



HOW TO BRAINSTORM YOUR MEDICAL SCHOOL SECONDARY ESSAYS

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Now that you've hopefully submitted your primary medical school application, it's time to look ahead. As soon as your application will be processed, the institutions you've applied to will start sending you your secondary essay prompts. This is not the time to relax! Most programs expect a two-week turnaround so you should hopefully plan to submit your secondary essays before July ends. In order to write them, it's best to anticipate the common questions and start preparing in advance. In this e-resource, we've outlined how to answer some common prompts and medical schools that have used them in the past.

HOW TO TACKLE THE MOST COMMON PROMPTS

To break down the ways schools specify what they're looking for, let's look at some questions on the common medical school secondary essay prompts:

“Why This School” Essays:

Take a look at the following “why this school” prompts from three different medical schools last year and the way they framed their questions:

- **Georgetown University** - Why have you chosen to apply to the Georgetown University School of Medicine and how do you think your education at Georgetown will prepare you to become a physician for the future? (1 page, formatted at your discretion)
- **Mayo Clinic** - Why are you specifically interested in pursuing your medical education at Mayo Clinic School of Medicine even if you gain acceptances to other highly ranked medical schools? (500 words or less)
- **University of Toledo** - Briefly describe why you wish to attend medical school at The University of Toledo College of Medicine and Life Sciences. As part of this essay, please discuss, if applicable, any personal connection you may have to The University of Toledo, the UT College of Medicine and Life Sciences/former Medical College of Ohio, the city of Toledo, or the region of Northwest Ohio. (300 words)

Success with these questions lies in actually taking the time to do research for your school list. Make sure you know exactly what the programs offer—you've applied to the school for a reason. What are the things you like the most about it and how will it help your goals? Emphasize your demonstrated interest in the school as specifically as possible—detail what about the program's mission appeals to you the most and fits your personality and plans. Finally, make sure you carefully read the entire prompt and answer all parts. While the objective of the questions is the same (to find out why you have chosen the school), each school puts its own unique spin on the question.

In the past, Georgetown has wanted to know how your training as a physician would benefit from a Georgetown education. To tackle this prompt, jot down specialties only Georgetown offers—faculty, courses, research opportunities—which appeal to you. Don't pick every single thing off the website. Select a special few details relevant to your interests within medicine and talk about how learning from a certain professor, for example, aligns with your goals.

Mayo's prompt last year similar, but asked why you would choose them despite acceptances to other top schools. You definitely need to be as specific as possible in your response. Admissions committee members obviously want accepted students to enroll. They want to know that you're not applying just for the sake of trying to attend a highly ranked school. So this is the time to demonstrate your knowledge of the program and to feature the opportunities you can take advantage of only at Mayo

Toledo's "why this school" prompt wanted to know about personal connections to the school, the city of Toledo, or the entire region of northwestern Ohio. Public medical schools pay special attention to in-state applicants and love to see candidates convey interest in the regional appeal of the school. Whether you've learned fun facts from a relative who's an alum or you have a strong connection to the food in the area, expressing concrete details about what you love about the medical school's environment can help admissions committee members gain an added perspective on you.

"How Will You Contribute to Our School" Essays

Check out a couple of examples of medical school secondary essay prompts that ask about how you will contribute to MD programs:

- **New York University** - The Admissions Committee uses a holistic approach to evaluate a wide range of student qualities and life experiences that are complementary to demonstrated academic excellence, strong interpersonal skills and leadership potential. What unique qualities or experiences do you possess that would contribute specifically to the NYU School of Medicine community (2500 characters max)?
- **University of Nevada** - Describe how your background and future goals will contribute to the mission of the University of Nevada School of Medicine.
- To answer the "how will you contribute to our school prompts," you need to think about the theme of your own application, and the theme of the institution itself.

Your essay could follow an application persona, or a recurrent theme throughout to help you stand out from other applicants. For example, your application persona could be that you are an aspiring surgeon who was motivated to be a doctor after helping victims of a natural disaster. Keeping your persona in mind can help you decide which of your qualifications and experiences to highlight in such an essay. What do you bring to the table that other applicants don't? What are you passionate about? What parts of medicine excite you?

Admissions committees want to understand how they'll specifically benefit from your unique contributions. Think about what each school is known for. How does its mission align with what you hope to achieve with an education in medicine? Don't get carried away, just talk about your perspective.

“Describe a Challenge You've Faced” Essays

Often, medical schools want to know about how you respond to challenges, as shown in the prompts below:

- **University of Chicago** - Share with us a difficult or challenging situation you have encountered and how you dealt with it. In your response, identify both the coping skills you called upon to resolve the dilemma, and the support person(s) from whom you sought advice. We suggest that you limit your essay to about 550 words.
- **Harvard University** - If there is an important aspect of your personal background or identity, not addressed elsewhere in the application, that you would like to share with the Committee, we invite you to do so here. Many applicants will not need to answer this question. Examples might include significant challenges in access to education, unusual socioeconomic factors, identification with a minority culture, religion, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender identity. Briefly explain how such factors have influenced your motivation for a career in medicine. (4000 characters maximum)
- **University of Kansas** - Beyond academics (grades and MCATs), describe the most significant challenge you have faced and the steps you have taken to address this challenge.

When answering prompts that fall under the “challenge” umbrella, you should do a little bit of self-reflection. The applicants you're going up against may have faced far greater adversity than you have—whether in the loss of their home or facing prejudice of some kind in society. This type of question may be optional, for example, in the case of Harvard's secondaries. But, if the question is not optional, and you're not sure that you've really faced many challenges, do not exaggerate your adversity. Grasping at straws for adversity will backfire and show that you lack perspective.

Medical schools want their classes to be composed of exceptional individuals, each of whom should bring something different to the class. Instead of telling stories that aren't yours, focus on challenges you might have faced in a unique passion or avocation. Try talking about an obstacle you faced in your clinical adventures or while leading a project for your work or internship.

The MD application process is tougher than ever. Each stage counts. Do not underestimate the power of strongly written secondaries. Think carefully about your application persona, consider what you can uniquely bring to the table, and prepare in advance so that you can set yourself up for success in this cutthroat process.