Lake Forest College
Health Professions Advisory Committee (HPAC)
(rev. Nov. 2005)

WRITING AN EFFECTIVE PERSONAL STATEMENT

1. SOME BASICS THAT ARE LOOKED FOR IN ALL LETTERS:
   - Can you ***write effectively*** without making grammatical mistakes and spelling errors?
   - Can you ***convey a message*** in a logical, coherent, and organized fashion?
   - Can you ***paint a unique picture*** of yourself that convinces a selection committee you are an excellent applicant?
   - Can you ***demonstrate attributes*** by your writing that make you a good candidate (realistic self-assessment, resourcefulness, accountability, cooperation, persistence, resilience, emotional support, focus, active learning, flexibility, efficiency, organization, purpose, compassion, maturity)?

2. SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR APPROACHING A PERSONAL STATEMENT:
   - ***Investigate schools*** before applying – do you know what you are getting into?
   - ***Consider your reader*** – admissions committees read thousands of personal statements and select hundreds of applicants for admission; engage your reader's interest.
   - ***Read before you write*** – consider the strengths and weaknesses of several essays by your peers.
   - ***Write early, write often*** – leave yourself time for ***several*** revisions and proofreading and for others to evaluate your essay. Recognize the importance of a personal statement. It can make or break your application, especially for borderline students.
   - ***Organize*** – your thoughts, materials, deadlines, etc.

3. CHOOSING A TOPIC FOR THE PERSONAL STATEMENT:
   - Why do you want to be a physician ***and how have you proved it to yourself?***
   - What influence have your family/early experiences had on your life?
   - What influence have your extracurricular, work, or volunteer activities had on your life?
   - What are your long-term goals?
   - What is your personal philosophy?

4. CHOOSING WHAT ***NOT*** TO PUT IN A PERSONAL STATEMENT:
   - ***A prose version of your CV*** – A list of accomplishments appears elsewhere in your application.
   - ***Answers to <u>all</u> of the questions in part 3*** – Be focused and selective. Choose at most two events or activities and use them to convey what skills you learned and why these are important to being a physician.
   - ***Inflated language or claims about yourself*** that you wouldn't use or make to people who know you well. The essay should represent you as honestly and clearly as possible.
   - ***Phrase or story clichés*** that you think admissions committees expect to hear. A strong statement will belong uniquely to you and could not describe any other medical school applicant.
   - ***Excuses for poor performance in courses or exams***. If explanations are called for, focus on what you have learned about what went wrong, what you have done to address it, and how you will keep similar circumstances from affecting your performance in medical school.
   - ***High school accomplishments***, unless they tie in with something more current that indicates something important about you as an individual. Don't leave your reader wondering, "What have you done lately?"
   - ***Grammatical mistakes or spelling errors***. The lack of these errors indicates your attention to detail, an important quality of good physicians.

5. WHEN YOU HAVE WRITTEN YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT:
   - ***Let 3-5 people read your statement***, accept constructive feedback, and revise again. Choose your advisor, other faculty, and a parent and/or friend - people that know you and can determine whether you are painting an appropriate picture of yourself.
   - ***Call individual Offices of Admission*** to seek advice and help tailor your personal statement for specific institutions.