



Writing the USMLE Personal Statement

Overall Goal

- Prove you have a disability (per the ADA) that impacts your everyday life
- Show what the barrier is with accessing the exams
- State what you are requesting and why it will “ensure that the student’s performance is a reflection of the understanding and mastery of the material tested, without reflecting the disability”
- If your disability is developmental (LD, ADHD etc...) that you have had this present you whole life (documented or not)

Guidance

1. Explain the nature of disability and why you are requesting accommodations. Include a description of the day-to-day impact of the disability—not just the impact on academic tasks such as taking exams (e.g., the impact on interpersonal relationships, employment, course withdrawals, personal organization, driving record, financial management).
2. Focus on areas of DIFFICULTY rather than strengths. Emphasize and highlight what has been difficult. It is essential that you connect the requested accommodations to their successes. Be sure to state what the barrier is with accessing the exams
3. Emphasize the need for the accommodation rather than a preference. The barrier must be grounded in the nature of the condition, and substantiated by the documentation. State the accommodation you are requesting and why it will “ensure that your performance is a reflection of the understanding and mastery of the material tested, without reflecting the disability”
4. Pay close attention to the language you use to describe your needs.

Avoid these common word-use pitfalls:

- “I would appreciate it if” . . . (do not ask for a favor; ask for legally mandated access)
- “It would be helpful to have” . . . (some might say it would be helpful for everyone)
- “I would do better with” or, “to ensure my success,” (you need to ensure access not success)
- “learning differences (“learning differences,” are not protected by ADA)

Use powerful phrases, as in these examples:

- “I require. . .As a result of [specify barrier],”
- “It is necessary that I am provided [specify accommodation].”
- “Throughout my education, [specify accommodation] has allowed me to demonstrate my understanding of materials on exams. I will require the same accommodation on this exam.”

5. Discuss your history of disability.

If the diagnosis is developmental (LD, ADHD, etc...) in nature, show that you have had this present your whole life. If you do not have official documentation showing a history:

- Establish
 - 1) why accommodations are necessary and
 - 2) why now?
- List effective self-accommodation strategies used prior to an official diagnosis (e.g., reading texts over many times for comprehension, using extensive tutoring, utilizing a partner or study group to break down information, using reading or voice-recognition software or having a friend or family member read materials).
- List Informal accommodations. Describe what was provided in the past, how the provision came about (e.g., requested informally from professor, professor noticed that the student took longer to test and offered time), documenting this via a third party (the professor, a proctor, a dean of students)

If you have an acquired disability: (recent diagnosis that is not developmental in nature) you should provide information about the onset of the condition and history of receiving accommodations since then, and explain any gaps or delays in using accommodations.

Adapted from:

The guide to assisting students with disabilities: equal access in health science and professional education. Lisa Meeks-Neera Jain - Springer Publishing Company - 2016