genuinely happy to be nominated to either school and your main priority in the linkage process is to increase the likelihood

of matriculating in medical school next fall. If, on the other hand, your interest in linkage is exclusively bound up with a particular school, it might be best to decline to choose a backup in order to assure you are not nominated to a school to which you would be likely to decline the nomination. (N.B. This option is not available to linkage candidates to Columbia's dental school.)

If you wish to exercise this option, please use your linkage essay to write briefly about your first and second choices. Please include a heading in your document that clearly states the primary choice and the alternate choice, e.g. *First Choice: School X, Alternate Choice School Y*. Apart from that, the format of the essay is open-ended, but one obvious way to organize it might be to devote the first page and a half to two pages to a discussion of your first choice, and the last page (or page and a half) to a discussion of your second choice.

Supplemental Essay(s)

It is possible to submit more than one supplemental essay, although it is unlikely you will need to do so. The following are some of the reasons applicants may wish to submit a supplemental essay.

- If there is anything you believe is relevant to your application to medical school which does not fit neatly into any of the first five essay topics, you are invited to submit an additional, optional essay. Please note that writing this additional essay for its own sake confers no advantage to you as an applicant. Write it only if it enables you to give a fuller picture of yourself.
- If you are preparing to apply to MD/PhD programs, you should use this optional essay to discuss your research experiences to date.
- If you have ever been the subject of a disciplinary process as a student or have ever been convicted of a criminal offense, we encourage you to discuss this. (We also expect you to provide corroborating documentation and to authorize the school at which the disciplinary procedure occurred to communicate with your advisor.)

II. Common Application Materials and Secondary Responses

Personal statement

The common application invites you to provide a personal statement. It is an important opportunity to communicate to admissions committees about your accomplishments, but more especially about your motivations for a career in health care, and about the person you have become through your lived experience, and how that makes you a good fit for the profession. The AMCAS application for American MD medicine furnishes you with a grand total of 5300 characters, including punctuation and spaces, or about 1.25 pages; other common applications give you slightly less (4500 characters). So, the challenge is to distill pertinent information down to the quintessentials.

To meet that challenge, we recommend that you first write all the essays of the internal application. Those essays, which don't require the degree of polish that your personal statement will need, give you space to ruminate, reminisce, and reflect, activities that provide a foundation for drafting your personal statement. We require you to submit a draft as early as we do (see the application timeline for dates), because you need plenty of lead time to revise your statement repeatedly. In the process, you should draw on trustworthy resources and people to give you feedback. To help you develop and refine your personal statement GS engages the expertise of a professional writer who, as our Writing Consultant, offers workshops and with whom you can consult about your own statement, once you have a working draft. Your advisor provides another pair of eyes. This is why we ask prospective general applicants to send their advisors a revision of the personal statement one week before the portfolio review during the spring leading up to their application.

Work and Activities

When you apply to medical, veterinary, or dental school, you will fill out and submit the on-line common applications known as "AMCAS" (medical school), "VMCAS" (veterinary school), or "AADSAS" (dental school). This is a labor-intensive, time-consuming exercise which you will probably not be able to complete in a single sitting. One section of the application will invite you to provide capsule descriptions of those jobs, publications, extracurricular activities, awards, and honors you regard as important. The AMCAS application will also ask you to identify up to three of your experiences as "most meaningful," and give you additional space in which to explain why. Because it requires some thought and care to write these entries, it is important that you prepare these Work and Activities entries as part of your application to the Premedical Committee. Please write capsule entries for those experiences, commendations, or achievements outside the classroom you regard as important. You must write at least seven entries and may not write more than fifteen.

These entries should be saved in a single Word document and submitted as part of your internal application by the deadline indicated on the internal application timeline. Please submit your Work and Activities entries to us in the format outlined by AMCAS, VMCAS, or AADSAS.

- Premeds will find guidelines for completing the Work and Activities entries in the 2021 AMCAS Applicant Guide on the AMCAS website:
students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/applying-medical-school-process/applying-medical-school-amcas/
- Preveterinary students will find guidelines for such entries (under the rubric "Experiences") at:
help.liaisonedu.com/VMCAS_Applicant_Help_Center/Filling_Out_Your_VMCAS_Application/VMCAS_Supporting_Information/2_Experiences
- Predental students will find guidelines for completing such entries (under the rubrics "Achievements" and "Experiences") at:
help.liaisonedu.com/ADEA_AADSAS_Applicant_Help_Center/Filling_Out_Your_ADEA_AADSAS_Application/Supporting_Information

When you are completing your AMCAS, VMCAS, or AADSAS application, please refer to these important resources.

Secondary Application Questions

Secondary applications are the applications that individual medical schools send after receiving a common application. Secondaries feature short essay questions designed to collect more detailed information about an applicant's character and skills and to gauge their fit for the school. Although questions vary widely, certain themes recur, including an applicant's experiences with and potential contributions to diversity, equity, and inclusion; an applicant's strengths in competencies such as teamwork, collaboration, and leadership; and an applicant's resilience and perseverance in the face of challenges or difficulties. The question prompts below, taken from actual secondary applications, are designed to give you a chance to prepare your answers to common questions you are likely to be asked in some form on a secondary.

1. Answer one of the following two questions (400 words maximum).

- a. We value diversity in all its forms. How will your background and experiences contribute to this important focus of our institution and inform your future role as a physician?
- b. We seek to train physicians who can connect with diverse patient populations with whom they may not share a similar background. Tell us one experience that enhanced your ability to understand those unlike yourself and what you learned from it.

2. Answer one of the following two questions (250 words maximum).

- a. What do you value most as a leader and as a contributor? What attributes do you possess as a leader and as a team member and how do you apply them on a daily basis?
- b. Everyone needs help at various times in their lives. Describe a time you asked for help and what you gained from that experience that has influenced your approach to asking for help.

3. Answer one of the following two questions (150 words maximum).

- a. Describe a situation that you have thought to be unfair or unjust, whether towards yourself or towards others. How did you address the situation, if at all?
- b. Not achieving a goal or one's desire can sometimes be disheartening. What have you discovered from your setbacks and disappointments and how does this translate to your current way of thinking?